Comparative Environmental Politics and Policy  
POLSCI 389  

Spring 2020  
Mon/Tue/Wed 12pm-2pm Eastern  
Permanent Link to Zoom Class Session:  
https://umich.zoom.us/j/98600430805

Instructor: Michael Lerner  
lererm@umich.edu  
Office Hours: Wed, 2.30pm – 4pm, Thursday 9am–10.30am  
Schedule appointments at: https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/michael-lerner/office-hours/  
Permanent Link to Zoom Office Hours: https://umich.zoom.us/j/98262499562

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine environmental politics and policy from a comparative perspective. Through this approach, we will address a number of significant questions, including: 1) Does climate change cause war? 2) Is there a resource curse? 3) Does Greta Thunberg’s appeal for climate action make a difference? Students will also conduct an in-depth investigation into the political dynamics that create (and potentially resolve) an environmental problem of their choice, producing a polished, compelling, and data-rich argument in the style of longform journalism.

SYLLABUS

1. General Course Policies

Important additional information on the following general course policies can be found on our Canvas site and at this link: http://tinyurl.com/polsci-policies

- Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
- Religious and Academic Conflicts
- Students Representing the University of Michigan
- Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Academic Integrity

1.1. Policy for Unexcused Late Assignments

1.1.1. Weekly Assignments
- 0–3 hours late: 25% penalty
- 3–12 hours late: 50% penalty
- 12+ hours late: No credit

1.1.2. Written Assignments
- 1/3 letter grade every 8 hours
2. Remote Course Logistics

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this course will take place remotely. Please read the following information carefully.

2.1. Class Sessions

2.1.1. Meeting on Zoom

- The class will meet on Zoom (umich.zoom.us) on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 12pm to 2pm Eastern.
  - We will use the same link every time:
    - https://umich.zoom.us/j/98600430805
  - Please make sure you have the latest version of the app on your computer:
    - https://zoom.us/support/download
- I will always try to stay on the line for a few minutes after class in case you need to ask me something
- I will post a recording of the lecture to Canvas

2.1.2. Attendance

- Attendance and active participation in the live class sessions is expected.
- To ask for an excused absence from the live class discussion, please send me an email before the start of class with a reason for your absence. An unreasonable number of unexcused absences will detract from your class participation grade.
- If you are located in a time-zone that makes attendance in the live class session infeasible (generally, GMT+7 to GMT+12), please contact me and we can arrange an accommodation.

2.1.3. Participation

- Please review the Expectations for Zoom Class Sessions document
- “One finger” comments
  - To ask a question or comment on a new topic, use the Raise Hand icon.
- “Two finger” comments
  - To ask a question or comment that builds on the current topic, use the Clapping Hands icon.
- Responding to a Yes/No question, use the Yes/No (green check/red cross) icons
- To let me know you stepped away from the computer, use the Away (clock) icon.

- If you encounter technical difficulties when attending the class, that’s okay.
  - First, wait a minute or two to see if it resolves itself.
  - Second, check that you are using the right link.
  - Third, check that your internet connection is working.
Fourth, restart the app and try everything again.
If it’s still not working, send me a chat in Zoom or an email (lernerm@umich.edu) to let me know you are trying to work through some technical difficulties.

2.2. Office Hours

- Office hours will be on Zoom on
  - Wednesdays from 2.30 to 4pm Eastern
  - Thursdays from 9 to 11.30am Eastern
  - By appointment.
- We will use a different link than the one for class sessions
  - https://umich.zoom.us/j/98262499562
- Sign up for office hours slots on my calendar
  - Please sign up at least 24 hours in advance, although I will try to accommodate meeting requests made later than that.
  - http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/michael-lerner/office-hours

2.3. Communication

2.3.1. Communication from Me

All class-wide communication will be done on Canvas.

Every Wednesday, I will post an Announcement on Canvas about the classes for the coming week. The announcement will link to the module on Canvas with the relevant readings.

2.3.2. Getting in touch with Me

If you have a question you think everyone would benefit from hearing the answer to, ask it on Canvas using the Discussions page.

If you would like to ask your question more privately, send me an email with the course number in the subject line.
For example: [POLSCI 389] Question about the next assignment
3. Course Requirements

3.1. Grades

- In-class work
  - Class participation – 10%
  - Case study facilitation – 10%

- Weekly assignments
  - Written reading responses – 10%
  - Discussion videos – 15%
  - Response videos – 5%

- Written assignments
  - Deconstruction analysis – 10%
  - Data Analysis – 10%
  - Narrative Investigation proposal – 5%
  - Narrative Investigation – 25%

3.2. Assignments

3.2.1. In-class Work

Class participation
Your class participation grade consists of attendance, asking and answering questions in full-class discussion, and occasional peer reviews of your contributions to small-group work. If you need to miss class, please send me an email prior to the class session with the reason for your absence.

Case study facilitation
After the first class, you will sign up to help present a case study later in the semester. Working with a small group, you will prepare a full 2-hour class session on the case study (Weeks 3–7 on Tuesdays). This will consist of 1) identifying one additional short paper/video/blog post/etc. for students to read prior to class, 2) creating a 30 minute lecture that introduces the case and relates it to the concepts discussed in the week’s readings and Monday class session, and 3) creating a pedagogical activity for the class to engage with case study. This could be, for example, a class debate, a role play, a jigsaw exercise, or think-pair-share. Each group member will receive an individual grade and provide confidential peer reviews of their group members.¹

One week prior to your group’s case study presentation, you must send me the additional paper/video/blog post/etc. and meet with me as a group to discuss your plans for the session. You can reserve a slot during office hours or make an appointment to meet at another time.

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¹ The peer reviews will inform, but not determine, each individual group members’ grade.
3.2.2. Weekly Assignments

Reading Responses
You will submit a very brief reading response prior to the start of every week (Monday, 9am Eastern). These responses will consist of bulleted discussion questions or thoughts (a minimum of 2 questions/thoughts per response), which you will post on Canvas. Your questions or thoughts should engage critically and synthetically with the readings, evaluating the key strengths and weaknesses of the authors’ arguments, methods, or findings; identifying connections or contradictions among the authors; or raising questions left unanswered by the readings.

Discussion Videos
You will record a 4–6 minute video responding to one of the week’s discussion questions each week (Tuesday, 9am). After signing up for one of the discussion questions, you will post your video on Canvas on the thread for your question’s discussion group. In your video, you should critically consider what the question is asking, explain your answer to the question, justify your answer with a narrative example, and identify one or two alternative positions a reasonable person could take and address the shortcomings of those positions. You should prepare talking points (not a written script) and submit your talking points in addition to your recording.

Response videos
After consulting the Google Sheet, you will find and watch your discussion partner’s video. Then you will record a 2–3 minute video responding to your partner’s argument (Wednesday, 9am). In your response, you should include what you find compelling or thought-provoking about your partner’s argument, a critique of the extent to which your partner’s example highlighted strengths and weaknesses in their argument, suggestions of alternative perspectives they did not consider (if any), and a reflection on the parts of your own position that seem stronger or weaker after viewing your partner’s video. You should again prepare talking points (not a written script) and submit your talking points in addition to your recording.

3.2.3. Written Assignments

Deconstruction Analysis
You will select and critique an “environmental policy claim,” meaning a declarative statement about the extent of some environmental problem and/or about the wisdom of a particular solution to that problem. You can find these claims in editorials, think tank studies, advocacy group white papers, testimony from Congressional hearings, politicians’ speeches, party platforms, academic journals, YouTube videos, blog posts, government policy directives, documentaries, political advertising, and social media newsfeeds. Claims and solutions can come from either side of an issue – a problem can be described as dire, in need of a strong response, or dismissed as unimportant, without a justification for action. Some claims are calls for action, others

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2 Your narrative example should set up and play out the consequences of adopting your position – for example, if your position is that people shouldn’t be allowed to jaywalk, your narrative example could be about you driving down the road and having to swerve to avoid a jaywalking pedestrian.

3 If your partner failed to submit their video, choose a video by someone else in your discussion group and respond to that one instead.
characterize a proposal as ill-advised or a disaster waiting to happen. You can choose any claim you would like to analyze (subject to my approval) and then submit a critique of that claim. The deconstruction analysis will be 1,350–1,650 words in length.

One week before the Deconstruction Analysis is due, you must submit a Deconstruction Analysis Proposal, consisting of a statement, in a single sentence, of the environmental policy claim you would like to deconstruct. If you are considering between multiple policy claims, you can submit multiple claims and a short description of which you are leaning toward and why. The Deconstruction Analysis Proposal does not count toward your final grade.

Data Analysis
You will collect data on the cause or consequence of an environmental problem, organize the data on a clearly labeled graph, and analyze the patterns you observe. The paper will serve as an opportunity to create a quantitative foundation for the argument you will make in the narrative investigation. Use this assignment to think about key relationships between the environmental problem and politics, as well as to familiarize yourself to data sources that will help you bolster your arguments using evidence. The data analysis will be 450–550 words in length.

Narrative Investigation

The class will culminate in a polished, compelling, and data-rich narrative investigation of 4,500–5,500 words. Your investigation should first identify an ongoing environmental problem, substantiated by evidence, logic, and examples. Then, identify three to five “environmental policy claims” about that problem. You will deconstruct the claims using a set of criteria to assess the pros and cons of each option. Carefully consider the tradeoffs among the options and conclude with a clear argument for moving forward. Highlight uncertainties in your analysis and the potential risks/downsides with your favored option. Using a narrative structure, you will introduce the reader to focal events, compare and contrast important decisionmakers and thinkers, and present data and supporting arguments in a convincing manner. You are encouraged, but not required, to write on the same general topic and build from your previous assignments.

Midway through the semester, you will submit a proposal of 135–165 words that identifies the topic of your narrative investigation, identifies your “environmental policy claims,” and outlines your argument. The final version will be due on the course’s assigned final exam date.

4. Key Dates and Deadlines

- **9am on Monday, May 18:** Deconstruction Analysis
- **9am on Monday, June 1:** Narrative Investigation Proposal
- **9am on Monday, June 8:** Data Analysis
- **5pm on Thursday, June 25:** Narrative Investigation
5. Topics and Readings by Week

NOTE – This only lists the readings for each week. Check the “Modules” section on Canvas for a full listing of what is required to be prepared for each class.

Week 1 – Introduction & COVID-19 and the Environment (May 5–6)

- Expectations for Zoom Class Sessions
- What is Comparative Environmental Politics and What Can We Learn from It? (Recorded mini-lecture)

[Deconstruction Analysis Proposal due 9am on Monday, May 11]

Week 2 – Managing Common Pool Resources (May 11–13)

- “The Parable of the Clyde; Bagehot” The Economist 408 no. 8851 (2013).
- Steinberg et al., "Who Rules the Earth?" The Social Rules Project. 2014.
[Deconstruction Analysis due 9am on Monday, May 18]

Week 3 – The Politics of Long-Term Problems (May 18–20)

- TBD – reading selected by student presenters

Week 4 – Environmental Policy Innovation, Change, and Leadership (May 25–27)

- TBD – reading selected by student presenters
Week 5 – Environmental Activism and Interest Groups (June 1–3)

  - Also watch linked videos
- TBD – reading selected by student presenters

Week 6 – Environmental Governance in Autocracies and Democracies (June 8–10)

- TBD – reading selected by student presenters
Week 7 – Environmental Conflict and Peacebuilding (June 15–17)

- TBD – reading selected by student presenters

Week 8 – Wrap-up (June 22)

[Narrative Investigation due 5pm on Thursday, June 25]
Expectations for Zoom Class Sessions

In this class, we’ll be having synchronous class sessions via Zoom. The guidelines below will help you be successful and help us have a good, productive class environment that minimizes distractions and disruptions.

Zoom Class Session Expectations:

- **Test your audio**
- **Test your video** and adjust your camera angle beforehand so we’re not staring up your nose or down at your torso
- Review what is visible around you/in the background and remove anything that is inappropriate for class
- If possible, use headphones with a microphone to minimize audio feedback and echoing (when talking, be careful that the microphone doesn’t brush up against your clothing and make loud noises)
- Attend class from a comfortable, yet appropriate location with good internet access (lounging on your bed is too casual; a coffee shop may be too noisy or have a bad internet connection)
- Wear clothing that is appropriate for class
- Limit the number of users connected to your home internet network to ensure a stable connection during your Zoom Class Session
- Close other browser windows, unless they’re needed for class, to save bandwidth
- Turn your camera on so your classmates and instructor(s) can see you
  - If you notice problems with your connection, turn off your camera to save bandwidth
- Mute your microphone when you’re not talking (this eliminates background noise that can be distracting)
- Limit exposure to distractions such as your phone, alarms, pets, and roommates
- If you have questions during class, unmute yourself and ask at a time that is least disruptive
- Participate in the discussion
- Be respectful of others
- Be prepared to take notes