

Human Health and the Environment

GRG 322D | Unique 36935

URB 332D | Unique 37285

Fall 2022

CLASS MEETS: Tuesdays and Thursdays | 9:30 – 10:45. RLP 1.102

Instructor: Professor Jules Elkins

Office hours: Virtual by appointment

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Course Description

Each year, hundreds of chemicals are found in Americans of all ages, including lead, mercury, dioxins and PCBs. Studies have detected antibacterial agents from liquid soaps in infants' cord blood, breast milk, and children's urine. PBDEs, or flame retardants, which can have negative impacts on learning and memory, show up in fabrics, upholstery, mattresses, and electronics, and leach out into household air and dust. News magazines call autism an 'epidemic.' Pollution is an affliction of the industrial age and remains one of the most vexing unintended consequences of economic growth.

This course discusses these contemporary, and often controversial, issues in environmental health, focusing on how today's environmental issues directly affect our health.

The thousands of chemicals we are exposed to have undergone little to no toxicity testing and their potential health dangers are generally unknown. These exposures, in conjunction with the public health achievements of vaccines and antibiotics, have shifted the nature of child and adult illness in developed countries from communicable disease to one of chronic illness. The face of toxic environmental exposures is both chronic and acute – from asthma exacerbated by air pollution to delayed development from lead in paint to the complex, chronic conditions of multiple origins, like immune dysfunction.

Of particular interest in this environmental morbidity is the unequal distribution of exposures among people of different socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Poor people are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, in the home, in school and workplace, and outdoors.

Toxic environmental exposures typically cannot be easily controlled individually, and therefore are heavily determined by our larger community and political decisions. Accordingly, this course focuses on the decision-

making process and the larger concept of environmental ethics. Because toxic exposures from manufactured chemicals could potentially be avoided by not using the chemicals in the first place, many ethical questions, dilemmas, and controversies arise in this course. For example, fossil fuels and human health – how should the short-term gains of using fossil fuels be weighed against the longer-term health consequences of respiratory and cardiopulmonary disease? Or obesity, under-nutrition, and starvation - the simultaneous existence of these conditions, particularly in one country, reveals a problem in environmental justice. Accordingly, we examine the relationship between humans and nature, and discuss the concepts of sustainability and resilience, and global health.

UNIVERSITY CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION

Discuss environmental health issues as they pertain to children's health. Focus on emerging scientific and public health issues such as water quality, air pollution, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, and the food environment. Three lecture hours a week for one semester.

PRE-REQUISITES FOR THE COURSE

Prerequisite: Upper division standing.

FLAG COURSES

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The Writing Flag faculty committee also provides statements on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Detection Software.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Using someone else's work in your own writing without giving proper credit is considered plagiarism, a serious form of academic dishonesty that can result in severe penalties. Copying someone else's work, buying a paper and submitting it as your own, copying and pasting text (even with changes), or borrowing images from an online source, are some examples of plagiarism. Even if you plagiarize accidentally, you can be held responsible and penalized.

Learning to cite sources appropriately is an important part of becoming a professional. When you are unsure about citation, you are encouraged to **ask your instructor** (who is already an expert in the discipline) what is appropriate in the context of your assignment. Consultants at The [University Writing Center](#) can also help you

determine whether you are citing sources correctly—and they have helpful guides online for using [direct quotations](#) and [paraphrasing](#). Reviewing those skills will help you feel confident that you are handling sources professionally in your writing. You can read the University’s definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in Sec. 11–402 of the [Student Conduct Code](#). For more information, visit the [Dean of Students’ site](#).

Plagiarism Detection Software

All assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student’s original work. Regardless of the results of any TurnItIn submission, the faculty member will make the final determination as to whether a paper has been plagiarized.

How Will You Learn?

STATEMENT OF LEARNING SUCCESS

Your success in this class is important to me. We all learn differently, and everyone struggles sometimes. You are not, ever, the only one having difficulty! If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we will develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. I also encourage you to reach out to the student resources available through UT and I am happy to connect you with a person or Center if you would like.

TEACHING MODALITY INFORMATION

This course meets in-person (requires in-person attendance). There are no recordings of classes. We will move online only when required to do so by the University.

COMMUNICATION

The course Canvas site can be found at utexas.instructure.com. Please email me through Canvas. You are responsible for ensuring that the primary email address you have recorded with the university is the one you will check for course communications because that is the email address that Canvas uses.

ASKING FOR HELP

Please consult Canvas as your first line of inquiry. If your questions are not answered, please email me at jules@austin.utexas.edu.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed, and that the diversity that students bring to this class can be comfortably expressed and be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit to all students. Please come to me at any time with any concerns.

SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Please refer to SSD's website for contact and more information:

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with SSD, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

Course Requirements and Grading

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All required course material is available online through links on the Canvas homepage.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

Class attendance Students are expected to attend class regularly as it is a seminar and discussion class, so your presence is required to create a rich learning experience. Attendance will be taken daily. Additionally, there may be field trips conducted during class time, for which your attendance is expected.

Class participation Class participation is strongly encouraged for a richer learning environment.

Behavior expectations Please refer to [Section 11-400](#) of the Institutional Rules in the GIC.

ASSIGNMENTS

The following table represents how you will demonstrate your learning and how we will assess the degree to which you have done so.

There are four requirements for this class.

1. **Attendance** (20% of final grade)

Students are expected to attend class regularly as it is a seminar and discussion class, so your presence is required to create a rich learning experience. Attendance will be taken daily. Additionally, there may be field trips conducted during class time, for which your attendance is expected.

2. **Weekly Assignments** (25% of final grade)

There is a rich body of writing, podcasts, and documentary film work on the topics we cover in this class. Weekly assignments may be based on readings, or, as a change from reading and writing, in this class I will also ask you to intellectually reflect upon what these pieces of work convey, and carefully consider how they fit into the body of work we are learning about and producing in this course. Detailed information about weekly assignments is available on the Canvas course web page.

For this class, you will have a choice for your semester-long main body of work. This project has two related parts, an annotated bibliography, and a creative project. Both parts build off the same topic. There are many options within this framework for your focus.

3. **Semester Project Part 1: Annotated Bibliography.** (25% of final grade)

An annotated bibliography is an organizing tool that is helpful when working on a research project. An effective annotated bibliography is used to compile research sources in one location and provide the researcher with quick access to the information contained in each source.

4. **Semester Project Part 2: Creative Project.** (30% of final grade)

More than ever, the world needs to hear and understand the story of science. Dry graphs and science jargon don't cut it with most audiences. In this class, students are asked to prepare a project to communicate their findings from the literature review to a wider audience, but to do so creatively. There exists an endless number of people, ideas, media, etc. competing for our attention and it is very hard to make your voice heard. Students are tasked with trying to find a way to creatively communicate their idea in a way that captures people's attention. Some examples include writing and illustrating a children's book, producing a podcast or video, creating an original artwork of piece of music ... the only limit is your creativity. In my teaching career, I can say with confidence and enthusiasm that the creative projects my students are producing are often some of the best and most inspiring work I have seen among undergraduates.

If you have any questions or concerns about a grade, you must bring it to my attention within one week of when the exam/assignment was returned. To do so, please write a case for why you think the grade is incorrect. After two weeks, the grade is final.

GRADE BREAKS

Grade	Cutoff
A	94%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	84%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	74%
C-	70%
D+	67%
D	64%
D-	60%
F	<60%

Course Policies and Disclosures

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY EXPECTATIONS

Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at:

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct>.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLASS RECORDINGS

Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

GETTING HELP WITH TECHNOLOGY

Students needing help with technology in this course should contact the [ITS Service Desk](#)

CONTENT WARNING

Our classroom provides an open space for the critical and civil exchange of ideas. Some readings and other content in this course will include topics that some students may find offensive and/or traumatizing. I'll aim to forewarn students about potentially disturbing content and I ask all students to help to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity.

SHARING OF COURSE MATERIALS IS PROHIBITED

No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class without explicit, written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. The University is well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure of the course.

RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS

By [UT Austin policy](#), you must notify me of your pending absence as far in advance as possible of the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

NAMES AND PRONOUNS

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will

gladly honor your request to address you by your chosen name and by the gender pronouns you use. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's chosen (not legal) name if you have provided one. If you wish to provide or update a chosen name, that [can be done easily at this page](#), and you can [add your pronouns to Canvas](#).

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, the ancestral name for what now is called North America. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge the Alabama-Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas.

University Resources for Students

SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (SSD)

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Please refer to SSD's website for contact and more information:

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with SSD, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH CENTER (CMHC)

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. Know you are not alone. If you or anyone you know is experiencing symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, academic concerns, loneliness, difficulty sleeping, or any other concern impacting your wellbeing – you are strongly encouraged to connect with CMHC. The Counseling and Mental Health Center provides a wide variety of mental health services to all UT students including crisis services, counseling services with immediate support and well-being resources. Additionally, CARE Counselors are located within the academic schools and colleges. These counselors get to know the concerns that are unique to their college's students. For more information on CMHC, visit <https://cmhc.utexas.edu> or call 512-471-3515.

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES (UHS)

Your physical health and wellness are a priority. University Health Services is an on-campus high-quality medical facility providing care to all UT students. Services offered by UHS include general medicine, urgent care, a 24/7 nurse advice line, women's health, sports medicine, physical therapy, lab and radiology services, COVID-19 testing and vaccinations and much more. For additional information, visit <https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu> or call 512-471-4955.

SANGER LEARNING CENTER

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332)."

STUDENT EMERGENCY SERVICES (SES)

Student Emergency Services in the Office of the Dean of Students helps students and their families during difficult or emergency situations. Assistance includes outreach, advocacy, intervention, support, and referrals to relevant campus and community resources. If you need to be absent from class due to a family emergency, medical or mental health concern, or academic difficulty due to crisis or an emergency, you can work with Student Emergency Services. SES will document your situation and notify your professors. Additional information is available at <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/> or by calling 512-471-5017.

Important Safety Information

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or professors, contact BCCAL (the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line) at <https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line> or by calling 512-232-5050. Confidentiality will be maintained as much as possible, however the university may be required to release some information to appropriate parties.

CLASSROOM SAFETY AND COVID-19

To help preserve our in-person learning environment, the university recommends the following.

- Adhere to university [mask guidance](#). Masks are strongly recommended, but optional, inside university buildings for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, except when alone in a private office or single-occupant cubicle.
- [Vaccinations are widely available](#), free and not billed to health insurance. The vaccine will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are vaccinated.
- [Proactive Community Testing](#) remains an important part of the university's efforts to protect our community. Tests are fast and free.
- We encourage the use of the [Protect Texas App](#) each day prior to coming to campus.
- If you develop COVID-19 symptoms or feel sick, stay home and contact the [University Health Services'](#) Nurse Advice Line at 512-475-6877. If you need to be absent from class, contact [Student Emergency Services](#) and they will notify your professors. In addition, to help understand what to do if you have been had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, see this [University Health Services link](#).

- [Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line](#) (BCCAL) remains available as the primary tool to address questions or concerns from the university community about COVID-19.
- Students who test positive should contact [BCCAL](#) or self-report (if tested off campus) to [University Health Services](#).
- Visit [Protect Texas Together](#) for more information.

CARRYING OF HANDGUNS ON CAMPUS

Texas' Open Carry law expressly prohibits a licensed to carry (LTC) holder from carrying a handgun openly on the campus of an institution of higher education such as UT Austin. Students in this class should be aware of the following university policies:

- Students in this class who hold a license to carry are asked to [review the university policy regarding campus carry](#).
- Individuals who hold a license to carry are eligible to carry a concealed handgun on campus, including in most outdoor areas, buildings and spaces that are accessible to the public, and in classrooms.
- It is the responsibility of concealed-carry license holders to carry their handguns on or about their person at all times while on campus. Open carry is NOT permitted, meaning that a license holder may not carry a partially or wholly visible handgun on campus premises or on any university driveway, street, sidewalk or walkway, parking lot, parking garage, or other parking area.
- Per my right, I prohibit carrying of handguns in my personal office. Note that this information will also be conveyed to all students verbally during the first week of class. This written notice is intended to reinforce the verbal notification and is not a “legally effective” means of notification in its own right.

TITLE IX DISCLOSURE

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, to report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be report it. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419. Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct, including the types of sexual misconduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

Faculty members and certain staff members are considered “Responsible Employees” or “Mandatory Reporters,” which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. **I am a**

Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX-related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX-related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu For more information about reporting options and resources, visit the [Title IX Office](#) or email titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

CAMPUS SAFETY

The following are recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the [Office of Campus Safety and Security](#), 512-471-5767,

- Students should sign up for Campus Emergency Text Alerts at the page linked above.
- Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus must evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- For more information, please visit [emergency preparedness](#).