GEOGRAPHY 450:360
Cultural and Political Ecology

Instructor: Richard Schroeder
Office: B-234 Lucy Stone Hall
Telephone: 848/445-4350
E-mail: rschroed@rci.rutgers.edu
Class time: M, W 1:40-3:00 pm
Class location: B-269, Lucy Stone Hall
Office hours: Tuesday, 9:30-11:30

Course theme:

This course explores the emergence and development of an important subfield of geography known as political ecology. This field adopts an approach to environmental problems that is centered on several inter-related questions: Where do humans fit in ecological analysis? How are ecological problems framed and represented in popular discourse? What sorts of assumptions underlie such representations, and how do these ideas shape the politics of ecological management? Who are the principle beneficiaries and victims of environmental change? How do policies designed to address ecological concerns affect particular groups of people? How should we interpret the patterns of ownership, access and control pertaining to specific natural resources? What moral, political and practical issues are raised by taking different approaches to environmental degradation, biodiversity conservation, and other contemporary resource management issues? What new challenges are emerging on the political ecological landscape?

Organization:

The course will be divided into three parts. The first provides an introduction to the field of political ecology and its core concepts. The second examines different moral and political perspectives on the twin environmental problems of degradation and diversity: 1) how should we define environmental degradation and how should we respond to it? 2) what approaches are warranted in settings characterized by high biodiversity – should we follow a strict policy of protection/preservation, or can we approach such valuable resources through a conservation (“wise use”) framework? The final section of the course surveys a series of contemporary issues from a political ecological perspective. These might include: the spread of genetically modified organisms; encroachment by “invasive” species; the “greening” of corporations and product brands; the battle for the soul of the organic movement; and a suite of issues subsumed under the heading of climate change politics: carbon trading, biofuels and/or sustainable cities.
Assigned readings:

There are no textbooks for this course. Reading assignments can be accessed via the “resources” tab on sakai, the university’s course management website (https://sakai.rutgers.edu/). Note that readings for weeks 12-16 (April 2-30) are yet to be determined. Occasional news items relating to course themes may also be added to the reading list throughout the term.

Course requirements

Course grades will be based on the following formula:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue papers (2 @ 5% each)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Extra credit</td>
<td>3%</td>
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A. Attendance (5%), preparation and participation (15%):

Because so much of the course is run as a seminar, a premium is placed on regular attendance. Adequate preparation and active participation in extended classroom discussions and debate will account for a substantial portion of your overall course grade.

B. Issue papers (5% each; 10% total):

Each of you will be required to draft two short (1-2 page) papers in preparation for our discussion of topics covered during the third section of the course. These papers are due on March 5 in both electronic (via sakai) and hard copy (in class) format. You will be asked to briefly enumerate the key political ecological issues raised by each of your chosen topics and provide a list of sources consulted in preparation of your outline. A more detailed rubric for completing this assignment will be circulated in class.

C. Midterm exam (45%):

A midterm exam covering the first two sections of the course will be administered after spring break. This exam will consist of two parts: questions for an open book, take home essay will be handed out in class on Wednesday, March 21; this essay will be due in class on Monday, March 26, when a closed book exam consisting of short answer and identification questions will be conducted.

D. Final exam (25%):

The final exam for the course will be held Tuesday, May 8 (noon - 3 pm) in LSH B-269. It will include an essay question asking you to discuss a contemporary political ecological case study of your choice drawn from popular media sources. You will be asked to summarize the case and apply analytical tools you’ve developed throughout the course to it. The remainder of the exam will cover only the special topics discussed in
the third section of the course (i.e. apart from the news analysis piece, it will not be cumulative).

E. Extra Credit

Extra credit may be obtained by attending extra-curricular activities relating to course contents. To obtain this credit, you will need to write a short summary of the event (film, lecture, or discussion panel), and prepare a list of analytical questions prompted by the speaker, film, or discussion. The first event attended will be worth 2%; the second event worth 1%. Special assignments will be announced in class for those who are interested in obtaining extra credit, but cannot attend relevant events due to scheduling conflicts.

READING LIST

Week 1 (Jan 18): Course introduction

Part One: Political ecology as a field

Week 2 (Jan 23, 25): Key approaches


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPZqXGBlj10&feature=related


Week 3 (Jan 30, Feb 1): Key approaches


Video: “Amazon Journal” (viewed in class, but also available online at:
http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?FLON;1652530; access from campus or login via Rutgers account)

Week 4 (Feb 6, 8): Key Concepts – debating intervention


**Part Two: Core political ecological problems**

**Week 5 (Feb 13, 15): Degradation**


Video: “Second Nature”

**Week 6 (Feb 20, 22): Restoration**


**Week 7 (Feb 27, 29): Conservation and control**


Video: “Planet Earth: Saving Species”

**Week 8 (Mar 5, 7): Conservation and control (cont’d)**


Monday, Mar 5: Issue papers due in class and on sakai.
Week 9 (Mar 12, 14): Spring break, no class

Week 10 (Mar 19, 21): Commodifying nature


Video: “Milking the Rhino”

Week 11 (Mar 26, 28): Midterm exam

Take home essay exam questions distributed in-class on Mar. 21; essays due in class on Monday, Mar. 26, when the in-class portion of exam will be administered

Part Three: Special topics

Apr 2, 4: Genetically modified organisms

Video viewed in class 4/2: “Deconstructing supper” (RU libraries)


Apr. 9: Invasive species


Video in class: “Invasive species.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V5513w1XSk

Video in class: “An exotic predator threatens the keys.” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxz4pwML2-s

Apr 11, 16: Biofuels
Video viewed in class: “Green” http://www.greenthefilm.com/


http://biofuelguide.net/

Recommended: Biofuel (the great green fuel gamble). Youtube. 29 min.

Recommended: http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/agrofuels_reality_check.pdf

Apr 18: Climate change/Carbon trading


Video viewed in class: http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-cap-trade/

Apr 23: “Greening” of corporations, products


Video viewed in class: “Greenwashing”;
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL1bIdgrIaE

April 25: Sustainable Cities


Video viewed in class 4/28: Majora Carter, Sustainable South Bronx; http://www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_s_tale_of_urban_renewal.html

Final exam: Tuesday, May 8, noon-3 pm, LSH rm. B-269.