

Culture, Energy and the Environment: An Introduction to Energy Humanities
Environmental Studies 202 / Humanities 202
Rice University
Spring 2014
TTh 1:00 – 2:15 / Sewall 303

Matthew Schneider-Mayerson
mjs23@rice.edu
312 Humanities Bldg
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-3:30, Wednesdays 12:30-1:45

Course Description: Humanity faces extraordinary challenges in an era of climate change and energy transition. These challenges are often portrayed as technological, but they extend to every aspect of our culture and raise new questions about value, power, politics, behavior and ethics that scholars are only beginning to grapple with. This course draws upon new research across the arts, humanities and social sciences to help students better understand the cultural and social dimensions of our current patterns of energy use, their environmental impacts, and the possibility of new energy futures. As an introduction to the emerging field of energy and environmental humanities, it is intended for students from all backgrounds and disciplines.

We will survey a fascinating body of interdisciplinary research from perspectives that include history, geography, anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, philosophy, cultural studies, film, literature, and art. The course is organized around three familiar temporalities: past, present, and future. First we'll look at questions such as the role of energy and in human and recent American history. Then we'll turn to the contemporary regime of energy sources, primarily fossil fuels, and their environmental consequences, which will include a visit to ExxonMobil's Baytown refinery. Finally, we'll explore the imagination of alternative energy and environmental futures and their political, psychological and ethical implications.

Learning Objectives

- To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of divergent arguments about the relationship between energy and the environment and different aspect of contemporary life, politics, and culture.
- To take your own positions on these questions and support these positions with sound reasoning and evidence.
- To communicate effectively by writing clear, well-supported reading responses and participating in class discussions.
- To collaborate with your peers in the creation of a poster on one of the course's major questions.

What to Expect

Expect to attend class. Active attendance in every class is mandatory and crucial to your success in the course. Participation in class discussions and debates forms a significant part of your final grade.

Expect to do a fair amount of reading. There will be weeks when you have 50-80 pages of scholarship to read. You will need to set aside time outside of class every day and start earlier on assignments than you might think you need to. Keeping up with the reading and writing is your responsibility.

Expect to succeed. If you apply yourself to doing the work in this class, you can expect to learn. On the other hand, if you decide you can't commit to doing all the work or attending class, don't expect to learn what the course is designed to teach.

Expect to learn new things. This course is a survey of different disciplinary takes on energy and environmental issues. You will be more familiar with some of these perspectives and less familiar with others. Expect to be surprised, confused, and hopefully even inspired!

Readings

All readings can be found on the course's OwlSpace site. There are no required books for this class.

Assignments

Reading Responses: Each student will write up a total of seven reading (or viewing, or field trip) responses, where they will formulate commentary or questions regarding the material or experience. The responses should touch upon every reading for that week/period, rather than merely focusing on one article or book chapter. Please understand the reading responses as facilitators for class discussions, and make sure to submit them by 10 am on the day that they are due. Post the reading responses in Assignments section of the class' OwlSpace site.

Poster Project: The major assignment for this course is a group project: the creation of a poster addressing one of the course's central questions that will require research outside of assigned class readings. In groups of three or four, you will write the copy, design the poster, create supplementary online components and write a short rationale explaining the content and design. You will meet and consult with staff from the Center for Written, Oral and Visual Communication, and you will be graded on the clarity of your presentation, the thoughtfulness of the poster and your individual contribution to the group effort. These posters will be displayed at the Center for Energy and Environmental Research in the Human Science's symposium (in late April) and then publicly displayed on campus. We will discuss the expectations and possible topics and for this assignment throughout the semester.

Class Participation: There will be ample opportunities to participate in class by making comments during class discussions, participating in class debates, and working with other students on in-class presentations. You should read any assigned materials before class and be prepared to participate in class discussions. If you are not always comfortable speaking up in a large class, you can also earn participation points by coming to the instructor's office hours or posting relevant material in the class Forum on OwlSpace. You may ask about your participation grade at any point during the semester.

Midterm and Final: We will have a take-home midterm and final. If you do the readings and attend class, you should have no problem doing well on these exams.

Evaluation Guidelines:

Participation:	20%
Reading responses:	30%
Midterm:	10%
Final:	10%
Group poster:	25%
Poster rationale:	5%

If your performance shows significant improvement over the course of the semester, I reserve the right (but assume no obligation) to raise your final grade.

General Policies

Late Work

- Pre-discussion reports and position papers will not be accepted late.
- Exceptions to the deadline policies may (very rarely) be made at the instructor's discretion, but only when there are extenuating circumstances such as a personal emergency or an illness requiring professional medical attention. These circumstances must be documented and brought to my attention before the deadline for a paper arrives.

- You are also advised to start assignments early so that if an issue arises which cannot be documented to our satisfaction but which still prevents you from finishing on time, you will still have at least some work to turn in by the deadline and thus avoid receiving no credit at all.

Honor Code

- Plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty are violations of the Rice Honor Code and will be reported to the Honor Council.
- Plagiarism is defined by the Honor Council as “quoting, paraphrasing, or otherwise using another's words or ideas as one's own without properly crediting the source. . . . The Honor Council assumes that, unless otherwise credited, all work submitted by the student is intended to be considered as his or her own work. Any time a student draws particularly or generally from another's work, the source should be properly credited.”

Disability Services

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact one of the instructors during the first two weeks of the semester to discuss accommodations confidentially. You will also need to contact and register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

Schedule

The Past

Introduction

January 16

- Vaclav Smil, *Energy: A Beginner's Guide*, “Energy in the Modern World: Fossil-Fueled Civilization” (50)

Energy in American History

January 21

- Ian Barbour et al, “Energy and the Rise of American Industrial Society” (13)
- David Nye, *Consuming Power: A Social History of American Energies*, “Introduction” (12)
- ❖ *Reading response #1*

Energy Slaves

January 23

- Jean-Francois Mouhot, “Past Connections and Present Similarities in Slave Ownership and Fossil Fuel Usage” (26)
- ❖ *Reading response #2*

Carbon Democracy

January 28

- Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, “Machines of Democracy” (32)

January 30

- Mitchell, “Fuel Economy” (35)
- ❖ *Reading response #3*

The High-Energy Economy

February 4

- ❖ Nye, “The High-Energy Economy” (30) and “Choices” (16)

The Present

Petroleum

February 6

- *No class*—first group tours the Baytown refinery
- For students who can't make either Baytown trip, read:
 - Lisa Margonelli, *Oil on the Brain: Adventures from the Pump to the Pipeline*, "Refinery"
 - David Painter, "Oil and the American Century"

February 11

- Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*, "Introduction" (16)
- ❖ *Reading response #4*

Unconventional Oil

February 13

- Elizabeth Kolbert, "Unconventional Crude: Canada's Synthetic-Fuels Boom," *Energy Reader* (9)
- Explore interactive documentary / video game "Fort McMoney" for one hour

February 18

- Watch *Gasland* (2010)
- Find and read three reviews of / responses to the film and its claims:
 - A typical film review
 - An article supporting the film's claims
 - An article refuting the film's claims
- ❖ *Reading response #5*

Future Prospects

February 20

- Mason Inman, *Scientific American*, "How to Measure the True Cost of Fossil Fuels"
- Charles C. Mann, *The Atlantic*, "What If We Never Run Out of Oil?" (13)
- Skim "Environment Texas and the Sierra Club v. ExxonMobil Corporation"
- *Skype discussion on Baytown refinery with Luke Metzger, Director of Environment Texas*
- ❖ *Field trip response #6*

February 24

- ❖ *Take-home midterm due*

February 25

- Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, *Peak Politics: Resource Scarcity and Libertarian Political Culture in the United States*, "The Peak Oil Ideology and Subculture" (30)
- Explore Transition Houston website
- *Discussion with Joyce Almaguer-Reisdorf of Transition Houston*

Climate Change

February 27

- Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, "The Denial of Global Warming" (46)
- ❖ *Reading response #7*

March 11

- Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, "Introduction" (44)

March 13

- Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*, “Who Killed Ekaru Loruman,” “Military Soothsayers” and “Monsoons and Tipping Points” (30)
- ❖ *Reading response #8*

March 18

- Kari Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*, “Introduction” (12), “People Want to Protect Themselves a Little Bit: The Why of Denial” (34)

March 20

- Norgaard, “The Cultural Tool Kit, Part One: Cultural Norms of Attention, Emotion, and Conversation” (40)
- ❖ *Reading response #9*

The Future

Ethics

March 25

- Stephen M. Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption” (13)
- Henry Shue, “Deadly Delays, Saving Opportunities: Creating a More Dangerous World?” (13)
- ❖ *Reading response #10*

Renewables

March 27

- Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Island in the Wind” (14)
- Martin J. Pasqualetti, “Social Barriers to Renewable Energy Landscapes” (20)
- ❖ *Reading response #11*
- *Discussion with Professor Cymene Howe about wind energy in Mexico*

Politics

April 1

- Al Gore and David Blood, “A Manifesto for Sustainable Capitalism”
- Paul Hawken, “Natural Capitalism” (14)
- *Optional:* Richard Smith, “Green Capitalism: The God that Failed”
- *Discussion with Jennifer Wilson, Center for Written, Oral, & Visual Communication*

April 8

- Carl Boggs, *Ecology and Revolution: Global Crisis and the Political Challenge*, “The Radical Imperative” (22) and “Liberal Delusions” (25)
- ❖ *Reading response #12*

April 10

- ❖ *No reading, work on poster*

April 14

- ❖ *Submit poster draft*

Predictions

April 15

- World Energy Council, *Composing Energy Futures to 2050*
- ❖ *Reading response #13*

Literature and Future Visions

April 17

- Paolo Bacigalupi, *Pump* 6, “The Calorie Man” (28)
- ❖ *Reading response #14*

Wrapping Up

April 22

- Peter Gelderloos, “An Anarchist Solution to Global Warming” (9)
- One of the following:
 - Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, “Critical Thinking” (20)
 - Kathleen Dean Moore, lecture from “Transformation Without Apocalypse: How to Live Well On An Altered Planet”
- *Reading response #15*

April 24

- ❖ *Poster presentations*

May 6

- ❖ *Take-home final due*

May 7

- ❖ *Poster rationale due*

Note: The schedule is subject to change with reasonable advance notice.