Logistics

Instructor: Samuel Stolper (sstolper@umich.edu)
Meeting time: W 9:30am-11:30am* (credit-hours: 1)
Prerequisites: none, although some familiar with economics concepts will be helpful

Overview

This seminar is about the relationship between economics and justice in the context of environmental well-being. Economists and economic logic play an important role in a great many applications of policymaking, including regulation of the natural environment. When it comes to issues of justice, this role is contentious. On the one hand, there is a sense that normative economics is blindly in thrall to markets and efficiency, at the expense of fairness and equality. On the other hand, positive economics provides valuable tools for understanding why environmental injustice happens and how policies do and do not address such injustice – in theory and in practice.

In seven two-hour class meetings, we will study, discuss, and apply the economics lens to the challenges of environmental, energy, and climate justice. Students will take turns leading discussion of assigned readings. Seminar grades will be determined by in-class participation and two written assignments (an op-ed and a 2-3 page persuasive essay). The seminar will be divided into three subsections:

1. Ethics in economic analysis
2. Causes of environmental injustice
3. Evaluating environmental policy on equity grounds

Inclusive, open-minded discussion will be the top priority in class meetings, and lecture will only be used where relevant economics concepts are not universally understood by students. Readings will be chosen from books and journal articles focused on economics, philosophy, and justice.

Teaching goals

- Establish strengths and weaknesses of economics as a lens for studying environmental justice
- Identify potential causes of environmental injustice and merits of proposed solutions
- Elucidate the distributional impacts of existing policies

*This meeting time is subject to change if a better time for enrolled students can be found. If you are interested in taking the seminar but cannot make the listed meeting time, let me know!