Environmental Geography

POLI 397
12:15-1:30 TR
Maybank 316

Instructor: Dr. Annette Watson
953-5864 (office)
WatsonAM@cofc.edu
Office: Political Science Dept, 114 Wentworth St., Rm. 207
Office hours: Tuesdays 2-3 and Wednesdays 3-5, or by appointment

Class Syllabus

Course Description

How do humans and ecologies interact to shape global and local environments? How are global political and economic processes connected to local political and environmental struggles?

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. Our aim is to understand the complexity of such multi-scale, multi-cultural dynamics.

We will review how resource patterns and political conflicts are a product of the geographies of particular places and people. 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. The societies in question can be based on subsistence, non-capitalist barter systems, well developed capitalism, or mixed economic systems; and the phenomena of interest can comprise a range of things, such as environmental governance, gender relations, soil erosion, Traditional Ecological Knowledge or water rights.

We will question conventional, simplistic explanations of environmental problems, such as overpopulation and poverty. 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.
Student Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge: Describe key issues in environmental geography; [assessment: commentaries, exams, project]
- Comprehend: Explain environmental politics in the context of broader social and political geographies; [assessment: commentaries, exams, project]
- Application: Illustrate the multi-scale nature of resource use and the political struggles for control of resources; [assessment: commentaries, exams, project]
- Analysis: Analyze the multi-scale environmental problems using geographical methods and theories, often called “political ecology” approaches; [assessment: project]
- Synthesis: Develop skills in critical reading, research, and oral presentation to construct, communicate and present complicated ideas to a lay public audience; [assessment: project]
- Evaluate: Compare and justify different research methodologies from the social and natural sciences, and choose methods that would be most effective in creating interdisciplinary knowledge of social-environmental phenomena; [assessment: commentaries, exams, project]

Course Relevance:
Of interest to students pursuing careers in political science, law, geography, planning, NGOs, environmental politics and/or management, journalism, education, and environmental activism.

Readings
You will be expected to read on average about 70-90 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). Exams and Commentaries (as well as 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:
Available at the College Bookstore on Calhoun

All other required readings will be available on OAKS

Assignments and Grading
Short breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>32% (two at 10%; final at 12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentaries</td>
<td>20% (2% each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Ethics Quiz</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Proposal</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of project</td>
<td>8%</td>
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**Participation (10%)**

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. If you really fear public speaking, participation also includes emailing me questions before class about terms or points of clarifications you’d like us to cover during class discussion, or even posting on the Geography at CofC facebook page. 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.

Commentaries (20%)

Worth 20% of your final grade; you must complete 10 (2pts each), due on OAKS the night before class (by midnight). You are expected to base your commentary on the entire week’s readings. A commentary is a reading reaction; you should write a brief abstract of the week’s readings in the first couple of sentences, then write any thoughtful critiques, ruminations on theory or method, contrasts and comparisons of readings or themes. If you write only about one reading, then you will receive a partial but failing grade for the commentary. You are not expected to cover every single aspect of what we read, but you might end up quoting at least one author and develop a commentary of substance. You should also include at least one possible discussion question for the class. Of course, you can also (in addition to your commentary) make a list of any terms that you need to clarify—there are many that I do not expect you to know, and it will be helpful to understand which intellectual histories and ideas we need to discuss. Your commentary should be about one half single-spaced page in Word; cut and paste your commentary to the OAKS discussion board under the date that we will discuss those readings. Be sure to review others’ commentaries before coming to class; reading them will also help you to improve your writing as well as your understanding of the concepts.

Exams (32%)

The exams will be both in-class and take home, and will be a mixture of short answer and essay questions. Worth a total of 32 points.

IRB Ethics Quiz Completion (5%)

Students are made familiar with the ethics of working with local peoples and doing human subjects research. This is relatively painless. Really. Take a very short course, the Required Training for Research Involving Human Participants; go to this web address: http://www.orga.cofc.edu/pub/compliance_IRB_RESEARCHER_TRAINING.shtml

At the bottom of that page you will see the option to go directly to the training site:
Follow this link
http://www.citiprogram.org/
to access CITI registration and training modules.

This is actually an online test. When I did it, it took me 1 hour; it will take you a little longer than that because you are less familiar with the material. Create a username and password, then you will take the “Basic/Refresher” course for social science. Identify yourself as a student, and that you are doing Exempt research. There will be text to read, and when you are asked to take the quiz, open it in a new page, so you can refer back to the text as you answer the questions. (Yes, this is open book.)

When you pass the test, print out the results page, and hand it in to me.

If you have questions while you take this test (if during the day), feel free to call my office. The IRB office is also available to help:
Eileen Callahan
Research Compliance Coordinator
Office of Research & Grants Administration
College of Charleston
843-953-7421
callahane@cofc.edu

Students that go on to develop projects that require them to talk with people as primary data sources, either informally or doing an unrecorded or recorded interview, they will go through a short process of approval by the College’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Project Proposal** (5%)

See separate instructions on creating a professional-quality proposal for the project you wish to do. Grade includes mandatory meeting with professor to discuss the proposal.

**Project** (28%, including 8% for presentation of your project)

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

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

A. Service Learning project: you may volunteer for a local environmental group, dedicating at least 10 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, write a journal of your experiences and thoughts arising from the assignment, and write a paper based on specific questions I ask of you,
tailored to your volunteer assignment (this paper will require additional research). [READ
instructions #A for more details]

B. Research a case study. 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 film depicting a case study using analytical tools of political
ecology [READ #C]

D. Interview a politician: ask him/her about the major issues facing the community they serve
(not explicitly “environmental” issues), and then write a policy report addressing each of
their concerns using the analytical tools of political ecology. [READ #D]

E. Research a case study. Write a series (3-5) of op-ed news pieces using the analytical tools of
political ecology. 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]

F. Scholar-Activist Group Project: students in groups of 3-4 people will develop a project
researching a case study in political ecology. Your project output can be many things, such
as some of the above projects (though expected to be more in-depth because there are more
people), and is also expected to be more ‘activist’ in its intervention. [READ #F]

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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92% or above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>91-90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>87-82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>81-80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79-78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77-72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>71-70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>69-68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>67-62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>61-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 59%</td>
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</tbody>
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Other Class Policies:

Computers/IPAD/ETC: use of such devices are 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 in 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.

Weeks 1 and 2: Situating Environmental Geography

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

Thursday, January 11th

Introductions and explanation of syllabus
I will introduce the project ideas for you to choose from; write a project proposal DUE no later than Feb 2nd by 11:59 pm (see instructions on how to write a proposal; worth 5% of your course grade; be sure to schedule individual meeting with me once you submit your proposal via OAKS).

Tuesday, January 15th and Thursday, January 17th

Readings we will discuss on both days:
[be sure to enter a commentary on all these readings on OAKS by Monday night!]


Week 3: Land Tenure, Land Use, Ethics and Justice

Tuesday January 22nd and Thursday January 24th
DUE (on thurs): CITI Training (worth 5% of your grade)
[we will also discuss the CITI quiz and its content during Thursday’s class]
Readings:


IPSG (Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group of the AAG) Statement on Research Ethics

**Week 4:** “Local” Communities, Knowledges, and Subsistence Economies  
T Jan 29th and Th Jan 31st

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


**Week 5:** Economic Geography, Uneven Development, and Environmental Justice  
T Feb 5th and Th Feb 7th  
DUE Th Feb 7th: selection of main projects and uploading project proposal (5% of your entire grade) via OAKS; Be sure to also schedule a meeting with me via email (watsonam@cofc.edu).


Selections from *Marx for Beginners*


**Week 6: Defining “Nature” and other Geographies of Power**  
**T Feb 12th and Th Feb 14th**


Selections from *Foucault for Beginners*.

**Week 7: Human and Non-Human Drivers of Environmental Change**  
**T Feb 19th and Th Feb 21st**


Week 8:
T Feb 26th and Th Feb 28th

No Class on Tuesday; Exam #1 on Thursday

Week 9:
NO CLASS
Spring Break

Week 10:
“Apolitical” Ecologies Part I: “Overpopulation” and the “Tragedy of the Commons”
T Mar 12th and Th Mar 14th

Readings:
Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. Governing the Commons [selections]: Chapter 1, “Reflections on the Commons”


Week 11: “Apolitical” Ecologies, Part II: Recognizing Political Ecologies
T Mar 13th and Th Mar 15th


**Week 12: Case Studies in “First World” Political Ecology**  
**T Mar 26th and Th Mar 28th**

Tuesday: guest Derek Alderman will engage us in conversation about "Untangling the Place of Kudzu in Southern History and Culture"

Alderman, Derek, and Donna Alderman. 2001. “Kudzu: A Tale of Two Vines,” Southern Cultures, Fall 2001: 49-64

Read Chapters 1 and 2 of Robbins *Lawn People* [we will begin this discussion on Thursday]

**EXTRA CREDIT**: Attend the Geography Lecture by Derek Alderman, Physician’s Auditorium, 4pm on Tuesday, March 26th [attendance will allow you to accrue one point when you sign in; if you write a 1-page summary you get 3 points total!]

**Week 13:**  
**T Ap 2nd and Th Ap 4th**

No Class: Work on your term projects!!!

**Week 14**  
**T Ap 9th and Th Ap 11th**

Tuesday: **Exam #2**  
Thursday: No Class: Work on your term projects!!!

**Week 15: Case Study in “First World” Political Ecology**  
**T Ap 16th and Th Ap 18th**  
Robbins, *Lawn People*, Chapters 3-6

**Week 16: Case Study in “First World” Political Ecology**  
**T Ap 23rd**

Robbins, *Lawn People*, Ch. 7-8, including Appendices
Final Presentations
During Final Exam Period, Thursday May 2nd, 12-3pm

Presentations on project: 10% of your project grade

Final Exam #3: Take Home Essay
Due Monday, May 6th in the OAKS dropbox by 11:59 pm.

Have a Great Summer!