Geography 755

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Office hours: Tuesdays: 2:00-3:30 and Fridays 10:30-12:00
or by appointment

Course Overview

This course is an examination of the subfield of political ecology within geography. But the class also probes the broader politicization of nature through processes of environmental conservation, development, and struggles over landscapes and livelihoods. We will examine the political economic contexts of environmental transformations, as well as the ways in which our understandings of nature are materially and discursively bound up with notions of culture and identity, and how these are transformed in the context of political-economic change. The course does not attempt to present a comprehensive survey of the environmental geography literature. Rather, it is a critical exploration of theories and themes related to nature, political economy, and culture – themes that, to my mind, fundamentally underlie the relationship between society and environment. The course is divided into five sections: (1) “Foundations” examines the intellectual foundations of political ecology as a subfield; (2) “Capitalist Transformations of Nature” explores the ways in which capitalism continually transforms nature and our relationship with it; (3) “Neoliberalism and Environmental Governance” continues the examination of capitalist transformations of nature, with a particular focus on the neoliberal form of capitalism, and the forms of environmental governance it engenders; (4) “The Politics of Epistemology: State Authority and Environmental Knowledge” explores differing modes of knowing and classifying nature, and how this knowledge translates into state power; and (5) “Agrarian Questions” begins with the classical Marxist debates about the peasantry, and then examines more recent discussions of peasant political ecologies and rural social movements.

Course Requirements

This course will be run as a seminar. As such, participation and preparation are essential. You are expected to do all assigned readings and come to class ready to discuss them critically. Each week you will be expected to prepare a 1-2 page critical response to the readings. Critical responses may present questions, rebuttals, syntheses of key ideas, or critical analyses of particular ideas in the week’s readings. Keep in mind that these should be critical in nature, and not merely summaries of the key points in the week’s readings. You are allowed 2 ‘free weeks’ when you don’t have to turn in a response. You can choose when to take these, according to your schedule and stress level. So, by the end of the semester you will need to have turned in 9 critical responses to get full credit. Each student is responsible for presenting two of these responses to the class during the semester. These presentations will serve as an introduction to the week’s readings, and as a basis for class discussion. Critical responses to be presented should be 3-4 pages, and should provide a more comprehensive overview and critique of the week’s readings. Your critical responses will be collected and read each week, but will be graded only during the weeks in which they are
presented to the class. We will also have a listserv for reactions, critiques, discussion or questions you may have about the readings or anything else of relevance to the class. Listserv participation is encouraged but not required. It exists simply as a forum for discussion and debate.

Half your grade will be based on a final paper of roughly 7500 words (around 25 pages). This should be a polished final draft, free of spelling and mechanical errors. Papers of rough draft quality will not be accepted. Your paper must be fully cited and include a detailed bibliography. You may use any citation system you like (footnotes, in-text citation, etc.), as long as it is comprehensive and consistent. You may write your paper on any political ecology-related topic you choose, based on themes covered in the class. If you prefer, you may use this assignment to write a research proposal, literature review essay, or a chapter draft for a thesis or dissertation. Regardless of the direction your paper takes, you are required to submit a paper proposal of about 2-pages, detailing (1) the research problem you will examine in the paper, and (2) the research questions you will address. Your proposal should also include a short, preliminary bibliography (of about 8-10 sources) of key works relevant to your topic. The proposal is due by November 2, and final papers are due on Monday, December 11 by 4:00 pm (they must be in my mailbox in the Geography Department office, 144 Eggers Hall, by no later than 4:00 pm). Unless prior arrangements are made, late papers will be marked down one letter grade for every day they are late.

Finally, you will also be expected to do a short (10 minute) presentation of your final research paper. Student presentations will be on the last day of class, December 7.

**Required Texts**


*All other required readings are online as pdf files, under course reserves.*

**Grading**

- Research Paper 50%
- Critical response papers & presentations 20%
- Class participation (class discussion, weekly critical responses, etc.) 20%
- Paper proposal 5%
- Final research presentation 5%
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Required Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 31</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
<td>no readings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Part I: Foundations of Political Ecology</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Part II: Capitalist Transformations of Nature</strong></td>
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<td>Sept 21</td>
<td>Nature as commodity</td>
<td>Prudham 2005&lt;br&gt;(whole book)</td>
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<td><strong>Part III: Neoliberalism and Environmental Governance</strong></td>
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Part IV: The Politics of Epistemology: State Authority and Environmental Knowledge

Oct 12       Knowing Nature and the Nature of Knowing  Cronon 1996 a, b  
              Williams 1973, 1980  
              Castree and Braun 1998  
              Demeritt 1998, 2002  
              Escobar 1998  
              Robbins 2000

Oct 19       State Authority  Gramsci 1971  
              Scott 1985 ("Hegemony and Consciousness")  
              Foucault 1991  
              Scott 1998  
              Z&B ch. 6, 8

Oct 26       Eco-Governmentality  Agrawal 2005  
              (whole book)

Part V: Agrarian Questions

Nov 2        Capitalist production and the peasantry  Lenin 1920  
              Alavi and Shanin 1988  
              Djurfeldt 1982  
              Bernstein 1982  
              Scott 1976  
              Scott 1985 ("Normal Exploitation, Normal Resistance")  
              Watts 1989

Nov 9        Political Ecologies of Peasant Livelihood  Bebbington 1999, 2000  
              Anderson 1994  
              Moore 1998  
              Z&B, ch. 7  
              P&W, ch. 4, 11, 12  
              Perreault 2005b

Nov 16       Rural Social Movements and Environmental Politics  P&W, ch. 7, 10, 13-15  
              Wolford 2004, 2005  
              Perreault 2003
Nov 23  Thanksgiving Break  (no class 😊)

Nov 30  Generalized creative expression  
(or maybe just a movie or some other form of goofing off)

Dec 7  Student Presentations  
No new readings

Final papers due by Monday, December 11, 4:00pm

Bibliography


