

Environmental Science and Management 429/529: Environmental Impact Assessment

Winter Quarter 2025 | Online

Instructor: Rachel Brown | tewbrown@pdx.edu | (801) 696-4550

Over 20 years of experience in environmental policy and management specializing in NEPA and permitting and compliance for renewable energy projects throughout the western US. I also instruct environmental law and management courses.

Student Hours: Wednesday and Thursday: 4–5:50 p.m., or by appointment; SRTC 218A; Zoom link: [Zoom link: https://pdx.zoom.us/j/3980799389](https://pdx.zoom.us/j/3980799389)

Overview

This course will introduce the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulatory and technical requirements, and other related laws and requirements. NEPA is intended to ensure that balanced decision making occurs regarding the environment. Almost a thousand environmental impacts assessments are prepared annually. This course will explore the need for environmental impact assessments, the different types of assessments, and the regulatory and technical requirements of preparing an assessment.

Readings

Required: NEPA and Environmental Planning, by Charles H. Eccleston, 1st Edition (2008).

Course Requirements

This is a joint graduate and undergraduate class. The course requirements are listed below:

ESM 429/529

Examinations	There will be two exams, mid-term and final available via Canvas.
Group Quizzes	In each week, there will be one open-book, open-note “group quiz” on the lecture due that day.
Midterm Report	Students will work individually or in groups of two or three other students to prepare a group project. The group project will be to write a term paper (6-10 pages) analyzing a EIS of their choosing.
Final Assignment	Students will work individually or as a group to complete a final assignment based upon a list of options summarizing what they learned in class.
Final Presentation	Students will give a 15-20 minute PowerPoint presentation on the subject of their paper and their major conclusions at the end of the quarter.
Discussion	You will be evaluated on your participation in the online discussion, Students will post discussions by Wednesday of every week, then respond to at least two other students by Sunday of each week.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

ESM 429/529	
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	20%
Quizzes/Assignments	15%
Midterm Report/ Presentation	25%
Participation	15%

Course Outline

Week		Date	Topic	Homework (due today)
1	Overview of NEPA	Jan. 6	Course Overview/Student Introductions NEPA Overview	Read Chapter 1, pages 1-18 Assignment: Introduce yourself; Watch “What is NEPA” video 300 word summary
2	Exemption and Categorical Exclusions	Jan 12	Exemptions and Categorical Exclusions Presentation by Melanie Ware, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)	Read Chapter 5, pages 129-141 Assignment: Prepare a CE; Submit your EIS Project Title for Mid-term Report (groups optional)
3	Preparing an EA	Jan 19	Preparing Environmental Assessments	Read Chapter 7, pages 167-185 Assignment: Prepare an EA analysis
4	When is an EIS Required?	Jan 26	When is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Required?	Read Chapter 6, pages 145-163 Assignment: Prepare a CEQ implementing procedures summary
5	Preparing an EIS	Feb 2	Preparing Environmental Impact Statements	Read Chapter 8, pages 189-226 Students will analyze EIS of their choice; Summarize in 6-10 pages (groups optional)
6	Midterm Report & Exam	Feb 9	Midterm Exam Midterm Report Due	
7	NEPA Streamlining Tools and Techniques	Feb 16	NEPA Tools and Techniques and Streamline Provisions Presentation by Travis Brown, SB Energy Director of Environmental Compliance	Read Chapter 2, pages 21-58 Chapter 3 pages 63-80 Assignment: Choose NEPA topic to complete: interview, survey, podcast, research paper, infographic, opposition paper, or presentation
8	Integrated Planning and Analysis Process	Feb 23	Integrated Planning and Scope of Analysis Presentation by Amanda Childs, VP SWCA Consultants Presentation by Kuri Gill, Program Outreach, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Read Chapter 4, pages 83-125 Chapter 9, pages 231-257 Assignment: Prepare a 500 word summary on a environmental law/permit included in NEPA analysis
9	NEPA and Congress, International EIA's, and NEPA Case Studies	Mar 2	NEPA and Congress/Legislation International Environmental Impacts NEPA Case Studies Presentation by Heather McPherron, Environmental Policy Analyst, Congressional Research Service Library of Congress	Read Chapter 10, pages 261-276 Read Chapter 12, pages 299-307 Chapter 13, pages 311-327 Assignment: Submit a NEPA case study Climate Case Studies: Case Studies U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit
10	Public Scoping/Comment Process	Mar 9	Public Scoping and Comment Process *Submit public scoping comment letter (extra credit)	Assignment: Watch or attend a public scoping meeting for a NEPA project NEPA Public Comment Process Assignment: Review a comment letter (projects listed or public comment examples); Prepare a 500 word

				summary
11	Final Exam Final Presentations	Mar 17	Final Exam: March 17 th – March 21 st Final Presentations: Due March 16th	Record a 10-15 minute Presentation summarizing your mid-term (groups optional)

CAMPUS POLICIES

Classroom Requirements for All Students and Faculty Due to COVID-19

The University has established rules and policies to make the return to the classroom as safe as possible. It is required for everyone to follow all the Return to Campus rules and policies. To participate in this class, PSU requires all students to comply with the following.

Vaccination: Be vaccinated against COVID-19 and complete the COVID-19 vaccination attestation form (available at <https://www.pdx.edu/covid-19-response/vaccinations>). Those students with medical or nonmedical exemptions or who will not be on campus at all must complete the process described on the “COVID-19 Vaccine Exemption Request Form” to establish those exemptions.

Health check, illness, exposure, or positive test for COVID-19:

- Complete [the required self-check for COVID-19 symptoms](#) before coming to campus each day.
- If you are feeling sick or have been exposed to COVID-19, do not come to campus. Call the Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) to discuss your symptoms and situation at 503-725-2800. They will advise you on testing, quarantine, and when you can return to campus.
- If you test positive for COVID, [report your result to SHAC](#) and do not come to campus. SHAC will advise you on quarantine, notification of close contacts, and when you can return to campus.
- Please notify the instructor (Rachel), should you need to miss a class period for any of these reasons so that we can discuss strategies to support your learning during this time.
- If the instructor becomes ill or needs to quarantine during the term, either she or the department chair will notify you via PSU email about her absence and how course instruction will continue.

Failure to comply with any of these rules: The University has given the instructor of this course the authority to require your compliance with these policies. If you do not comply with these requirements, she may ask you to leave the classroom, or she may need to cancel the class session entirely. In addition, failure to comply with these requirements may result in a referral to the Office of the Dean of Student Life to consider charges under PSU’s Code of Conduct. A student found to have violated a university rule (or rules) through the due process of student conduct might face disciplinary and educational sanctions (or consequences). For a complete list of sanctions, see Section 14 of the Student Code of Conduct & Responsibility (<https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-code-student-conduct-and-responsibility>)

Guidance may change: Please note that the University rules, policies, and guidance may change at any time at the direction of the CDC, State, or County requirements. Please review the University’s main COVID-19 Response webpage (<https://www.pdx.edu/covid-19-response>) and look for emails from the University on these topics.

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me; I am open to your feedback.

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations at drc@pdx.edu (<https://www.pdx.edu/drc>).

If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations. For information about emergency preparedness, please go to the Fire and Life Safety webpage (<https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-health-safety/fire-and-life-safety>) for information.

Academic Integrity

In the American college and university system, scholars and students use the ideas of their peers and predecessors to build new knowledge and understandings; in interdisciplinary fields such as environmental science and management, collaboration is an essential part of problem-solving, and one we emphasize in ESM courses. Institutions that depend on the free and open exchange of ideas and information also depend on a culture of academic integrity. Consequently (and as you have probably noticed) there are strong formal and informal sanctions against academic misconduct in this university and in this department. I expect that all work that you submit in this class will represent an original synthesis of your own ideas and the ideas of others. That means that information generated by others and used in your work must be clearly attributed to its original source, and either paraphrased in your own words or placed in quotation marks.

If you are uncertain about whether conduct constitutes a violation or not, please ask questions. If you can't ask questions early, ask them late, and err on the side of transparency. For help identifying plagiarism and learning how to avoid it, this online guide is a good starting place: <http://guides.library.ucla.edu/bruin-success/citing>.

Canvas

All materials and grading will be available in Canvas for this course. The web-based course management system can display material on a wide range of platforms from desktops to tablets to phones, you may need to use functions that are only available on a fully functioning browser. If your device/browser combination is not fully supported it is your responsibility to make arrangements for taking quizzes or submitting work. You can consult the OIT help desk at (503) 725-HELP or help@pdx.edu for guidance on resources that may be available for free online or from PSU. (Also, I do not recommend trying to review PDF documents on a smart phone, due to the small size of the screen. If you cannot find a larger screen device, download the .pdf and then use a viewer on your phone such as iBooks.)

Title IX Reporting Obligations

Please be aware that federal, state, and PSU policies require faculty members to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. (PSU faculty are also required to file a report under other circumstances, e.g., if we become aware of child abuse.) If you are experiencing or have experienced any form of sexual harassment or violence and would like to get support and learn about your options without triggering a report or an investigation, the PSU Women's Resource Center hosts advocates who can maintain confidentiality, and their services are available to students of all genders. To book an appoint with a confidential advocate, go to psuwrc.youcanbook.me or call (503) 725-5672. You may also wish to seek help from the Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC), where counselors are not subject to the same reporting requirements as your instructors.

Students' Right to Privacy

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. §1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Under FERPA, students have the right to inspect and review their education records maintained by the school. Generally, schools must have written permission from the student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to certain parties or under the specific conditions. Schools may also disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student's name, address, and telephone number, unless the student has requested that the school not disclose directory information about them. These sites provide additional information:

<https://www.pdx.edu/registration/student-records-privacy-policy>

http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.education/files/gse_handbook_student_privacy.pdf

CAMPUS RESOURCES

There are numerous resources available on campus to help you feel comfortable at PSU and succeed academically, including (but not limited to) services for students with disabilities; tutoring; career advising; multicultural centers; centers for womxn, LGBTQI, and transfer and returning students; and resources for students experiencing food insecurity, students with children, and veterans— just to name a few. You can set up an appointment to chat with a writing consultant while you both look at a draft paper you're writing (the Writing Center), or talk to a lawyer about problems that may arise with your landlord, to get help with immigration challenges, traffic accidents and citations, or to change the way your name or gender is recorded by the government (Student Legal Services)— and all of those services are free to registered students.

While many of these programs have changed the way they operate since the onset of Covid-19, they are still available and staffed with people who are eager to help you thrive. A list of these resources with links and descriptions will be posted in Canvas; the instructor can also help connect you with support that aligns with your needs, so send Rachel an email if you don't know where to start. And speaking of Covid-19,

- You can find frequently-updated information on pandemic-related closures, openings, policies, and procedures here: <https://www.pdx.edu/coronavirus-response>
- Guidance on what to do if you feel sick, as well as resources to help you maintain your physical and mental health in Covid times, here: <https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/covid-19-resources>

Grading Criteria and Evaluation

This course is to be completed in 10 weeks. You are strongly advised to prioritize this class; expect to spend approximately 12 hours a week on coursework including class time, assignments, readings, quizzes, and term reports.

Your final grade in the course is based on the percentage of points you earn out of the total number possible. To access information regarding how assignments are evaluated, please review the assignment details and the grading rubric. Grading follows the standard PSU grading scale below. Visit the [grading standards](#) for Academic Policies & Standards.

Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	Undergraduate	Graduate
A	4.00	Excellent	Excellent
A-	3.67		
B+	3.33		
B	3.00	Good	Satisfactory
B-	2.67		
C+	2.33		
C	2.00	Satisfactory	Below Standard
C-	1.67		
D+	1.33		
D	1.00	Inferior	Failure
D-	0.67		Failure

F	0.00	Failure	Failure
---	------	---------	---------