

Tom Perreault receives Fulbright-Hays award to study environmental politics in rural Bolivia

Tom Perreault, associate professor of geography, has been awarded a prestigious 2010 Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad grant. He will travel to Bolivia in January to spend six months examining the social and environmental implications of mine-related water contamination for indigenous peoples living in the Lake Poopó region on the Bolivian altiplano (high plain).

This is the second Fulbright-Hays award Perreault has received in less than 10 years. During the 2003-04 academic year, he received a grant to study rural water management, irrigation, state reform, and campesino (peasant farmer) politics in the Bolivian highlands. The project included an examination of how indigenous people organized to secure access to and manage water resources.

His new project will include two, community-based case studies of how mine-related water contamination has affected the livelihood of indigenous people living in the Lake Poopó watershed and the extent of which grassroots organizations are able to influence governmental mining and water management policy.

“In 2006, rural communities formed the Movement in Defense of the Desguadero River Basin and Lakes Uru Uru, and Poopó,” Perreault says. “It is the first such community-based organization to seek remedial action on the part of mining companies and the state. Their efforts resulted in the Bolivian president declaring one of Lake Poopó’s major tributaries an ecological emergency.”

Perreault's current research focuses on the complex interactions between social movements, environmental politics, and resource governance in the South American Andes Mountains. He teaches courses on political ecology, indigenous social movements in Latin America, and geographies of environmental justice, among others. In addition to Fulbright-Hays funding, Perreault has received funding from the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. His doctoral research (1997-1999) was funded by a Fulbright—IIE Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant and the Inter-American Foundation Doctoral Research Fellowship.