

Geography 3443 – Energy and Power

Dr. Carol Hunsberger
Office: Social Sciences Centre 2409
Office hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:00 or by appointment
Email: chunsber@uwo.ca

Class schedule

Monday 12:30-2:30, SSC 3026
Tuesday 1:30-2:30, SH 3355

Calendar description

This course investigates the political ecology of energy. Issues of politics and power, social equity, and environmental impact are examined through Canadian and international case studies. The concept of ‘energy justice’ is used both to critically assess current patterns of energy production and use and to explore more sustainable possibilities.

Prerequisites: Third or fourth year status at the University.

Overview

Energy pervades everyday life, but its origins and impacts often remain hidden from view. The smell of exhaust or the act of refilling a fuel tank may remind us on some level that fossil fuels release by-products and are ‘gone’ once they are burned – but the challenges faced by communities where these resources are extracted, and the political and economic power driving the industry, are less obvious. The pooled nature of the electrical grid can obscure whether the energy it delivers came from coal, nuclear, hydro or wind – and the impacts linked to each of these sources. In many parts of the world fuelwood and charcoal remain the dominant sources of household energy, with implications for forest cover, gender and health.

In short, current patterns of energy production and use are shot through with questions of social and environmental justice. *Who benefits most from the global energy system? Who bears its costs? Are biofuels sustainable? How have the politics of climate change shaped energy policies? Is nuclear energy clean energy? How far can energy efficiency take us?* Through these and other questions, this course explores the impacts of energy production, the equity issues surrounding energy distribution and access, and the political economy shaping key energy decisions.

The course is organized around the concept of ‘energy justice’ and uses this framework to assess a series of case studies. In addition to problems, we consider possibilities for – and examples of – more just and sustainable energy systems.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain the features and theoretical foundations of ‘energy justice,’ drawing on ideas from philosophy, political ecology, and environmental justice;
- Apply an energy justice framework to critically assess the impacts of different energy sources (e.g. oil, coal, nuclear, wind, solar, hydro, biofuels) and specific energy projects;
- Grapple with the challenge of how to reconcile diverse values, priorities and worldviews in energy and resource decision-making;
- Express well-supported arguments about how energy systems could better address social and environmental justice challenges, both orally and in writing.

Format

3 hours per week. Lectures will be interactive and will involve group discussions, debates and other activities. Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to take an active role.

Readings

Course text: Sovacool, B. 2013. *Energy and Ethics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Additional readings will be provided via the course website.

Tentative schedule (subject to change with notice)

Week	Monday class	Tuesday class	Due dates	Readings
04-Jan	Course overview	Set up hearings		Ch. 1
11-Jan	Foundations of energy justice	Justice activity		TBD
18-Jan	Energy availability and affordability	Preparation Day 1	Reflection paper 1 due	Ch. 2, 3
25-Jan	Mock hearing 1	Follow-up Day 1	Stakeholder reports due	
01-Feb	Due process and transparency	Judgment Day 1	Panel, media reports due	Ch. 4, 5
08-Feb	Equity within generations	Preparation Day 2		Ch. 7
15-Feb	READING WEEK			
22-Feb	Mock hearing 2	Follow-up Day 2	Stakeholder reports due	
Feb-29	Equity across generations	Judgment Day 2	Panel, media reports due	TBD
07-Mar	Prudence and responsibility	Preparation Day 3		Ch. 6, 9
14-Mar	Mock hearing 3	Follow-up Day 3	Stakeholder reports due	
21-Mar	Tough questions	Judgment Day 3	Panel, media reports due	TBD
28-Mar	Hopeful examples	No class		TBD
04-Apr	Course review and synthesis		Reflection paper 2 due	Ch. 10

Methods of Evaluation

Grades will be allocated based on the following tasks:

Reflection paper 1	10%
Mock hearing: Stakeholder role	30%
Mock hearing: Panelist role	20%
Mock hearing: Media role	20%
Reflection paper 2	20%

Mock hearings

Throughout the term there will be three mock energy board hearings during class time. Each hearing will concern a different proposed energy project. These are role-playing activities where the class will be split into three different roles:

- 1) Stakeholders making submissions to the panel;
- 2) Panelists collectively making a decision about whether the project should proceed;
- 3) Members of the media covering the issue.

Each student will play each role once during the course. The instructor will act as timekeeper and chair for all hearings. Attendance is mandatory on the dates of the hearings and associated work sessions.

Stakeholders will be evaluated individually based on a written submission (20%) and an oral presentation (10%). Panelists will be evaluated as a group based on a written report explaining their decision and the reasons for it (20%). Members of the media will be evaluated in pairs based on a piece of media coverage that they produce; this can be video, audio or print/web material (20%). More detailed instructions and expectations for each role are provided in a separate file.

Reflection papers

The rest of the course grade will be based on two short reflection papers. One will be completed at the beginning of the semester (10%, due January 18) and the other at the end (20%, due April 4). More detailed instructions and expectations are provided in a separate file.

Late policy

The late penalty for written work will be 5% per weekday (the weekend counts as one 'day'). Late hard copies should be placed in the Drop Box outside the Geography Department main office, with the course number and instructor's name clearly visible on the first page.

Additional Information

Mental Health

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, please visit the site below for information on mental health resources: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

For a downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC) see:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Using electronic devices in class for purposes other than taking notes is distracting to you and everyone around you. Please resist the temptation to surf, text, tweet, shop, and otherwise fiddle around during class.

Accessibility

The University of Western Ontario is committed to achieving barrier free accessibility for persons studying, visiting and working at Western. Please contact Dr. Hunsberger as soon as possible if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you, and to facilitate a positive learning environment. Please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Plagiarism

The Department of Geography has a zero tolerance policy towards plagiarism. If a student commits plagiarism, the instructor will assign a grade of zero on the assignment. A second instance of plagiarism is regarded as a scholastic offense and will be dealt with according to The University of Western Ontario policy for Scholastic offenses. The most common offense is failing to cite properly. If you quote directly, you must cite the author!

The following is an excerpt from the university secretariat: "Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf"

Turnitin.com

The university provides this mandatory wording: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between UWO and [Turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)."