11.373 Science, Politics, and Environmental Policy
Day 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

I. **Rationale for the Course**

My view is that:

--This is one of the most important topics in the field of environmental policy. It's critically important for practicing scientists, policymakers, advocates, and anyone who's interested in understanding what happens in this realm. So this is a very practical course: It will help you understand the context in which you are working, whatever area you are in.

--I also think that graduate students—especially masters students—make a mistake in approaching graduate school simply as a time for acquiring "practical" skills. It should also be an opportunity to gain new perspectives and to become a more thoughtful, reflective person. This class gives you the chance to step back from the kinds of "how to" courses you are taking and think about what difference knowledge actually makes in the world and why.

Why take this course with me?

--This is a topic I've been thinking, reading, and writing about for about ten years, since I started my dissertation in the mid-1990s. My perspective is that of a political scientist, not a natural scientist. That means I'm able to maintain a fairly broad view of the roles that science can and cannot play in politics.

II. **Goals of the Course**

To make you think about the relationship between science and politics and science and policy—both empirically and normatively.

--The picture we'll get is going to be complex and emergent, in the sense that I don't have a fixed set of ideas I intend to push.

More generally, to help you become a more critical reader and thinker.

And to help you become more articulate in talking and writing about what you've thought and read.

--This is a discussion class, and I am going to try to help each of you to be clear and concise and logical in expressing your ideas, both orally and in writing. This is an explicit, rather than an implicit, goal of the course, so we'll actually have periodic discussions about communicating more effectively.

III.   The Syllabus

You'll notice that there is a series of questions under each topic. You can use these to guide your reading and writing, but don't feel constrained by them. If you find something particularly interesting in the reading, you are free to focus on that.

I try to assign readings that give you a variety of perspectives.

I also try to choose readings that are interesting and well written. This limits my choices considerably, as you can imagine.

At the end of each class, I'll give you a little background on the reading for the next class, and I'll tell you which pieces you can skim and which you need to read more closely.

Here are some suggestions on how to approach the reading to make sure you are efficient.

>   --What is the author's main argument, in a nutshell?

>   --How does she defend that argument, logically? What empirical support does she offer?

>   --If applicable, what are some of the major weaknesses, gaps, or inconsistencies in the argument?