Community and Environmental Sociology

Sociologists study human social behavior and how societies are organized. The Department of Community and Environmental Sociology’s focus is on the relationship between people and their natural environment and with the communities in which people live, work, and play.

A major in community and environmental sociology is good preparation for jobs that involve an understanding of social issues, require knowledge of the functioning and organization of communities and the relationship between people and the natural environment, and involve data collection or data analysis. Community and environmental sociology graduates may be employed in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on a number of issues surrounding community development, environment, and advocacy, governmental planning or social service agencies, agricultural or environmental organizations, and cooperative or agribusiness enterprises. A major in community and environmental sociology also provides excellent preparation for careers in international development, law, and further academic work in sociology or other social sciences.

The Department of Community and Environmental Sociology offers a wide range of courses for both beginning and advanced students. The department’s introductory course, C&E SOC/SOC 140 Introduction to Community and Environmental Sociology, is designed to explore the changing nature of rural development in the global economy.

UW–Madison community and environmental sociologists teach about a wide range of issues that are of critical importance to people and communities from Wisconsin to the low-income countries of the developing world. For example, students can study such matters as the growing controversies around energy, the implementation of environmental laws, sustainability, and the special problems and unique concerns of people in resource-dependent communities. Students can also focus on issues such as the effect of new agricultural technologies on family farms, the ways gender and race affect educational and occupational opportunities, and how community leaders and citizens address problems such as urban sprawl or rural poverty. In addition, students can examine issues such as population growth, the causes of world hunger, tropical rainforest destruction, and the prospects for achieving sustainable development in poor countries.

Many community and environmental sociology students build on their major by selecting one of the certificate programs available from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences or from other UW–Madison schools or colleges. Certificate programs enable students to expand their skills and study particular topics or issues in more depth. Community and environmental sociology majors often choose certificate programs in the concentration in analysis and research, global health, food systems, criminology, and environmental studies. Many students choose to pursue a double major, combining C&E sociology with fields such as Spanish, environmental studies, nutritional sciences, agronomy, biology, wildlife ecology, or environmental science. Students have also combined their undergraduate major in C&E sociology with graduate work in public policy through the La Follette School of Public Affairs accelerated master’s of public affairs program.