GES 400/600
Environmental Social Action
MW 8:30 – 9:45
Sondheim 110

Instructor:	Dr. Kohl (she/her/hers)
Office:	Sondheim 211J
Drop-In Hours:	Mondays 10-11; Wednesday 2:30-3:30 or by appointment
Email Hours:	Monday – Friday 9:00 – 5:00
Email:	eakohl@umbc.edu

Syllabus Version: 24-Aug-26

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course uses critical geographic perspectives to explore the evolution of environmental social movements—from early activism to today's justice-centered campaigns. Students will engage with key social movement theories while analyzing the strategies, tactics, and power dynamics that shape modern environmental activism. Throughout the semester, in teams you'll go beyond the classroom by designing and leading your own social action campaign focused on an environmental issue on campus or in the surrounding community. This hands-on project gives you the chance to put theory into practice, build organizing skills, and create meaningful local change

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Examine the theoretical, historical, and political roots of environmental activism in the US.
- Analyze the evolution of environmental social movements through an intersectional lens.
- Draw on social movement strategies to foster creative and innovative thinking for solving problems.
- Understand successful organizations and effective leadership strategies and develop skills for communicating ideas in a concise and logical way while working in teams.
- Apply social movement theories to the development and implementation of an environmental social action on campus.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action. Second Edition. Scott Myers-Lipton

Course Website: All course material will be available through Blackboard. Please check Blackboard ***frequently*** for course materials, announcements, and other updates.

EVALUATION

We will be using a process called ungrading for evaluation in this course. Ungrading is a student-driven, self-reflective grading system that emphasizes qualitative rather than quantitative feedback. During the first few weeks of the course, we will discuss this process and work together to develop expectations. Students will be responsible for writing two self-reflections during the semester to assess their progress, learning, challenges, and grade earned. I reserve the right to change grades as appropriate.

Remember, I do not give you grades, you earn your grades.

Weekly Reading Engagement – 20%
In-Class Participation – 20%
Portfolio and Log – 40%
Campaign Presentation and Binder – 20%

Course Assignments:

Weekly Reading Engagement (20%): Each week you will be assigned readings to prepare you for class discussions. You are expected to read all readings. For readings in CHANGE! you will need to take handwritten notes on the chapters. In class on Mondays, I will occasionally check to see if you have completed handwritten notes for the assigned readings. All other reading engagement will be done online through Perusall, which can be accessed through Blackboard.

In-class Participation (20%): This class is a student-led, discussion-based, project-based class. You are expected to not only come to class but also participate in discussions, activities, and in-class group work. This does not mean you must dominate the conversation (if you are inclined to talk a lot, being silent and letting others express their views is sometimes the most important part of learning) but be an active part of the learning community.

Portfolio and Log (40%): Your portfolio is both a work in progress and a culmination of your semester. It is your opportunity to demonstrate and implement the knowledge gained from the text and your social action experiences. Portfolio assignments can be found at the end of each chapter in your CHANGE! book. Your portfolio must reflect your experiences and all in-class texts we are reading. Without integrating all texts into your writing your portfolio will not be considered as higher than C work. In addition to your reflections you also need to log hours on the provided form you spend outside of class working on your social action campaign. It is expected that you spend a minimum of 25 hours (1.5 – 2 hours a week) on your social action campaign outside of class, but you may need to spend more, especially towards the end of the semester (notice we start reading less???). You will turn your portfolio in throughout the semester. Your final grade on your portfolio will reflect both the individual bench marks as well as your overall engagement with the project. Graduate students will be required to add a theoretical component of their choosing to their portfolio.

Campaign Binder and Presentation (20%): Throughout the course of the semester, as a team, you will need to record the work that you complete in a campaign binder. This will not only track your progress, but it will be made available to future groups who may choose to continue the work you began on your social action campaign. It is important that your binder contains sufficient details so that students in future classes will be able to pick up where you left off. A template will be provided for the binder. At the end of the semester, your team will prepare a 20-minute presentation on your social action project.

A Note on Group Work: I know many students do not like group work because they want to control their academic production (and their grades), but many jobs require you to work together in teams and all social action necessitates teamwork. Teamwork is challenging, you have to negotiate schedules, personalities, opinions, and priorities. This why I assign group work – like all skills, we have to practice them to get better at them.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Decency Pledge: I ask that you be kind, honest, open, and decent to each other and to me. I will do the same for you. While we can (and will) disagree at times, I ask we do so in a respectful manner. While differences in opinions are encouraged, validated, and interrogated I draw the line at any language or actions that dehumanize people.

Course Community. I acknowledge we are all individuals with multiple sociocultural identities that intersect and shape our worldview through the lens of privilege and oppression. My commitment to you as your instructor is to minimize systemic forces of oppression within the classroom such as ableism, classism, racism, sexism, transphobia, and heterosexism in an effort to create a safe learning environment for all of us. I ask that you join me in this commitment to foster respect for one another, enhance solidarity, and build community.

Classroom Etiquette: This semester, like every semester, will have challenges. I encourage you to approach each other with humility and patience. During the first weeks of class, we will develop expectations of ourselves and each other. Take some time to reflect on what worked for you in the past, what you need to continue, what you need to change, and what you would like from yourself, your peers, and your instructor to make this semester a success.

Communication: Please address me as Dr. Kohl or Professor Kohl. If you email me, put *"GES 400"* or *"GES 600"* in the subject line. This helps me keep track of the communication for each class. Treat these communications as a formal interaction – think of it as practice for future employment. Include a salutation, use full sentences, and include a closing. I will answer emails within 48 hours. I do not check my email after 5 or on the weekends. Please keep that in mind if you have a time-sensitive question. Consult the syllabus, website, or your classmates *before* emailing me, as they may be a quicker way to get information.

Communication (Part Two): Communication is an important part of our class community. This class, and many others, may make explicit use of digital communication for academic purposes. All communication, whether in person or electronically, including but not limited to email, Blackboard, Discord, Group Me, WhatsApp, texting, or any other method, is expected to be respectful and courteous to all class members in accordance with the UMBC code of conduct. If you receive, or are aware of, communication that is not respectful, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Drop-In Hours: I have allocated time each week to meet with students. I am there specifically for YOU. I will be in my office on Mondays from 10-11 and Wednesdays from 2:30 - 3:30, if you have questions or want to chat feel free to stop by. If you aren't able to meet during that time, send me an email and we can set up a time to meet.

Absences: You are expected to attend all classes. I realize that life happens – and we all need to make tough decisions about our priorities. With that in mind, you will have *three* opportunities to miss class and make up any in-class work – regardless of the reason – but be mindful – if you choose to not come to class, and then are sick, even with proper documentation – you have already used up your absences. If you are absent for more than three classes, your grade will be adversely impacted. In extenuating circumstances, with proper documentation, we can discuss multiple, repeated absences.

AI: AI can be a valuable tool but it is also an imperfect tool that can present responses that are incorrect, inaccurate, or biased and can limit your own creative and writing development. For each assignment, we will discuss how AI can be used as a tool for the assignment according to the AI Assessment Scale (found on Blackboard). Our class is a space where we will have regular dialogues about the potential, power, use, and concerns tied to AI tools. My interest is in keeping these lines of communication open and supporting one another as we navigate this ever-shifting arena. You may not submit any work generated by an AI tool as though it is your own, this is considered plagiarism and will be considered a violation of academic integrity. If you choose to use and include any AI-generated material in an assignment for this class, you must cite it as a source, just like any other reference.

Late work: All due dates are deliberately chosen to prepare you for class or to spread out the workload over the semester. I expect that all work be turned in by the stated due date. Late work will be accepted with the following penalties: (1) Assignments designed to prepare you for class (i.e. weekly reflections, discussion group prep work, peer review) turned in after the start of class will be accepted for 50% of the total grade. (2) For all other assignments, there will be a 48-hour grace period after the due date where projects can be turned in with no questions asked and no penalties. After the grace period, a 10% deduction will be taken for each day they are late. (3) For in-class work, any work from the first three absences can be made up, after the first three absences no make-up work will be accepted except in extenuating circumstances.

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Environmental Social Action

Acknowledgment: UMBC was established upon unceded land that was home to and stewarded by the Piscataway Conoy and Susquehannock peoples. Over time, citizens of many more Indigenous nations have come to reside in this region. In addition, some people arrived in chains against their will and helped work this land and build its infrastructure, and yet have been excluded from many places and activities. Others came to escape harsh conditions or to pursue promises of a better life, some of whom have found these promises wanting. We humbly acknowledge those who have lived and struggled, now and today, in this place, and we know that this statement is but the first step toward justice.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is an important value at UMBC. By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. These principles and policies apply in both face-to-face and online classes. Resources for students about academic integrity at UMBC are available at https://academicconduct.umbc.edu/resources-for-students/. The following is an excerpt of UMBC's academic integrity code, quoted from <http://www.umbc.edu/provost/integrity/faculty.html> :"By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the UMBC Student Handbook, the Faculty Handbook, or the UMBC Policies section of the UMBC Directory."

Accessibility and Disability Accommodations, Guidance and Resources: Accommodations for students with disabilities are provided for all students with a qualified disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA & ADAAA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that creates equal access for students when barriers to participation exist in University courses, programs, or activities. If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations in your courses, please refer to the SDS website at sds.umbc.edu for registration information and office procedures. SDS email: disAbility@umbc.edu SDS phone: 410-455-2459. If you will be using SDS approved accommodations in this class, please contact the instructor to discuss implementation of the accommodations. During remote instruction requirements due to COVID, communication and flexibility will be essential for success.

Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Based Violence and Discrimination: UMBC Policy in addition to federal and state law (to include Title IX) prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in University programs and activities. Any student who is impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, gender discrimination, pregnancy discrimination, gender-based harassment, or related retaliation should contact the University's Title IX Coordinator to make a report and/or access support and resources. The Title IX Coordinator can be reached at titleixcoordinator@umbc.edu or 410-455-1717. You can access support and resources even if you do not want to take any further action. You will not be forced to file a formal complaint or police report. Please be aware that the University may take action on its own if essential to protect the safety of the community. If you are interested in making a report, please use the Online Reporting/Referral Form. Please note that, if you report anonymously, the University's ability to respond will be limited.

Notice that Faculty and Teaching Assistants are Responsible Employees with Mandatory Reporting Obligations: All faculty members and teaching assistants are considered Responsible Employees, per UMBC's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Discrimination. Faculty and teaching assistants therefore required to report all known information regarding alleged conduct that may be a violation of the Policy to the Title IX Coordinator, even if a student discloses an experience that occurred before attending UMBC and/or an incident that only involves people not affiliated with UMBC. Reports are required regardless of the amount of detail provided and even in instances where support has already been offered or received. While faculty members want to encourage you to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, students should understand that faculty are required to report past and present sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, stalking, and gender discrimination that is shared with them to the Title IX Coordinator so that the University can inform students of their rights, resources, and support. While you are encouraged to do so, you are not obligated to respond to outreach conducted as a result of a report to the Title IX Coordinator.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence, who does not have an obligation to report to the Title IX Coordinator, UMBC has a number of Confidential Resources available to support you: Retriever Integrated Health (Main Campus):

410-455-2472; Monday – Friday 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.; For After-Hours Support, Call 988. Center for Counseling and Well-Being (Shady Grove Campus): 301-738-6273; Monday-Thursday 10:00a.m. – 7:00 p.m. and Friday 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (virtual) Online Appointment Request Form. Pastoral Counseling via The Gathering Space for Spiritual Well-Being: 410-455-6795; i3b@umbc.edu; Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Child Abuse and Neglect: Please note that Maryland law and UMBC policy require that faculty report all disclosures or suspicions of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services and/or the police even if the person who experienced the abuse or neglect is now over 18.

Pregnant and Parenting Students: UMBC's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination expressly prohibits all forms of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex, including pregnancy. Resources for pregnant, parenting and breastfeeding students are available through the University's Office of Equity and Civil Rights. Pregnant and parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator to discuss plans and ensure ongoing access to their academic program with respect to a leave of absence – returning following leave, or any other accommodation that may be needed related to pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, breastfeeding, and/or the early months of parenting. In addition, students who are pregnant and have an impairment related to their pregnancy that qualifies as disability under the ADA may be entitled to accommodations through the Office of Student Disability Services.

Religious Observances & Accommodations: UMBC Policy provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs, and that students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor of any intended absences or requested modifications for religious observances in advance, and as early as possible. For questions or guidance regarding religious observances and accommodations, please contact the Office of Equity and Civil Rights at ecr@umbc.edu.

Hate, Bias, Discrimination and Harassment: UMBC values safety, cultural and ethnic diversity, social responsibility, lifelong learning, equity, and civic engagement. Consistent with these principles, UMBC Policy prohibits discrimination and harassment in its educational programs and activities or with respect to employment terms and conditions based on race, creed, color, religion, sex, gender, pregnancy, ancestry, age, gender identity or expression, national origin, veterans status, marital status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or genetic information. Students (and faculty and staff) who experience discrimination, harassment, hate, or bias based upon a protected status or who have such matters reported to them should use the online reporting/referral form to report discrimination, hate, or bias incidents. You may report incidents that happen to you anonymously. Please note that, if you report anonymously, the University's ability to respond may be limited.