NRE 566 - PUBLIC OPINION AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
Fall 2010  

Professor:  Paul Mohai, 3520 Dana Building (763-4598; pmohai@umich.edu)  
Lectures:  Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4:00-5:30 pm  
Credits:  3 hours  

Objectives  
This course examines trends in public opinion on the environment, influences on people’s concerns about the environment, the depth and strength of concerns, and how environmental concerns affect personal behaviors and the political process. Also covered are the role of the media in shaping environmental public opinion, the linkages between environmental values and core social values; race, class, gender, and intergenerational differences in environmental opinion and what implications such differences have for society. In addition, we will be making cross-national comparisons and explore the reasons why environmental concern appears to have become a worldwide phenomenon. Based on the understandings developed in the course, we will attempt to predict where public opinion on the environment is likely to head in the future and assess its potential for affecting future political and social change.  

SPECIAL FOCUS FOR THIS SEMESTER: PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THIS NOVEMBER’S ELECTIONS.  

Grading and Evaluation  
Grades will be based on class participation, a newspaper tracking exercise, eight 2-page commentaries on the weekly readings, and a 12- to 15-page term paper.  

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commentaries</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper Prospectus (due Oct. 26)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper Tracking Exercise (due Nov. 2)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper (due Dec. 9)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Class participation:  The class participation grade will be based on attendance in class, contribution to class discussions, and oral presentation of reports.  

Tracking environmental issues in the news:  As a class exercise, students will divide into teams of 4-6 and track environmental issues covered in the media over a 4-6 week period. Each team will pick a newspaper to monitor (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, etc.). So as not to make this exercise burdensome, each member of the team needs to take a turn only once in monitoring the team’s paper over a one-week period. Information about what to look for and how your team should analyze the findings will be given in class.  

Commentaries:  Students will turn in eight commentaries over the term on the weekly readings that a) summarize and critique the readings’ principal ideas, arguments, findings, etc. and b) discuss new ideas and insights obtained from them. Each commentary should be focused on the collection of readings in a given week and should be about 1 ½ to 2 pages, single-spaced. More information about the commentaries will be given in class. No commentaries are assigned for readings in Weeks 1, 2, and 14. Students may choose any of the 8 of the remaining 11 weeks for which to submit commentaries. More information about the commentaries will be given in class.  

Term Paper: The purpose of the paper is to bring course materials to bear in analyzing and understanding a subject of particular interest to you - within the general topic of public opinion and the environment. Your goal will be to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of course materials as well
as your ability to apply that material in order to analyze and uncover new insights about a phenomenon or issue of particular interest. A prospectus outlining the topic you plan to address will be collected and reviewed by me (due Oct. 26). More information about the term paper project will be given in class.

Reading Materials
2. Other required readings will be available on NRE 566 CTOOLS site.

Weekly Reading Assignments

Week 1 – Sept. 7 & 9: Introduction to Course

Week 2 – Sept. 14 & 16: Assessing American Concern for the Environment / Instructions on Commentaries and Newspaper Tracking
Guber, Chapt. 1 – Do Americans Favor Environmental Protection? Pp. 19-36

Week 3 – Sept. 21 & 23: Explaining Trends in Environmental Public Opinion/The Role of the Media
Molotch - "Media and Movements," pp. 1-2

Week 4 – Sept. 28 & 30: Influences on Long-Range Trends in Public Opinion: More on the Media, Think-Tanks, and Controversy
Wikipedia. 2010. “Climate Research Unit Email Controversy”
Also: Wash. Indep. – Economic Crisis Sidelines Global Warming Concerns – March 17 2009
CNN-Climategate Explained – Dec 7, 2009
CNN-Climategate Review Clears Scientists of Dishonesty – Jul 7 2010

Wikipedia, 2010, "Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill"

Week 5 – Oct 5 & 7: Demographic Correlates of Environmental Concern/Race, Gender, and Environmentalism

**Week 6 – Oct. 12 & 14: Environmental Actions and Behaviors**
Guber, Chapt. 6 – The Ballot Box I: Issue Voting and the Environment in Presidential Elections; pp. 105-123.
Guber, Chapt. 7 – The Ballot Box II: Environmental Voting on Statewide Ballot Propositions; pp. 125-152.

**Week 7 – Fall Study Break & Oct. 21: The Use of Public Opinion Polling by Political Actors**

**Week 8 – Oct. 26 & 28: Environmental Values vs. Attitudes and Beliefs / Term Paper Prospectus**

**Week 9 – Nov. 2 & 4: Grassroots Environmentalism/Environmental Justice; Newspaper Tracking Reports**

**Week 10 – Nov. 9 & 11: The “Mainstream” vs. the “Grassroots”/Dimensionality of Environmental Concern**
Guber, Chapt. 5 – Constraint: Are Environmental Attitudes Inconsistent? Pp. 89-102.
Guber, Conclusions- Rethinking Environmentalism; pp. 175-187.

**Week 11 – Nov. 16 & 18: Environmentalism in Non-Industrialized ("Developing") Nations**


**Week 12 – Nov. 23 & Thanksgiving: Global Environmentalism**


**Week 13 – Nov. 30 & Dec. 2: Environmental Socialization**


**Week 14 – Dec. 7 & 9: Conclusion of Course**