Course Description & Goals

This course examines the politics of environmental issues in the United States. The course has two primary goals: First, to introduce students to the laws, institutions, stakeholders, and political processes important to debates over environmental policy at the federal level. Second, to develop and practice skills of analyzing and making decisions relevant to environmental politics and policy. Drawing on the literature of environmental studies, this course will consider the structure of the federal environmental regulatory state, how environmental issues are framed in political discourse, various policy approaches to environmental protection, and the contested role of science in environmental politics.

Becoming fluent in environmental politics and policy requires both studying and participating in environmental decisionmaking. The course is divided into three units to achieve that goal. First, we will undertake an intensive study of the existing federal environmental regulatory state — giving particular attention to the proliferation of policy pathways which make environmental politics volatile, creative, and frustrating. Second, we will focus on five case studies which are pressing issues for environmental policymakers. Third, the final product for the course will be a collaborative project that provides an analytical overview of key federal environmental issues in the U.S. with the class’s consensus positions on recommended policy directions.

Instead of using a pre-packaged volume on environmental case studies, the students in this course have the opportunity to produce such a volume themselves. Each student will be responsible for researching a specific policy issue, consulting with fellow students, determining the class’s consensus position, and producing a relevant issue brief. This issue brief, like the rest of the work in this course, will challenge you to explore and analyze information relevant to environmental politics from a variety of primary sources — government documents, scientific journals, media coverage, stakeholder position statements, and more — and from a variety of political perspectives and, ultimately, to make legally defensible recommendations through collaboration with your peers.

Course Meetings

This course meets Tuesdays and Fridays each week from 1:30 to 2:40pm. It also meets alternative Wednesdays (2/11, 2/18,* 3/11, 4/1, 4/15, 4/29, and 5/13) from 2:15 to 3:20pm. There will be no class on We, 2/25, or We, 2/27, when I’m presenting a paper at the American Society for Environmental History. Note, we’ll meet on 2/18 in lieu of 2/25.

Contacting Me…

Please call me Jay. You can reach me at iturner@wellesley.edu, Pendleton Hall East 133, office – ext. 2820, home – 508-655-1832 (before 9pm). I am more than happy to work with you outside of class. I am often in my office so please feel free to stop in if the door is open, after class, and
during my office hours (Wednesday 11am-12:20pm), or make an appointment to see me in advance.

**Readings**

Only one book, *Environmental Policy: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 2006) is required for this course. It is an environmental politics and policy reader which provides an introduction to the laws, institutions, stakeholders, and policy processes important to this course.

The bulk of the readings for the class and case studies will be available on the course conference. A warning: case studies will include an intensive amount of reading. The expectations will not be that you read it all thoroughly, but that you effectively review it, synthesize relevant information and data, and draw upon it to inform your points in discussion and your short and long issue briefs.

**Current Events**

This course will closely follow current events in two ways: First, please subscribe to grist.org’s daily email digest. Second, each Friday one or two students (if two, working together) will make a 5-minute presentation on 1 or 2 current events and allow for 5-minutes for questions and discussion. These presentations are not meant to summarize current events, but to make substantive and specific connections between these events and policy processes and institutions previously discussed in class.

**Course Requirements**

Participation and Presentations (10%). This component of your grade will reflect how well you are prepared for class, which, in large part, rests on your completion of the readings and case studies. The expectation is that you contribute to the discussion frequently in such a manner that benefits both you and your classmates. Several in-class presentations will be included in the participation grade.

Short Homework Assignments (15%). There are five short assignments designed to help you consolidate your understanding of the federal environmental regulatory state. These assignments should meet the following criteria: 1-1/2 to 2 pages in length (1-1/2 spaced), concise, analytical, and factual. These assignments will be graded on a 5-point scale. If an assignment is well done and accomplishes everything asked for, it will receive a mark of 3; most assignments will receive a mark of 3.

Short Issue Briefs (15%). Your 1-page summary of current events will constitute one short issue brief. You will write an issue brief for four of the five case studies (which one you skip is up to you; or you may opt to do all, and I’ll drop the lowest grade). These briefs should meet the following criteria: 1 to 1 1/2 pages in length (1-1/2 spaced), concise, analytical, factual, and they must conclude with your concrete assessment and/or recommendation. Note, a draft of your issue brief is due in class the day of the case study discussion to the FirstClass conference; a revised issue brief is due at the start of the next class. These short issue briefs are meant to help you hone your analytical skills and provide you with
regular feedback on your progress toward that goal. These short issue briefs will be graded on the same scale as the homework assignments.

Long Issue Brief – Individual (25%). Each student has the opportunity to write an entry for our volume on current federal environmental issues. These articles will be 12- to 15-pages in length, plus supplementary material (1-1/2 spaced). This article will draw on your fellow students’ issue briefs, course materials, and additional outside research, as appropriate. It will present a concise overview of a policy issue, stakeholder positions, potential options for resolving it, and our class’s consensus position on the issue. While you are the chief author for your entry, the class will collaborate with you to help you refine your analysis. These papers are due by Friday, 5/22, at 4:30pm.

Long Issue Brief — Group (10%). An overall grade will be assigned to your section (which will be compromised of 3-4 issue briefs) of our volume on environmental issues.

Mid-Term Test (25%). The mid-term test will cover the first half of the term.

Late Work

My expectation is that you will turn your assignments in on time. I realize that circumstances may arise which make this difficult. If this is the case, please discuss this with me ahead of time, and we can come to an accommodation. If you are judicious in requesting extensions, I’ll be reasonable in granting them. Please note, such extensions are difficult to grant when the rest of the class depends upon your work being completed on time (for presentations, group workshops, etc.). Late assignments will be penalized 1 point (out of 5) immediately and 1 point for each additional 24 hour period.

Course Schedule

**Unit 1: The Green State: The Federal Environmental Regulatory System**

Tu 2/3 What is the Green State?

Fr 2/5 Institutional Landscape of the Green State
- VK, “Environmental policy from the 1970s to the 21st c”, 1-19.
- VK, review appendices 2, 3, and 4

Mo 2/9 Assignment #1 due by 11.59pm to FirstClass.

Tu 2/10 Interest Groups: Environmentalists and Opponents

We 2/11 Foundations of a Green State: The Progressive Era
Fr 2/13  Expanding the Green State: The Golden Era

Mo 2/16  Assignment #2 due by 11.59pm to FirstClass.

Tu 2/17  The Green State Today: Gridlock or Dynamic?

We 2/18  Brainstorm Case Studies.

Fr 2/20  Policy Pathways: Agency Rulemaking
- VK, “Improving Environmental Regulation at EPA,” ch 8.

Mo 2/23  Assignment #3 due by 11.59pm to FirstClass.

Tu 2/24  Policy Pathways: Congressional Legislation (Slow-track; Fast-track?)
- VK, “Environmental Policy in Congress,” 134-142.

We 2/25  No Class.

Fr 2/27  No Class.

Mo 3/2  Assignment #4 due by 11.59pm to FirstClass.

Tu 3/3  Policy Pathways: Executive Initiatives

Fr 3/6  Policy Pathways: Judicial Review
- VK, “Environmental Policy and the Courts,” ch 7.

Mo 3/5  Assignment #5 due by 11.59pm to FirstClass.

Tu 3/10  Policy Pathways: States and Federal Environmental Policy

We 3/11  Looking Forward: A New Generation of Environmental Policy?
- VK, “Toward Sustainable Development,” ch 17.

Fr 3/13  Mid-Term Examination.
Units 2 and 3: Case Studies and Issue Brief Workshops

Note, for each case study, I’ll introduce the issue on Tuesdays, and we’ll discuss the issue on Friday. For some of these discussions, you’ll be asked to participate in mock hearings, debates, and other scenarios.

CS #1:  Tu, 3/17 and Fr, 3/20.

CS #2:  Tu, 3/31 and Fr, 4/3.  We, 4/1 – Issue Brief Discussion.

CS #3:  Tu, 4/7 and Fr, 4/10.

CS #4:  Tu, 4/14 and Fr, 4/17.  We, 4/15 – Workshop Issue Briefs #1  Fr, 4/19 — Workshop Issue Briefs #2

CS #5:  Tu, 4/26 and Fr, 5/1  Tu, 5/3 — Workshop Issue Briefs #3  Fr 5/8 — Workshop Issue Briefs #4  Tu, 5/10 — Workshop Issue Briefs #5  We, 5/11 — Course Wrap-Up