Environmental Geography
POLI 397
1:40-2:55 TR
Maybank 316

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Office hours: Tuesdays 3-4 and Wednesdays 3-5, or by appointment

Class Syllabus

Course Description

How do humans and ecologies interact to shape global and local environments, and how do these local and global geographies shape ecosystems and social life? How are global political and economic processes connected to local political and environmental struggles, and how does “the local” matter?

This class critically examines the relationship between humans and their environments, focusing on the politically volatile nature of human resource use. How resource distribution occurs (evenly or unevenly), who controls the distribution, and how the distribution impacts economic, social, and ecological systems are often the source of political conflict and environmental problems. We will study how these political problems interrelate across different spatial and temporal scales, from the individual resource user to international regulatory bodies, and from colonial times to the present day. Our aim is to understand the complexity of such multi-scale, multi-cultural dynamics.

In this course students examine the relationship between people and the environment through a focus on the economic systems of capitalism and subsistence, the uneven distribution of resources, and the diverse social systems affected by the changing political economy. Students will critically examine assumptions about nature and human nature to make a more sustainable world. Topics of study include ideas of wilderness, the tragedy of the commons, overpopulation, social-ecological resilience, and environmental justice. The types of communities we will explore include minority and/or indigenous communities, as well as rural and suburban communities, with case studies from North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Oceania.

We will question conventional, simplistic explanations of environmental problems, such as “overpopulation,” as well as question traditional categories such as “wilderness” and “the commons.” The goals of this class are thus to challenge students' thinking about environmental problems, develop new frameworks for critical analysis, and discuss practical and conceptual alternatives. Differing ways of explaining environmental problems are important because they form the basis for new political solutions.

The class time will be discussion-driven, punctuated with lectures, group discussions, active learning exercises, student presentations, and video. Students will be evaluated based on their
ability to critically approach questions, problems, and solutions to environmental conflicts through written assignments, oral participation and presentations, and projects. Students will engage in a primary project that will allow them to explore one case in depth, taking the form of a “scholar-activist” project that bridges academic knowledges with public knowledges of these social-ecological systems.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

- Students will identify and critique societal assumptions about environmental spaces [Geography Program Student Learning Outcome]
- Students will describe and analyze the multi-scale nature of resource use and the political-economic struggles for control of resources via a methodological approach called “political and cultural ecology;”
- Students will develop skills in critical reading, research, and oral presentation to construct, communicate and present complicated ideas to a lay public audience
- Students can advocate for resiliency at the individual, institutional, community, national, or international level [SLI outcome]

**Course Relevance:**

Of interest to students pursuing careers in government, policy analysis, natural resource management, environmental advocacy, geography, planning, sustainability consulting, teaching, journalism.

**Readings**

You will be expected to read about 50-70 pages per week; sometimes more, sometimes less. Readings are preparatory; that is they must be read by the date they are listed in the syllabus (by Tuesday or Thursday). Exams and Questions for class discussion are directly tied to the readings, so stay on schedule with the readings. **Be sure to have either the digital or hard copy of readings with you when you come to class, even if they are posted on OAKS!**

**Required texts:**


All other required readings will be available on OAKS

**Assignments and Grading**

Short breakdown:

- Exams (2 total): 32%
- Discussion Questions: 10% (1% each)
- Participation: 10%
- Project Proposal: 7%
- Project annotated bibliography: 8%
- Project final: 20%
- Presentation of project: 13%
This class will be highly **interactive**, which means that your participation in class will be central to the success of the course (and also to how much you learn). I will expect you to ask questions of me, of the readings, and I will expect you to engage with each others’ ideas. Although I understand that sometimes it can be difficult to speak out in class, everyone is expected to participate in class discussion—via your spoken voice, or the discussion questions you post on OAKS. To succeed in this class you will need to critically evaluate ideas, question them, dispute them, or make them your own. Speak out!

**Attendance is mandatory**; you may request that your absence be excused only if you are required to participate in college-sponsored activities. If so, you must fill out the appropriate forms at 67 George St., or call Constance Nelson (953-3390). Notices I receive from the Absent Memo Office **do not** constitute excused absences, and you will be penalized for all unexcused absences.

**Questions (10%)**

Worth 10% of your final grade; you **must** complete 10 (1pt each), due the morning before class begins, submitted to the OAKS discussion board. You are expected to base your question on the day’s readings that we will discuss. What question, if answered, would allow you to understand the main argument of the author(s)? What concepts are the author(s) introducing that would be significant to understand these environmental politics? You are not expected to cover every single aspect of what we read, but shape a question that would allow the class to better understand the material, NOT debate personal opinions. You must ask a minimum of ONE question for ten different class days during the semester. I will read some of these during class time, and we can answer them together.

**Rubric for quality questions posted to OAKS:**

- **1** = Developed a thematic question relevant to all readings (not specific to one reading); identified/used key term(s) to understanding the text/argument; likely introduces the question with short summary of the reading for context.
- **.75** = Question(s) engages readings by developing a thematic question, or identify key terms to understanding a text/argument
- **.5** = Student asked a brief question relevant to one of the readings, but without fully forming a context from which to ask that question
- **.1** = Student asked a question that had little direct relevance to understand the readings, or asked a question that brings in issues from outside of the course.

**Exams (32%)**

The exams will be both in-class and take home, and will be a mixture of multiple choice, fill in the blank, T/F, short answer and essay questions. Worth a total of **32 points**.
Project Proposal (7%)

See separate instructions on creating a professional-quality proposal for the project you wish to do. Please schedule optional meeting with professor to discuss the proposal.

Project Annotated Bibliography (8%)

Students will develop an annotated bibliography of 20 peer-review sources that is relevant to your case study or the environmental problems your organization aims to solve. See separate instructions and rubric.

Project (33%, including 13% for final presentation)

This project will build/develop your:
- Data-gathering skills (primary sources) and reviews of secondary literature
- Skills in different analytical techniques used by geographers and political ecologists.
- Knowledge about at least one environmental issue in depth
- Verbal, written, and visual communication skills

You MUST choose one project, and read the further instructions for each, as each have different components, requirements, and rubrics.

A. Service Learning project: you may volunteer for a local environmental group, dedicating at least 15 hours over the semester (it cannot be a one-day event, though a ‘clean up’ or other such one-day project might comprise part of your volunteer effort). You will be required to complete your volunteer assignment, complete an annotated bibliography, write a journal of your experiences and thoughts arising from the assignment, and write a 5-page essay based on a specific questions I ask of you, tailored to your volunteer assignment. [READ instructions #A for more details]

B. Research a case study and develop a geographical analysis of that issue. Write a cartoon book, similar to Marx for Beginners or Foucault for Beginners; maybe call yours Political Ecology for Beginners. [READ #B]

C. Create a 5-7 minute short digital video depicting a case study and develop a geographical analysis of that issue [READ #C]

D. Research a case study. Write a series (3-5) of op-ed news pieces highlighting the analytical tools of geographers. Automatic “A” on the project if you can get at least one in print somewhere (within the semester) with a readership of more than 15,000 people. [READ #E]

General guidelines for grades:

A – achievement is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirement

B – achievement is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.

C – achievement meets the course requirements in every respect.

D – achievement is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
S/P – achievement is satisfactory which is equivalent to a C- or better.

F – achievement is inadequate and no credit will be given for the course.

I (Incomplete) – assigned due to extraordinary circumstances, e.g., hospitalization, which prevent the completion of work on time. Requires an agreement between student and instructor.

This course will use +/- grades, allocated as follows:

A = 92% or above  C = 77-72%

A- = 91-90%  C- = 71-70%

B+ = 89-88%  D+ = 69-68%

B = 87-82%  D = 67-62%

B- = 81-80%  D- = 61-60%

C+ = 79-78%  F = below 59%

Other Class Policies:

Computers/IPAD/ETC: use of such devices are HIGHLY encouraged, particularly if it saves you from printing all the readings. HOWEVER, if I find you surfing or chatting or other such unauthorized use of any internet-capable or text-capable device, you will lose privileges to use your devices in class. Class time is not passive learning, but you are expected to be active and engaged and working on the issues at hand. Texting or facebook-ing distracts you and others from the tasks you are expected to complete, and research has shown that such activities detract from your learning/retention of content. I will play bad cop if I have to, to maintain respect for the classroom space.

It is assumed that all students will act with academic integrity and will not engage in behavior such as plagiarism, academic dishonesty, misrepresentation, or cheating. Please refer to the college’s policy on academic honesty. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will result in an XF in the class. The entire purpose of this class is to acquire useful skills; to cheat is to lose the opportunity to improve these skills. Please refer to the campus honor code for questions about academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism refers to the presentation of someone else's ideas, work, or words as your own, without attribution. If you use someone else's exact words, then you must use quotation marks in addition to a citation; simply naming the source is not enough. If you completely paraphrase someone else's ideas in your own words, then you still have to cite the source, but you do not have to use quotations. When in doubt, cite the source. If you have questions about whether you have provided adequate citation, consult with me before the assignment is due.
Support Services:

Please take advantage of the College’s Center for Student Learning; they have walk-in labs for writing and speaking—two skills you will need to improve (and be graded on!) during this semester. The Center for Student Learning is located in the Addlestone Library (953-5635).

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed.

Class Outline

Readings must be completed by the first class they are listed to be discussed. Even though some of the readings are online, you are responsible for having a digital or hard copy DURING CLASS.

**Week 1: Situating Environmental Geography**

**Tuesday, January 8th**

Introductions and explanation of syllabus

Foucault said that “space is fundamental to the exercise of power” (1980, 149)

  Intro to geographical thinking—Space, place, scale, Nature-society relationships/human-environment studies

I will introduce the project ideas for you to choose from; **write a project proposal DUE no later than Friday, February 1st** by 11:59 pm (see instructions on how to write a proposal; worth 7% of your course grade; stop by my office hours or schedule an individual meeting with me to talk through your topics, before and/or after submitting your proposal).

**Thursday, January 10th**


**Week 2: Fundamental Concepts of Environmental Geography**

**Tuesday, January 15th**


Thursday, January 17th


**Week 3: “Nature” as a Socio-cultural phenomenon**

Tuesday, January 22nd


Thursday, January 24th


**Week 4: Land Tenure, Land Use, Ethics**

Tuesday, January 29th


Thursday, January 31st


**Project proposals DUE by Friday February 1st 11:59 pm.**
**Week 5:**

**Tuesday, February 5th**

Exam 1: multiple choice, short answer, short essay (worth 10%)

**Thursday, February 7th**

Sustainable Agriculture at CofC, campus tour
Reading “Geography and Sustainability,” TBA

**Week 6: “Local” Communities, Knowledges, and Subsistence Economies**

**Tuesday February 12th**


Berkes, Fikret. 1999. Selections from *Sacred Ecologies*: “Defining Traditional Ecological Knowledge,” pgs. 5-9; Ch. 5: “Cree Worldview ‘From the Inside,’” pgs. 79-93.

**Thursday February 14th**


**Week 7: Economic Geography and Uneven Development**

**Tuesday February 19th**

Selections from *Marx for Beginners*


**Thursday February 21st**

Week 8: Development and Environmental Justice

Tuesday February 26th


Thursday February 28th


TBA

Week 9: Geographies of Power

Tuesday, March 5th

Selections from Foucault for Beginners.

TBA

Thursday March 7th


Week 10: The Commons and Formal/Informal Environmental Institutions

Tuesday March 12th

Robbins, “Chapter 4: Institutions and ‘The Commons,’” 46-62
**Thursday March 14th**


TBA

Annotated bibliographies **DUE** Friday 11:59 pm in the Dropbox

**Week 11: Spring Break**

**NO CLASS March 19th and 21st**

**Week 12: Political Ecologies and Apolitical Ecologies**

**Tuesday March 26th**


**Thursday March 28th**


**Week 13:**

**Tuesday, April 2nd**

Exam #2: multiple choice, short answer, essay

**Thursday, April 4th:**

Student Presentation Day #1

**Week 14: Lawn People, part 1**

**Tuesday April 9th**

Chapters 1-4, *Lawn People* by Paul Robbins
Thursday, April 11th

Student Presentation Day #2

Week 15: Lawn People, part 2

Tuesday, April 16th

Chapters 5-8, Lawn People, plus appendices

Thursday, April 18th

Student Presentation Day #3

Final Exam #3: Take Home Essays
Due May 3rd in the OAKS dropbox by 11:59 pm.

Have a Great Summer Break!