Population, Consumption, & Environment STS 4304

Professor: Eileen Crist,
Department of Science and Technology in Society
Virginia Tech
231 Lane Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061-0247
Phone: 540.231.5195
Email: ecrist@vt.edu

Description
Ever since Paul Ehrlich and John Holdren proposed the formula IPAT (Human Impact = Population x Affluence x Technology) in 1971, it has been used as a rough model for understanding anthropogenic environmental degradation. Scores of analysts and scholars have pondered the contribution of the different factors and their interactions. In this course we will explore some high profile frameworks and debates concerning the impact of human population growth and overconsumption both on the planet and on the quality of human life.

Readings
Books:
Paul and Anne Ehrlich One With Nineveh: Politics, Consumption, and the Human Future, 2004
Laurie Mazur, A Pivotal Moment: Population, Justice, & the Environmental Challenge, 2010
James Gustave Speth, The Bridge at the Edge of the World, 2008

Articles on Scholar

Requirements
This is a reading intensive seminar. Its success depends on participants’ reading the assignments closely and contributing actively. For each reading, one student will be responsible for presenting it: briefly summarizing the main points, guiding discussion by raising questions about the reading (prepared beforehand), and keeping the conversation going. Presentations should be accompanied by power point. Two reading presentations per student are required.

The quality of your overall participation in the course, including presentations and class discussion, will count for 50% of the grade. Class attendance is mandatory (barring illness or other emergency).

The first day of classes (January 24th) and Week 12 will involve the seminar format “Around the Table.” You are required to write a one-page op-ed style response to the reading(s) for that day. You can draw on your written response to participate in the discussion. This assignment will be handed in, and will factor in to class participation.

The last requirement for the course is a research project which will be presented in oral and written form at the end of the semester. The paper will be about 12 to 15 pages long, double-spaced with references. The presentation will be formal and delivered by power-point. The last three classes are reserved for presentations of research.
Schedule of classes and readings

**Week 1: Introduction**

*Around the table*
Paul and Anne Ehrlich, “Introduction,” Chapter 1 (“The Human Predicament”), and Chapter 2 (“The Costs of Success”) from *One with Nineveh*
Laurie Mazur “Introduction” and Joel Cohen “Human Population Grows Up,” Chapter 1, *A Pivotal Moment*
Film: David Attenborough, “How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth”

**Week 2: Neo-Malthusians versus Technological Optimists**

*Background*
Thomas Malthus, from *An Essay on the Principle of Population*
Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Chapter 3 (“The Tide of Population”) from *One with Nineveh*

*Perspectives*
Paul Ehrlich, from *The Population Bomb*
Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”
Julian Simon, “Can the Supply of Natural Resources Really Be Infinite? Yes!”
John Harte, “Numbers Matter” Chapter 9, *A Pivotal Moment*

**Week 3: Population and the Biodiversity Crisis**

*Background*
Holmes Rolston, “Why Species Matter”

*Perspectives*
Donella Meadows, “Biodiversity: The Key to Saving Life on Earth”
Lynne Gaffkin, “Population Growth, Ecosystem Services, and Human Well-Being” Chapter 8, *A Pivotal Moment*

*Optional reading:*
Eileen Crist, “Limits-to-Growth and the Biodiversity Crisis”

**Week 4: Food Security, Poverty, Population (Research paper proposal due)**

*Background*
National Geographic, 2009: “The End of Plenty”
Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Chapter 6 “Billions, Birthrates, and Policies” from *One with Nineveh*

*Perspectives*
Partha Dasgupta, “Population, Poverty and the Local Environment”
Holmes Rolston, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature?”
Lester Brown, “Food: Will There Be Enough?” Chapter 12, A Pivotal Moment

Optional reading:
Walden Bello, “Understanding the Global Food Crisis” Chapter 13, A Pivotal Moment

Week 5: Resource Competition, War, and Overpopulation

Background
Report of Hearings to the UN, “Return of the Population Growth Factor: Its Impact upon the Millennium Development Goals”

Perspectives
Roger Smith, “Scarcity and Genocide”
Malcolm Potts “Sex and Violence,” “The War of Nature,” and “The Future of War”
Robert Sussman and Joshua Marshack, “Are Humans Inherently Killers?”
Richard Wrangham, “A Response to Sussman and Marshack”
(Note: The last two articles are together in the file “ChimpWars” on Scholar)

Week 6: Women, Women’s Empowerment, and Population Trends

Background
Robert Engelman, “The Return of Nature”

Perspectives
Martha Campbell and Kathleen Bedford, “The Theoretical and Political Framing of the Population Factor in Development”
Ellen Chesler, “Women at the Center” Chapter 24, A Pivotal Moment
Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, “Reproductive Choices: The Ecological Dimension”
Stephanie Mills, “Nulliparity and the Cruel Hoax Revisited”

Week 7: SPRING BREAK

Week 8: Population Politics

Background
Julia Whitty, “The Last Taboo” (Mother Jones, 2010)
Robert Engelman “Zen and the Art of Population Maintenance,” from More
Dave Foreman, “Retreat on Population Stabilization”

Perspectives
Jacqueline N. Echegaray and Shira Saperstein “Reproductive Rights are Human Rights” Chapter 27, A Pivotal Moment
Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics”
Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples, “The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration to the United States”
Priscilla Huang, “Overbreeders and the Population Bomb” Chapter 28, A Pivotal Moment

Week 9: The Consumer Society
**Background**
Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Chapter 4, “The Consumption Factor”
Herbert Marcuse, “The New Forms of Control”

**Perspectives**
Alex Kotlowitz, “False Connections”
George Ritzer, “An Introduction to McDonaldization”
Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, “Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning”

**Week 10: The New Consumerism and its Discontents**

**Around the table**
Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Chapter 7 “Consuming Less”
Juliet Schor, “Tackling Turbo Consumption”
Luis Camacho, “Consumption as a Theme in the North-South Dialogue”
Duane Elgin, “The Garden of Simplicity”
David Orr, “Shelf Life”

**Week 11: Meat Consumption, Overfishing, & Environmental Degradation**

**Background**

**Perspectives**
Brian Halweil & Danielle Nierenberg, “Meat and Seafood: The Most Costly Ingredients in the Global Diet”
Charlie LeDuff, “At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die”
Michael Allen Fox, “Vegetarianism and Treading Lightly on Earth”

**Optional:**
Peter Dauvergne, *The Shadows of Consumption*: “Beef”

**Week 12**

**Around the table**
James Gustave Speth, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*

**Weeks 13 & 14**

Presentations