ESM 295: Advanced Topics in Environmental Justice

Course Syllabus: Spring 2026
Meeting Time: 12:30-1:45 pm Tuesday & Thursday
Meeting Place: Bren Hall 1424

Instructor: Jayajit Chakraborty
Pronouns: He/Him/His
Email: jchakrab@ucsb.edu
Office: Bren Hall 4520
Office Hours: 3:30-4:30 pm Tuesday
(or, by appointment)

The term 'environmental justice' refers to many different things at the same time, including: (a) a multi-disciplinary and multi-method field of academic research; (b) an ongoing socio-political movement that began in the 1980s; and (c) an administrative goal pursued by government agencies and incorporated into legislation. While the initial emphasis of environmental justice activism and research in the U.S. was on hazardous waste facilities and air pollution sources, the scope has now diversified and expanded to include many other types of environmental burdens and undesirable land uses, disasters such as hurricanes and heatwaves, new forms of injustices associated with climate change, energy transitions, and urban development, and environmental benefits such as availability of nutritious food, greenspaces, and recreational areas. Persistent spatial and social inequalities associated with both exposure to environmental "bads" and access to environmental "goods" continue to galvanize environmental justice movements and research, as well as influence public policies in the U.S. and other nations.

This course seeks to explore the environmental justice (EJ) implications of several different issues or *objects of concern*, through class lectures, case studies, assigned readings/videos, guest speakers, and student presentations. The choice of topics is intended to cover well-established issues of EJ concern (e.g., hazardous waste and air pollution), as well as contemporary topics that have been incorporated in the EJ framework more recently (e.g., flooding, marine/ocean environments, data centers, and food systems), while addressing their implications at multiple geographic scales. We will also examine practical challenges associated with EJ mapping/screening tools and their community validation, as well as explore the changing federal policy landscape and its implications for the future of EJ.

Our engagement and examination of each object of EJ concern will be informed by concepts, debates, frameworks, methods, tools, and policy solutions that were introduced in the core course on Environmental Justice [ESM 205]. While EJ can be defined, interpreted, and practiced in multiple ways, the distinction between various components of EJ claim-making (e.g., justice concepts, evidence, and process) and key dimensions of injustice are particularly relevant in examining specific objects of EJ concern. *Distributive justice* is concerned with "who gets what" in terms of benefits and burdens, and issues of fairness of that distribution. While distributional outcomes have dominated EJ activism, research, and policy responses, *procedural* justice focuses on equal and meaningful participation in the decision-making process, in terms of who is included and who has influence. *Recognitional justice* takes a further step to examine cultural, economic, political, and institutionally embedded processes

through which discrimination occurs, in terms who gets respected and valued, and who remains disempowered and disregarded. These key dimensions of EJ, along with the main components of EJ claims, represent important entry points for analyzing and understanding the EJ implications of various objects of concern that will be covered in this course.

By the end of this course, students will:

- Understand the nature and social dimensions of various environmental burdens (e.g., hazardous waste, toxic chemicals, air pollution, and flooding), environmental benefits (e.g., access to coastal areas and healthy food), and policy initiatives for managing these burdens/benefits.
- Be able to identify examples of environmental injustices in a wide range of contexts and geographic settings.
- Understand the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic dimensions of various environmental problems, as well as the environmental aspects of economic and social justice concerns.
- Gain familiarity with the use of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches for analyzing evidence of environmental injustices.
- Be able to evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches, frameworks, and strategies for addressing environmental injustices.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

This course is designed using a modular format where each topic is packaged as a single module or learning unit on the Canvas course website, so that all required and recommended readings, videos, assignments, and other relevant materials are located in a single area (Unit) for a particular topic. Students are expected to actively participate by completing all required reading/video assignments, submitting written exercises, and engaging in thoughtful discussion of the issues and topics covered in class. This course is designed based on the premise that all students will take active roles in their own learning, as well as interact with each other in class meetings and discussions to form a collaborative and supportive learning environment. All students are expected to participate in a manner that demonstrates adequate reflection and understanding of the subject matter, respect for your colleagues in the class, and a willingness to learn and grow. Everyone should feel comfortable sharing their thoughts freely in our class discussions. Specific course requirements are described in more detail below:

Class sessions: This course requires you to participate in 19 scheduled class meetings that will be held every Tuesday and Thursday at 12:30 pm, as indicated in the Course Schedule (page 5). Each Unit will also comprise at least two required readings/videos. Regular attendance and participation are required for this course. If you cannot attend class due to a medical emergency or illness, please notify the instructor in advance and as early as you can. Slides used in my class lecture will be posted as a PDF document on the Canvas course website, within a few hours after the class meeting has concluded.

Class participation: Students must also come prepared to actively participate in class discussions that will include the entire class or smaller groups. This requires completing and

keeping up with the lecture and assigned readings. Participation includes paying attention, taking notes, answering questions, asking your own questions, participating in group work and discussions, and offering critiques or responses to the lecture and reading material. Given the nature of topics covered in this course, there could be a wide range of opinions among students, many of which may be rooted in your personal and professional experiences. However, you must always try to engage in considerate and respectful discussion and debate in class, and avoid any abusive and harsh language or behavior.

Leading class discussions: Each student will be required to lead class discussion of an assigned course topic and related reading/video, once in this course (Units 2 to 8). Students leading class discussion (discussion leaders) will be required to: (1) summarize, synthesize, and discuss the assigned material; and (2) outline key issues and questions that can be used to generate class discussion. The role of the discussion leader is to make your colleagues think critically about the content of the readings/videos, and help facilitate and contextualize discussion. For example, you may raise questions about the assigned readings, critique the arguments or approaches of the authors, challenge others to think about the readings differently, compare and contrast the readings with others, or reflect on the themes of the readings in the context of current events and/or personal experiences. The use of slides is recommended for leading class discussion. Discussion leaders should begin with an introduction and brief summary of the reading, to be followed by discussion questions that include and/or extend the topics covered in the reading. You are expected to bring a sufficient number of meaningful questions that generate debate and discussion, and not just questions that only require reproducing information from the assigned reading*. You will sign up to lead class discussion only once*. A sign-up spreadsheet, available on the course website, will allow you to choose the date and Unit for which you wish to lead or co-lead our class discussion (first come/first-served basis only).

Weekly assignments: Students will be required to complete and submit a written exercise, six times during this quarter. These assignments (Exercises 1 to 6) will be based on concepts, issues, and topics covered in the class lectures and reading material. Each exercise should be prepared using the Word document provided and submitted through the Assignments link for the Unit available on the Canvas course website. The due dates and times for each exercise will be announced when they are posted. Points will be deducted for late submissions, with the exception of documented medical or other emergencies.

Final project**:** The final requirement is the preparation and submission of a final project. Students are expected to work *individually* on an EJ-related issue or object of concern that is not directly linked to topics already covered in the course. You are welcome to choose a project topic from a list that will be provided by the instructor, but other relevant topics will also be allowed. Two potential options for this project include: (A) a critical and detailed review of a particular EJ topic that was not covered in this class; or (B) a case study that focuses on analyzing an object of EJ concern in a particular study area. For option (A), you are expected to use peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books as your main sources, as well as utilize references recommended by the instructor. For option (B), you are

recommended to use web-based EJ mapping/screening tools and other data sources that are publicly available and were covered in ESM 205. The project could contribute to your own research agenda or be related to your capstone group project, but this is not a requirement. Completion of this project will proceed in two steps:

1. A one-page proposal of your final project topic and other relevant details must be submitted by Friday, May 8, 2026 (tentative date), to enable me to provide feedback and recommendations in a timely manner. You are encouraged to communicate with me earlier to discuss and/or finalize your topic.
2. Each student will make a conference-style presentation of their project to the class during one of our final three class meetings (May 28, June 2, and June 4, 2026). You will deliver a PowerPoint presentation of your project, to be followed by questions and discussion. Detailed guidelines for this presentation will be provided later. You will also be required to provide constructive feedback on two other presentations.
3. Questions, comments, and suggestions received during the presentation should be addressed and incorporated to revise the content of the presentation and create a blogpost that will be submitted to the instructor for grading as a PDF document. More information on the final project and related requirements will be provided in class and posted on the Canvas course website.

Course Evaluation and Grading

The final course grade will be computed on the basis of the following components/weights:

- Class attendance: 10%
- Class participation: 10%
- Leading class discussion: 10%
- Assignments: 42%
- Final project: 28%; comprising:
  - Proposal: 3%
  - Class presentation: 20%
  - Feedback on other presentations: 5%

Course Communication

***Email*:** E-mail is the easiest and quickest way to reach me. If you contact me via email [jchakrab@ucsb.edu], I will make every attempt to respond within 24 hours of receipt. When e-mailing me, make sure to email from your UCSB student account and please put the course number in the subject line. In the body of your e-mail, clearly state your question. At the end of your e-mail, be sure to include your first and last name. If you need to meet with me outside my office hours, please send me an email to schedule an appointment for a meeting via phone, Zoom, or in-person.

***Citation style*:** All formal written work for this class should adhere to the APA style as described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition). Information on the APA style has been summarized in a document titled *Common References*

Example Guide (APA Style) that I have posted on the Syllabus page of the Canvas course website. More detailed information can be found here: https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples.

Textbook

There are no textbooks for this course. All assigned readings are available for viewing and downloading as PDF documents available on the webpage for each Unit on the course website that can be accessed at: https://www.canvas.ucsb.edu/.

Course Calendar: Spring 2026

Unit	Date	Day	Topic
0	31-March	Tues	Course introduction
1	2-April	Thurs	Core concepts
2	7-April	Tues	Hazardous waste
	9-April	Thurs	Hazardous waste[1]
3	14-April	Tues	Nuclear hazards[1]
4	16-April	Thurs	Toxic chemicals
	21-April	Tues	Toxic chemicals[1]
5	23-April	Thurs	Air pollution
	28-April	Tues	Air pollution[1]
6	30-April	Thurs	Flood hazards[1]
7	5-May	Tues	Marine and ocean justice[1]
8	7-May	Thurs	Data centers[1]
9	12-May	Tues	EJ screening: Methods, policy, and community validation[2]
10	14-May	Thurs	Food insecurity in a US-Mexico border community[2]
11	19-May	Tues	Federal policy landscape and prospects for the future[2]
12	21-May	Thurs	Final project guidelines and course review
	26-May	Tues	*Project preparation*
13	28-May	Thurs	Student project presentations
	2-June	Tues	Student project presentations
	4-June	Thurs	Student project presentations

[1] Class session with student-led discussion & [2] Guest lecture

Please note that this is a tentative schedule that could be subject to minor changes, if necessary. Any changes to this course calendar will typically constitute a minor change in reading assignments, topic, deadline, or the cancellation of a day of class. You will be given an adequate warning before any new responsibility or assignment is due.

Supplementary Course Information

COURSE CONDUCT: All students are expected to read and comply with the UCSB Code of Conduct. We are committed to making this course a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, or religion (or lack thereof). We expect all students to help ensure this environment of inclusivity and will not tolerate harassment of any form. Please contribute to the class collective by respecting your classmates' pronouns, difference of experience, and difference of opinion.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic dishonesty is prohibited. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying data on class projects. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person as one's own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. It is expected that students will understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and that they will be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Materials submitted to fulfill academic requirements must represent a student's own efforts. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

LATE AND MISSING WORK: Assignments will be allowed to be turned in late only in the event of a documented medical or family emergency. If you do encounter an emergency, you must notify the instructor on or before the due date. Documentation could include a note from a physician, a hospital admittance slip, or correspondence from an academic advisor. Foreseeable excused absences (such as participation in university-sanctioned events) also require documentation as well as notifying the instructor at least one week in advance. In the case of foreseeable absences, you must turn work in early rather than late. In each of these situations it is the student's responsibility to communicate with the instructor.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT FOR COURSE MATERIALS: All materials used in this course are protected by copyright law. The course materials are only for the use of students currently enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further disseminated. All course materials (class lecture slides, discussions, handouts, and web-based materials) and the intellectual content of the course itself are protected by U.S. Federal Copyright Law, the California Civil Code. The UC Policy 102.23 expressly prohibits students (and all other peoples) from distributing or selling lectures notes and all other course materials without the prior written permission of the instructor. For more details, see http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/2710530/PACAOS100

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: If you are a student with a documented disability (registered with the DSP program: 805-893-2668, www.sa.ucsb.edu/dsp) and would like to arrange accommodation, please contact me and I will be happy to discuss alternative arrangements.

MENTAL HEALTH: We are in the midst of a mental health crisis nationwide and at UCSB. My goal is to help you learn the material. I design my assignments and final project in service of that goal. If assignments are getting in the way of your learning by causing crippling anxiety or any other paralyzing feeling, please talk to me as soon as you can.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: You are not encouraged or required to use generative AI tools such as ChatGPT in this course. If you still decide to use AI, I encourage you to remain skeptical and not let artificial intelligence replace your own intelligence. I will be grading the content of your submissions and holding you to a high standard to produce original and meaningful content. Keep in mind that AI often produces bland, uncritical, and uninteresting content, especially on issues and topics that will be covered in this course. For this class, you should never submit writing or ideas produced by AI or ChatGPT and claim it as your own. For example, you should not use it to write a definition of a term from class, analyze any part of a reading or video, or construct an original argument. The writing and thinking for this course should be done by you and build on ideas from the class lectures, discussions, and assigned course materials.