

Sociology 104: The Global Environmental Crisis (Spring 2024)  
Tuesdays, 16:10-19:00, 124 Wheeler  
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Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-4 pm, and by appointment

In the years 2020-22, the world was in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet there is a much more devastating disaster on the horizon: the global environmental crisis. Some of its consequences are apparent already, including fire and flooding (and the proliferation of pandemics). This course will consider these two crises – and disasters in general – from the standpoint of knowledge and action. Put differently, how aware are we about looming disasters, how do we assess them, and what do we do about them? That is, the course is about knowledge, risk, and action (or ignorance, denial, and inaction).

### Evaluation

Participation (20%)  
Examination (40%)  
Project (40%)

*Participation* seems subjective, but there are two objective components. First, the desideratum of showing up. Everyone will get one pass on unexcused absence, but four or more unexcused absences will result in F for the course. Second, beyond showing up, you should be there, so to speak: that is, at minimum, striving to pay attention. Therefore, although it may seem retrogressive to ban personal electronics (i.e., laptop, smartphone etc.) in the classroom, *no electronics in the classroom*, please. (Although you may fancy yourself to be a maestro/a of multitasking, we have considerable and compelling evidence that multitasking is well-nigh impossible and, more relevant, electronics hinder attention and learning.

*Examination* (short essay questions) will be in class.

*Project* is an independent research project, though you may work with up to two more people (and will be evaluated collectively). The mode of presentation is open: traditional research paper, video, podcast. The topic is *open* (that is, no prompts), but should fall within the ambit of this course. To avoid misunderstanding, please send me a brief prospectus by

Please beware that I take an extremely dim view of plagiarism, whether the classic sort (copying another person's work) or its contemporary permutation (relying on generative AI). For general guidance, please see the *Berkeley Academic Guide*, available at: <https://guide.berkeley.edu/academic-policies/>.

All the reading assignments will be distributed electronically.

### Schedule

16 January: Introduction

23 January: Pandemics Past

Alex de Waal, New Pandemics, Old Politics, 2021, chaps.1-3

30 January: The Covid-19 Crisis

de Waal, chap.6

6 February: The Global Environmental Crisis: A Conspectus, I

Begin David Wallace-Wells, The Uninhabitable Earth, 2019

13 February: The Global Environmental Crisis: A Conspectus, II

Finish Wallace-Wells

20 February: The Politics and Sociology of Denial

Eviatar Zerubavel, The Elephant in the Room, 2004, chap.3

27 February: Knowledge and Science

Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 1991, chaps.1-2

Immanuel Wallerstein et al., Open the Social Sciences, 1996, chaps.3-4

5 March: Science vs. Scientism

John Lie, The Global Environmental Catastrophe, 2024, chap.2

12 March: Risk, Disaster, and Responsibility

Judith N. Shklar, The Faces of Injustice, 1990, chap.2 (the rest strongly recommended)

19 March: Interregnum

26 March: Spring Recess

2 April: Action, Inaction, and Habit

Lie, chap.3

9 April: Living the Present, Anticipating the Future

Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, 1954 (orig. 1922), chap.3 (chaps.2,4 strongly recommended)

**16 April: EXAMINATION**

**23 April: PRESENTATION**

**26 April: PROJECT DUE**