

## **Environment and Society**

Undergraduate Minor

*(Minimum of 12 credits required)*

Standing faculty committee for program operations:

Stacey Balkan, Associate Professor, English & Environmental Humanities

Annette LaRocco, Assistant Professor, Political Science

### **Why Environment and Society?**

The field is flourishing internationally, with new programs—both graduate and undergraduate—appearing almost weekly. The justification for Environmental Humanities, and the intersecting study of Environment and Society, is powerfully made by cultural critic Imre Szeman (University of Waterloo, Minister of Environment) and anthropologist Dominic Boyer (Rice University): “our energy and environmental dilemmas are fundamentally problems of ethics, habits, values, institutions, beliefs, and power—all areas of expertise of the humanities and humanistic social sciences” (2014).

\*The core group of faculty consultants for the Undergraduate Minor in Environment and Society deemed it more appropriate to name the minor with a more expansive title than Environmental Humanities—that is, a title inclusive of study beyond the Humanities.

The core group of faculty include:

Stacey Balkan (English)

Annette LaRocco (Political Science)

Patricia Widener (Sociology)

Evan Bennett (History)

Sandra Norman (History)

Jane Caputi (Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)

Colin Polsky (CES & Geosciences)

Andrew Furman (English)

Cynthia Wedding (English)

Robert Gutsche, Jr. (School of Communication and Multimedia Studies)

### **Why Environment and Society at FAU?**

The university, aligned with the belated national consensus regarding climate science and the climate emergency, has designated several relevant disciplinary areas as part of its strategic “pillars” and “platforms” for its 2015-2025 strategic plan. These include: Environmental Science, a “Healthy and Environmentally Sustainable Campus,” and “Peace, Justice, and Human Rights.” The last has been channeled into a Certificate program for the Center for Peace, Justice, and Human Rights; the Undergraduate Minor in Environment and Society would differ in its central emphasis on environmental issues and thus satisfy two pillars/platforms.

The strategic plan also stresses marketability: this course of study is, without question, amongst the most marketable fields of study both nationally and internationally. Questions around energy

consumption, and the “greening” of the “energy” sector, are surely central to any discussion pertaining to the nation’s economic (and political) future. Consequently, students are virtually guaranteed employment in, for example, Environmental Consulting, Climate Change Mitigation, and the (exponentially increasing) academic discipline of Environmental Humanities.

As an Environmental Humanist and Environmental Justice worker, I work with a core group of international faculty (<https://www.petrocultures.com>) on similar programming; more critically, as an Environmental Humanist in South Florida, which many have deemed “ground zero” for the climate crisis in the United States, I feel that it is a moral imperative to bolster study in areas related to planetary habitability.

### **Are there peer institutions working on similar degrees?**

There are many such institutions. While the more established programs are at the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University, there are an increasing number of programs—for example, Environment and Society at Syracuse, and Environmental Studies at the University of Connecticut, whose curriculum is Humanities-intensive and thus quite different from conventional programs in “Environmental Studies”; both universities fall within the category of “peer” or aspirational peer. The latter is in line with FAU100 as well as FAU’s strategic plan, both of which mandate that we work toward institutional inclusion in the nation’s top 100 public schools.

### **Are there models for academic scholarship that stress interdisciplinarity in a way that would benefit faculty teaching in this area and thus also serve FAU100 in terms of bolstering our research profile?**

Amongst the many scholarly collectives within the academy, the After Oil school has been particularly successful in terms of publication on top university presses, securing funding for conference programs and residencies, and mentoring graduate students in the field. As an example, we boast two collaboratively authored Environmental Humanities/Environmental Studies volumes (published on top university presses--<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/solarities>); and I have received several queries from international students regarding such an emphasis for study at the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. level.