

GEO 103: Environment and Society

Rachel Ameen

Sample Syllabus | Instructor of Record, Summer 2025 | Syracuse University

Instructor: Rachel Ameen **Schedule:** Mon.-Thu. 8:00-9:45 am **Office Hours:** By appointment or after class

Course Description

This course explores how people and societies shape, and are shaped by, the environment. We will use ideas from geography, history, and the social sciences to better understand today's major environmental problems. Topics include climate change, food and farming, energy, water, and environmental justice. Throughout the course, we will focus on building the tools to think critically about the social, political, and historical forces that affect the environment.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain how environmental issues are shaped by social, political, and economic forces.
- Recognize key events and ideas in environmental history.
- Use concepts from geography and the social sciences to analyze current environmental problems.
- Discuss different viewpoints on justice, inequality, and the environment.

Required Texts

Robbins, Paul, John Hintz, and Sarah A. Moore. *Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction*. 3rd Edition. Wiley-Blackwell, 2022. Additional readings (articles, book chapters, essays) will be posted as PDFs on Blackboard.

Course Structure

This is a fast-paced summer course that meets four days a week. Each day, we'll focus on a key theme or case study. You'll receive a dossier packet at the start of each class to work on throughout the session, which you'll return at the end of class. These dossiers make up the largest portion of your grade. Each week will combine short lectures, discussion, individual writing, and small-group activities. You'll also complete an in-person midterm and final exam, and your participation and attendance matter. Regular attendance, active engagement, and keeping up with readings are essential to your success in this course.

Grade Breakdown

Item	% of Grade	Points
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Weekly Dossiers (6 total)	40%	16 points each, 96 pts
Midterm Exam	20%	48 points
Final Exam	25%	60 points
Attendance / Participation	15%	36 points
Total	100%	240 points

Assignments

Weekly Dossiers (40%). Each week, you'll receive a dossier packet in class that includes activities, prompts, and space for notes tied to that week's theme. You'll complete it during class and turn it in at the end of each session. I'll grade these weekly, then return them to you the following week. They're designed to help you stay engaged, reflect critically, and build your understanding throughout the course.

Midterm Exam (20%). The midterm will cover material from the first half of the course, including lectures, readings, and class discussions. It will assess your grasp of core concepts and your ability to think critically about human-environment relationships.

Final Exam (25%). The final exam will be cumulative, with extra emphasis on the second half of the course. Like the midterm, it will draw on lectures, readings, and discussions, with a mix of factual, analytical, and reflective questions.

Attendance and Participation (15%). Your presence and active involvement in class are essential. This grade includes regular attendance, thoughtful participation in discussions, and completion of in-class activities.

Missed Class

This is a fast-moving class, and being present matters. You may submit up to two dossiers late during the term, no questions asked. After that, late work will be considered on a case-by-case basis. I will take attendance each day, and this will be taken into consideration to holistically determine your participation grade. Make-up exams will only be offered in cases of documented emergency or university-approved absence.

Course Etiquette

What you can expect from me: Clear and engaging class sessions. Respect for your time and ideas. Timely, fair feedback on your work.

What I expect from you: Timely presence and engaged participation. Preparation, including doing the required readings, bringing a laptop and writing utensils, and reading the dossiers carefully. Engage thoughtfully with the material and with each other.

Technology

Laptops and tablets are marvelous technologies. However, in this course, the use of laptops and tablets is a privilege, not a right. If your use of these devices becomes disruptive, I will ban you from using them in future classes. You'll be working primarily with printed packets and taking notes by hand. I'll give clear cues when it's time to open devices, for example for a quick poll, data lookup, or short digital activity. If you have an accommodation through the Office of Disability Services that requires laptop use for note-taking, you're absolutely welcome to use one. I will upload slides and key terms to Blackboard after each week, but your weekly dossier packet is your primary study guide, not the slides.

AI Technology

Based on the specific learning outcomes and assignments in this course, artificial intelligence might be permitted on specific assignments. See each assignment, quiz, or exam for more information about what artificial intelligence tools are permitted and to what extent, as well as citation requirements. If no instructions are provided for a specific assignment, then no use of any artificial intelligence tool is permitted. Any AI use beyond that which is detailed in course assignments is explicitly prohibited except when documented permission is granted.

Weekly Schedule

Week	Theme	Anchor Issues
1	Nature and Culture	The Anthropocene; the construction of wilderness; climate basics
2	Populations and Consumption	Overpopulation and overconsumption; carbon footprints
3	Markets and Risk	Labor, commodities, environmental harm; fast fashion and the global waste economy
4	Governance and Justice	Environmental racism; politics of climate change; Flint and water
5	Science and Ethics	Energy, AI, e-waste; ethics of industrial food systems
6	Solutions and Emotions	Climate grief and denialism; degrowth; utopias and dystopias