

## Cataloging Environmental Justice Courses across Harvard

*By the 2024-2025 SSAs from sections A, D & H*

Environmental Justice (EJ) is a growing area of interest for students across disciplines at Harvard. Yet despite an increasing demand for coursework that explores the intersection of justice, sustainability, and community wellbeing, there is no standardized resource for students to identify which courses meaningfully engage with Environmental Justice.

This semester, in collaboration with the Salata Institute's Climate Action Accelerator, we set out to build a comprehensive, replicable framework for identifying Environmental Justice coursework across Harvard's many schools and programs. Our goals were threefold:

1. **Develop a rigorous definition and framework for Environmental Justice** rooted in academic research and shaped by input from Harvard stakeholders;
2. **Use that framework to assess the current landscape of EJ courses across the University** and compile a centralized resource for students;
3. **Provide a replicable, annually updateable model** that enables students, faculty, and administrators to build on our work in the future.

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## Why This Work Matters

Students increasingly want their education to prepare them not just to work in the sustainability space, but to do so with a lens of justice, equity, and inclusion. Many peer institutions—from Stanford to the University of Michigan—have already built robust EJ course offerings. At Harvard, while EJ concepts are often embedded in existing classes, the lack of a shared definition and tagging system has made it difficult for students to find relevant coursework. We saw an opportunity to fill that gap.

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## Defining Environmental Justice: A Multi-Source Approach

We began by asking: **What exactly is Environmental Justice in an academic context?**

To answer that, we reviewed:

- Scholarly literature on the evolution and scope of EJ,

- Definitions, frameworks, and course tagging used by leading peer institutions,
- Input from Harvard faculty across multiple schools.

We found that while interpretations of EJ varied, several key themes emerged consistently: a focus on the **disproportionate environmental burdens faced by marginalized communities**, an emphasis on **equitable participation in decision-making**, and the **interdisciplinary nature** of EJ work—spanning public health, law, urban planning, environmental science, and beyond.

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## Building and Testing Our Framework

With this foundation, we developed a working definition and set of evaluation criteria. Then, in a process designed to be both **rigorous and replicable**, we pressure-tested our framework through an iterative, “test and learn” process:

- Each team member independently applied the framework to a sample of Harvard course listings;
- We cross-compared our results to identify inconsistencies or gaps;
- We revised the framework to improve consistency and objectivity;
- We validated the updated version with the Salata Institute and a small working group of faculty.

The final framework included **key thematic pillars** (e.g., distributive justice, procedural justice, intersectionality), **indicators** (e.g., course content, case studies, community engagement), and **keywords** drawn from our research to support an initial screen of the course catalog.

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## From Framework to Course List

Next, we applied the framework across the course catalogs of all Harvard schools, using keyword searches to identify potential matches and then manually reviewing each course to assess alignment. Doing so, we narrowed down a list of courses determined to have at least ~20% EJ-related content.

Throughout this process, we were mindful of one of the core tensions in the project: EJ content is often embedded in courses that aren't *explicitly* labeled as such. Our goal was to strike a careful balance—recognizing and highlighting that content without overextending the label.

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## What's Next

We've submitted our partial list for the next academic year (note: some Harvard schools have yet to update their course lists) to the Salata Institute. We've also provided a detailed playbook to ensure the framework and process can be reused by future students or staff.

This work isn't just about building a list. It's about **creating access, visibility, and institutional support for Environmental Justice as an essential part of climate education**. We hope this project serves as a foundation that others can build on—whether by expanding the course list, deepening the academic inquiry into EJ, or further embedding justice into Harvard's sustainability goals.