

What I Teach and How I Teach It

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DSOC 3240: Environmental Sociology	How do people collectively create and respond to environmental problems—material disruptions of pollution and degradation, moral concerns about environmental harm, social conflicts over health and access?
DSOC 6210: Fundamentals of Environmental Sociology	
DSOC 3140: Spatial Thinking, Geographic Information Systems, and Related Methods	How do we make sense of the world with maps? What do those maps do to people and places? How can we make maps that serve human needs well?
DSOC 6340: Risk and Disaster	What are risks and disasters? What shapes how people experience them? How do social institutions play in risk creation, mitigation, preparedness, and response?

To come to terms with the environmental predicaments people face today, students need to be aware of the various ways people experience those predicaments and to mindfully examine how people create environmental concerns, struggle over them, and sometimes resolve them.

In courses I teach, we ask tough questions about how people live in a more-than-human world. We learn from scholars who grapple with these questions. We learn from communities that struggle to be heard. In doing so, we challenge ourselves to use evidence and reasoning to understand ways of seeing environmental issues that may be unfamiliar, to characterize cases and patterns of human-environment connection, and to mindfully communicate what we have learned.

In every course, we build skills in reasoning, analysis, and expression. Here are some illustrations.

Reasoning My courses challenge students to understand complex issues, weigh differing perspectives, and identify connections and implications. We center concerns about environmental injustice, which invariably call us to listen to multiple views and attend to difficult tensions. In Risk and Disaster, we examine how sociologists, psychologists, risk managers, and more make sense of people's responses to hazards. In conversation and in assignments, students identify the assumptions, evidence, and methods each approach brings to bear and work through the insights each brings to cases from regulating flame retardant chemicals to Hurricane Maria.

Analysis We cultivate students' ability to examine evidence. In Spatial Thinking, GIS, and Related Methods, students learn both analytical skills for evaluating hypotheses with spatially oriented data and for thinking through how different ways of picturing the world in a map can impact people and landscapes in different ways. Through group activities, written assignments, and labs, we practice thinking through evidence, its relationships, its implications.

Expression We work on expressing our reasoning and analyses so other people can benefit. In Environmental Sociology, instead of a term paper, students write an online magazine article about

an environmental controversy they identify and research. It's like *Scientific American* for environmental sociology: the student makes sense of a real-world case using tools from research and shares it with a general audience in lively prose. Not only does this assignment give a better sense of students' mastery by having them express it in plain words; it also yields a creation that they can share and cite long after the semester ends.

I engage students in multiple modes of learning. We read books and articles that tread varied intellectual currents. We draw on documentaries and opinion pieces. Content is vital: it is the fuel analytical skills run on. Class meetings bring a varied mix of lectures, group activities, individual work, and videos and visiting speakers. Sometimes individually and sometimes in groups, students work together to understand content, apply ideas in new contexts, and share feedback on each other's work. Group activities give students chances to try things out without the pressure of speaking before the whole class. They work in teams over the semester to build trust and support.

These approaches draw students into actively accomplishing their own education. Students participate not just by raising their hands to answer my questions, but by working in groups, and sharing written reflections, to which I make direct handwritten responses. Students learn better when they build relationships with instructors. When class size allows, I ask every student to meet with me or a teaching assistant to discuss their work and experience. These multiple points of contact help me keep my finger on the pulse of students' learning. They also build a strong basis for communicating so I can recognize concerns, reach out, and change course if needed.

Today's environmental challenges demand better ways of understanding the world. If we are going to make progress on them, we need to understand human-environmental relationships in all their material, social, and moral complexity. We need to learn where different people come from, what their options are, and how their actions impact other people and ecosystems. We need to build on these understandings to work for just and lasting ways of living in a more-than-human world. In my teaching, I strive to give students tools to do these things.