WGSS 392J/692J: Feminisms and Environmental Justice

Professor K. Asher (kasher@umass.edu)  Office: W467 South College
Term: Spring 2018  Spire numbers: 69816/69817
Class time: TuTh 1:00-2:15pm  Meets in: W205 South College
Office Hours: By appointment until Feb 15, thereafter on Tuesdays: 2:15-3:15pm; Thursdays 11:30am- 12:30pm, (appointments only if you cannot make it during regular office hours). Check Moodle for updates
Course mailing lists: wgss-392j-01-spr18@courses.umass.edu; wgss-692j-spr18@courses.umass.edu (all students can post to these lists)

Course Description
While feminism and environmental justice are both political projects of social change, their objects or objectives are not the same. As we sink into the 21st century, amid looming fears of ecological catastrophes and socio-economic crises, is a conversation between these two projects likely to be productive for both struggles, or are their goals at odds with each other? This class will examine the perceived, existing, and potential links (or disjuncts) between feminism and environmental justice. Our interdisciplinary inquiry will be guided by questions such as: What is understood by the terms “feminism” and “environmental justice”? How have “nature” and the “environment” figured in feminist writings and feminist ideas of justice? Conversely, how do “women” and “gender” figure in ideas and struggles for environmental justice? Are these ideas explicitly or implicitly “feminist”?

Course outcomes: Enable students to
- Contextualize 21st century “environmental justice” and feminist struggles within broader histories and debates about economic globalization and social change
- Recognize and assess the various linkages between economic development, the environment, and social struggles (including those for gender, racial, class, and sexual freedoms)
- Understand the analytical parameters of the capitalist mode of production and feminist perspectives on sex, gender, society, and nature.
- Apply political economic and feminist theories to analyze social and environmental problems, especially current justice struggles of your choice
- See the complex, contradictory and power laden connections between the “local” and the “global,” i.e. think transnationally
- Develop strong reading, thinking, and writing skills
- Engage critically and self-reflexively in theoretical debates and political actions for a just world for humans and non-humans.

What this course is NOT about
- “Women” as victims or “saviors” of the world’s environment
- Technical or policy solutions to complex problems
- “Plural” views of the world where we add different perspectives to one frame
Seminar Approach

1. As should be evident from catalog description, the seminar is NOT about prescribing “feminist” models of environmental justice, or showing how women, native communities or other “Avatar” style heroes and villians. Nor is it about recommending policy or activist solutions—environmental or feminist. That is, rather than taking a “problem solving” approach we will examine feminist and environmental justice struggles and the perceived, existing, and potential links (or disjuncts) between them.

2. Our interdisciplinary inquiry will be guided by questions such as: What is understood by the terms “feminism” and “environmental justice”? How have “nature” and the “environment” figured in feminist writings and feminist ideas of justice? Conversely, how do “women” and “gender” figure in ideas and struggles for environmental justice? Are these ideas explicitly or implicitly “feminist”?

3. We will engage the above questions through a close and critical engagement with past and current debates about the “environment” (early in the semester you have to pick a particular subset or issue to research throughout the term). We will also read how issues of gender, race, and nature appear (or not) in the debates about various environmental issues.

4. Our focus will be “transnational” – not just on the United States or the western world. That is, we will eschew AngloAmerican-centric views of the world as we grapple to understand the goals, practices, and outcomes of specific “environmental” movements from Latin America, Asia, and the US. For example, indigenous and Afro-descendent organizing for ethnic and territorial rights, struggles to “save” and access forest resources such as the famous Chipko movement in India, struggles against genetically-modified seeds, struggles against toxic dumps, movements against repressive population control policies and for reproductive and sexual rights.

5. Our study of these movements will rest on the following premises
   - Feminist and environmental justice struggles for social change are political endeavors. That is, they are linked to struggles for power and what that means for us is that we have to understand the existing arrangements of power and politics in specific contexts, and trace their implications. The background readings will help you understand what this means and of course we will discuss them in class.
   - They bear the legacy of past struggles and any attempt at imagining and constituting alternative and just society-nature relations requires understanding the history of these struggles.

Pre-requisites: This is a seminar open to undergraduates and graduates, and as the instructor I will make sure that everyone gets to learn at their level and pace. That said, all students should have a solid working knowledge (through course work or self-study) of some core concepts such as political economy of development, feminism, and social theory (see email sent in January, copy on Moodle). Without these pre-requisites, students will be unable to keep up with the term of the seminar.
**Required Readings** (Available via Amherst Books – buy local!)
- Other readings on Moodle or through links below

**Background readings**
- Other readings on Moodle or through links below
- A writing guide such as Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference*, and a style manual such as Hacker’s *A Pocket Manual of Style* (both published by St Martin’s Press, NY), or Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*. 4th edition. Longman.

**Assignments, Grades, and Ground Rules:**
- Attendance and Participation (incl. how you engage your peers) 25%
- Short Reading Reviews 20%
- Midterm Essay (due Mar 21) 25%
- Final Assignment (due May 9) 30%

**Attendance and Absences**: The success of the class depends on the instructor and students being physically and intellectual present in class. Being a little late occasionally is understandable. However, if you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be marked absent. If you have to miss class because of legitimate reasons (illness, injury, death of a loved one), excuse your absence in writing within a week of the missed session. **Over three absences will result in the lowering of your overall grade**, as even excused absences will affect your participation grade. So try not to miss class.

If missing class is unavoidable, know that it is **your responsibility to catch up on what you missed**. Set up a “study buddy” with whom you can exchange notes, review material, and check in about intellectual or logistical issues related to the class.

**Study Buddy 1**: __________________________________________________________

**Study Buddy 2**: __________________________________________________________

**Preparation and Reading**: Good participation and great conversations rest on good preparation. So do the assigned work, including the readings, before coming to class. Develop a practice of reading closely to identify main theme(s) and examine the premise of an argument critically. Close reading fosters critical dialogues.
**Participation:** Good participation means active and mindful engagement with the course material and class participants, including your peers. Active and mindful engagement goes beyond agreements and disagreements to foster collective learning through critical dialogues about the topics and ideas generated by the course material. Critical dialogues entail listening, thinking, talking, and asking questions of the material and of each other. The best classrooms conversations are ones that expand your knowledge and understanding, and bring the intense pleasure of critical intellectual inquiry. It is a skill that requires practice and like other academic skills it is useful far beyond the classroom.

**Notes:** Learn to keep notes (digitally or in paper notebooks) on what you read, highlight key quotes (if you write the quotes in your notes, make sure your to write down the full citation with page numbers), on how an author makes an argument, how the terms of one article relate to the broader course themes. If you don’t understand something or are confused, make notes to prompt you to ask questions about them in class. Bring your readings and notes to class! And don’t forget to set up a study buddy.

These notes are for your own use (or to share with your peers). You may NOT sell these notes to outside vendors, nor make audio or video recordings of class lectures and discussions without my permission.

**Using smart phones in class is decidedly un-smart** as it invites me to fail you. When in class turn OFF your mobile devices. You may seek permission to use your computer in class to refer to readings and notes, and to take notes. However, please do not connect to the Internet.

**Online communications and Email etiquette:** Instructions, study questions, and updates about the course will be posted on Moodle and/or sent through the class lists (see above). So make sure that your university email (yourname@umass.edu) is functional, and check Moodle regularly. I welcome appropriate email queries and will respond to them within a reasonable amount of time (24-48 hours is normal). For a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate email, familiarize yourself with Emails as Professional Correspondences or Email Etiquette.

**Office Hours** are listed above and updated on Moodle. I strongly encourage you to stop by with questions about class material, brainstorm research ideas, talk about topics that sparked your intellectual curiosity, or discuss your performance in class. However, keep in mind that, office hours are not the space to review course material you missed or entertain inquiry such as “I was absent, what did I miss?” Talk to your study buddy first and then follow up with me to discuss specific queries.

**Research:** Go beyond wikipedia and google! UMASS libraries (click the Menu button on the upper right) have excellent resources and amazing professional staff to help you meet your learning goals. So learn to use them and to do library research.

**Writing** is a crucial tool for learning and an invaluable skill for communicating what you learn. So learn to write well. Check out some of the excellent resources available to you,
including http://owl.english.purdue.edu/ (one of the most extensive lists of handouts on writing and research help). You can also get free writing help at the Writing Center, and from the WGSS writing tutor (Check Moodle for the tutor’s office hours). Take a copy of the assignment instructions and your draft response to your session. Engage your editing process by articulating what you want the tutor to focus on in addressing your work.

Finally, all written assignments:

- May be discussed with your peers or with me during my office hours
- Must be submitted by the stated deadlines. By handing in assignments late you forfeit your right to comments and lose half a letter grade for every day that your work is late. So learn to manage your time.
- May be revised and resubmitted accepted within two weeks of receiving comments back from the instructor. Submit hardcopies of your substantially revised written work along with the original submission(s). Note that resubmitting a paper does not guarantee a higher grade. In fact, cursorily rewritten work may receive a lower grade than the original.
- Should comply with the Checklist of Written Work guidelines (see below).
- Will be graded according to the criteria listed below.
- Sometimes I give slash grades (B/B+). This means that the assignment is tending towards the higher grade but is not there yet. If you do better in the next assignment of a similar nature, the prior one will automatically be graded higher.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING WRITTEN WORK

A = a well organized, lucidly written paper free of mechanical errors (or oral argument) that indicates your thorough understanding of the material and your interesting insights or critical responses to it. In a phrase, an A paper is a “perfect 10” paper.

B = a paper (or presentation) that offers evidence of your understanding of the material, but in which your points are obscured due to mechanical errors, lack of organization, inadequate evidence and/or insufficiently developed arguments.

C = a paper in which the student’s understanding and response to the material is unclear or largely obscured due to any one or more factors listed under B.

D, F = indicate that students are submitting unacceptable work.

GRADE CHART

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**Accommodation Statement:** Disability Services (DS) on campus keeps documentation on file of physical, psychological, or learning disability and provides services to students with disabilities: [http://www.umass.edu/disability/](http://www.umass.edu/disability/). They also act as a liaison between students and professors. If you need accommodations related to disabilities, please contact DS and me within the first two weeks of the term (before the add/drop period ends) so that we can work together to meet your learning needs. *A letter from Disability Services is not sufficient excuse for late or missed work or absences.* If, after consulting the syllabus, you anticipate missing classes or think you will need alternative formats and timelines for assignments, please communicate with me in person during office hours so that we can make mutually agreeable arrangements.

**Academic Honesty Statement:** Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at UMass. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent ([http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)).

**Pronoun Statement:** I will gladly address you by the name you prefer and use the gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please advise the class and me on your name and pronoun preference, and the proper pronunciation of your name.
Checklist for Written Work for Prof Asher, AKA her 20 COMMANDMENTS!

1. I have a central argument or a main point and I state it clearly.
2. I define the key terms on which my argument is based.
3. I have developed my argument systematically and organized my points clearly. That is, my points follow from each other and speak to my central argument.
4. I substantiate my claims with supporting evidence, and cite relevant sources using a correct and consistent format. Prof Asher prefers the author-date style: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
5. By the middle of my paper, I have lost neither clarity nor focus.
6. I make clear transitions between my points and between paragraphs and sections.
7. The passive voice has not been used by me. Instead, I use the active voice.
8. I have edited my paper and it is free from repeated errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and I have used short sentences and made sure that my sentences do not run on like this one does.
9. My sources are formatted correctly and consistently, as is my Reference List.
10. In my introductory and concluding remarks, I neither over generalize nor make banal claims. Rather, I begin and conclude with insightful remarks about my topic.

Logistical and Mechanical details checklist

1. My paper has a title. It tells my reader what my paper is about.
2. My name, course name and number, type and number of the assignment, and the date of this paper appear single-spaced in the upper left hand corner of the first page.
3. I have used a legible font, double-spaced my writing, and used 1.25-inch margins.
4. I have numbered all the pages of my assignment
5. I have STAPLED all the pages of my assignment. Prof Asher will not accept paper clipped papers.
6. I am NOT including a cover page or a report cover with my assignments.
7. I have submitted my paper on time and in the format indicated on the assignment. Rubric for naming electronic documents: Your Last Name_Assignment_Course#_Term, e.g. Ash_Final_392J_Spr2018
8. I know that Prof Asher does not accept email papers. I know that late papers lose half a letter grade for each day the paper is late.
9. I have NOT plagiarized (http://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/geninfo/plagiarism.html)
10. I have conferenced my assignment at the Writing Center (http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/) if necessary, or at the very least addressed the issues in Section V of Strunk and White’s The Elements of Style.
Course Schedule: This is a working course schedule and is subject to change. For example, readings may be added or substituted at the professor's discretion. The readings listed under each week are for that week. That is, please read the listed material before coming to class.

Week 1: Introduction to the class, its key terms, and its participants
Tu, Jan 23: Our perceptions of feminism, environmentalism, and justice
- View selections from The Shoreline Project http://theshorelineproject.org/#!/shoreline
- Discussion: What do I understand by environmental justice? Feminism? What do I want to learn about them and the links between them? How do I expect the class to help me meet my learning goals? How do I expect to contribute to the class?
- Post your learning goals on Moodle by 5pm by Wednesday, Jan 24. Read your classmates’ responses before class on Thursday.

Th, Jan 25: Feminism and Environmental Justice
- Ebron, P and A. Tsing. 2017. Feminism and the Anthropocene: Assessing the Field through Recent Books. Feminist Studies 43 (3): 658-683. NB: This is a “model” for your final assignment of your research project
- https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene (optional)

Week 2: Feminisms and Environmental Justice: A Provisional Introduction
Tu, Jan 30:
- The Statement of the Combahee River Collective (1979)

Th, Feb 1:

Background
- Black, Maggie. No Nonsense Guide to International Development.
- McMichael, Globalization: Myths and Realities (Moodle)
- Selections on Moodle about Environmentalism and Environmental Justice
Week 3: The Multiple Genealogies of Feminisms and Environmental Justice
Tu: Feb 6:
- Full introduction to the class, its key terms, and its participants
  http://www.ciesin.org/docs/010-278/010-278chpt2.html
- http://iejproject.info.yorku.ca/research/
- Reading Response 1 due in class (everyone). Prompts on Moodle.

Th, Feb 8: Whither Gender/feminism in Environmentalism and Environmental Justice?

Background:
- Carson, Rachel. 1962. Silent Spring (selections on Moodle)

Week 4: Women, Gender and the Environment vs. feminist perspectives on nature, science, and society
Tu: Feb 13:
- https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-environmental/ (Skim)
- https://sites.hampshire.edu/popdev/ (Skim)
Th, Feb 15:
- **Reading Response 2 due in class (everyone). Prompts on Moodle.**

**Recommended**

Week 5: **Capitalism in the web of life**
Tu: Feb 20
- Moore, Capitalism in the web of life

Th, Feb 22:
- Moore, Capitalism in the web of life
- **Sign-up for Reading Review 3 (due in class)**

**Recommended background**
- Wolf, Eric. *Chapter 3 (Modes of Production) in Europe and the People without history*. University of California Press. (Moodle)

Week 6: **Conceptualizing Environmental Justice in a Transnational Frame**
Tu: Feb 27:
- Tsing, Mushroom at the End of the World

Th, Mar 1:
- Tsing, Mushroom at the End of the World
- **Sign-up for Reading Review 3 (due in class)**

**Week 7:**
Tu: Mar 6:
- Revisiting the past two weeks via a feminist lens
- Bring a preliminary list of readings for second half of the semester
Th, Mar 8: Finalize themes/groups for second half of the semester

**SPRING BREAK (March 12-16)**

**Week 8:**
Tu: Mar 20: Peer workshop Midterm exam. Bring 3 hard copies of your essay to workshop with your peers.

**Midterm Exam due by 5pm by Wednesday, Mar 21**

Th: Mar 22:
❖ Readings TBA: Finalize readings for second half of the semester. Reading Review 4 to be submitted the day you led your session.

**Weeks 9-13: Session topics to be selected and led by students**

**Week 9:**
Tu: Mar 27:
Th, Mar 29:

**Week 10:**
Tu: Apr 3:
Th, Apr 5:

**Week 11:**
Tu, Apr 10:
Th, Apr 12:

[https://clpp.hampshire.edu/conference/2018-conference](https://clpp.hampshire.edu/conference/2018-conference)

**Week 12:**
Tu, Apr 17: MONDAY SCHEDULE, No class meeting
Th, Apr 19:

**Week 13:**
Tu, Apr 24:

Th, Apr 26:

**Week 14:**
Tu, May 1: Weston, *Animate Planet*
**Research Themes/Topics**
Early in the semester everyone thinks about and begins doing preliminary research on a research theme from the list below. You will then begin to form groups by the first third of the semester so that by the mid term they have something substantial.
1. Agriculture and Food sovereignty
2. Indigenous struggles for land and justice
3. Reproductive and sexual justice (must make links with the population and consumption debate)
4. Environmental health
5. Biodiversity (or non-human nature)
6. Climate Justice

**Some suggestions on how to start research and collect readings on your themes**
Your FOURTH reading review will be due on the readings you choose for class

- Identify **potential readings** by checking Moodle for resources (I’ve uploaded a bunch)
- Check the syllabus for readings you might want to revisit
- Check readings the bibliographies and reference lists of readings we have already done to identify sources that you might want to revisit
- Check out WHO has draw on these readings/ideas in contemporary work (ask a librarian for help)
- Check out some library guides for WGSS AND other fields such as Environmental Science, Geography, Sociology, and more: [http://guides.library.umass.edu/wost](http://guides.library.umass.edu/wost)
- contact the appropriate librarian for further library help
- work with your peers and group members to work collectively