Geography 755

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Office hours: Mondays 2-4pm
or by appointment

Course Overview

This course is an examination of the field of political ecology within geography. 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 processes. 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) “Political Economies of Nature” examines the materiality of natural resources and the commodification of nature; (3) “Neoliberalism & Environmental Governance” continues our 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) “Agrarian Questions” begins with the classical Marxist debates about the peasantry, and then examines more recent discussions about accumulation by dispossession, peasant political ecologies and rural social movements; and (5) Environmental Politics & Social Mobilization examines the forms of social mobilization that emerge from environmental conflict.

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. You will be expected to prepare weekly papers of 1-2 page that respond critically 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 are meant to be critical in nature, and not merely summaries of the key points in the week’s readings. You are allowed two ‘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 ten critical response papers 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.
Half your grade will be based on a final paper of roughly 6000 words (around 24 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 February 29, and final papers are due on Monday, April 30 at 12 noon (they must be in my mailbox in the Geography Department office, 144 Eggers Hall, by no later than 12:00 noon). No late papers will be accepted.

Finally, you will also be expected to do a 15-minute conference-style presentation of your final research paper. Student presentations will be on the last day of class, April 25.

Required Texts (available at University Bookstore)


*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>January 18</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
<td>no readings</td>
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<td>January 25</td>
<td><strong>Part I: Foundations of Political Ecology</strong></td>
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<td>Denevan (1983)</td>
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<td>Turner (1989, 1997)</td>
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<td>Butzer (1989, 1990)</td>
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<td>Kates et al. (1990)</td>
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<td>Hewitt (1983)</td>
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<td>Watts (1983)</td>
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<td>Blakie &amp; Brookfield (1987)</td>
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<td>Peet &amp; Watts (1996)</td>
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<td>McCarthy (2002)</td>
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<td>Turner (2009)</td>
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<td>Walker (2005, 2007)</td>
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<td>Vayda &amp; Walters (1999)</td>
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<td>February 8</td>
<td><strong>Part II: Political Economies of Nature</strong></td>
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<td>Bakker &amp; Bridge (2006)</td>
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<td>Bridge (2009)</td>
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<td>Huber (2009)</td>
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<td>Henderson (2009)</td>
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<td>Sundberg (2011)</td>
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<td>Shaw et al. (2010)</td>
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<td>February 15</td>
<td>The nature of commodification</td>
<td>Bakker (2003)</td>
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<td>Prudham (2009a)</td>
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<td>Knock on Wood (chaps 1-5)</td>
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Political Ecology - 3
Part III: Neoliberalism & Environmental Governance

February 22  Neoliberalizing Nature
Harvey (2005)
McCarthy & Prudham (2004)
Mansfield (2004)
Castree (2008a,b)
Prudham (2009b)
Robertson (2011)
Himley (2008)

February 29  Governing Nature
Bridge & Perreault (2009)
Bridge & Jonas (2002)
Bridge (2000)
Bakker (2002)
McCarthy (2005)
Robertson (2010)
Perreault (2008)

-- paper proposals due in class --

March 7  Eco-Governmentality
Foucault (1991)
Agrawal (2005)
Valdivia (2008)
Birkenholtz (2009)
Suffering (Intro, ch. 1-2)

March 14  Spring break (no class!)

Part IV: Agrarian Questions

March 21  Capitalist production and the peasantry
Harris (1982)
Bernstein (1982)
Lenin (1982)
Alavi & Shanin (1988)
Harrison (1982)
Akram-Lodhi & Kay (2010a,b)
Brookfield (2008)
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Topic</th>
<th>Authors</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>Accumulation, primitive and otherwise</td>
<td>Marx (1867)</td>
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<td>Perelman (2000)</td>
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<td>De Angelis (2001)</td>
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<td>Harvey (2003)</td>
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<td>Glassman (2006)</td>
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<td>April 4</td>
<td>Political ecologies of peasant livelihoods</td>
<td>Bebbington (1999)</td>
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<td>McMichael (2008)</td>
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<td>King (2011)</td>
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<td>van der Ploeg (2010)</td>
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<td><em>Suffering</em> (ch. 3-6)</td>
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<td>April 11</td>
<td>Political ecologies of conflict and mobilization</td>
<td>Watts (2004)</td>
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<td>Perreault (2006)</td>
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<td>Bebbington et al. (2008)</td>
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<td><em>This Land</em> (ch. 1-5)</td>
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<td>April 18</td>
<td>Social movements and environmental politics</td>
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<td><em>This Land</em> (ch. 6 + conclusion)</td>
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<td><em>Suffering</em> (ch. 7-9 + epilogue)</td>
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<td>April 25</td>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
<td>No new readings</td>
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*Final papers due by Monday, April 30 at 12:00 noon*
Bibliography


