Course Description and Goals

Political ecology is less a coherent subfield, with its own methods and theoretical points of view, as it is an umbrella under which disparate literatures on the politics of the environment are brought together. This course highlights some of the important contributions that political ecology, broadly defined, has lent to the study of the environment. In the first section of the course, it explores the foundational concepts of political ecology, including its emergence out of the study of natural hazards and cultural ecology, its early formulation as the merging of Marxist political economy and the interests of ecology, and its focus on marginality in the developing world.

The latter section of the course will explore major contemporary debates within political ecology and their implications for the study of environmental politics. These include the implications of applying political ecology's analytical frame to sites outside of the so-called Third World, the application of political ecology in an urban context, and the analytical consequences of theorizing “politics” differently.

Required Materials

There is no required text for this course. All readings are identified in the schedule below, and will be available via Sakai.

Organization of Class Time

Each class period may consist of a mixture of lecture, small group activities, films, and discussion. Therefore please attend having completed the assigned reading and be ready to share your opinions, thoughts, and critiques of the material we have read for class. If you miss a lecture, it is your responsibility to find out if there were readings announced in class. In general, regular class attendance, careful attention to the assigned reading, and consistent note taking are the best strategies for earning a strong course grade.

Student Evaluation

In order to do well in the course, students must arrive to each class session prepared to engage with the material. This means doing the assigned readings and taking time to reflect upon them. Attendance and punctuality at every class is important. Exams will draw from both readings and the lectures; therefore you won't be able to do well in this course without attending class and taking good notes. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes from a classmate.

Performance in this course will be evaluated based on two in-class “quizzes” designed to help students reflect on what they learned thus far in the class. No make-up quizzes will be given without
official documentation (emergency, bereavement, illness, official university business, university sports event) from your college dean or other appropriate officer.

Attendance and Participation — Attendance is not calculated as part of your grade. However, it is a requirement for taking this course. It will not be possible to earn a passing grade if you do not attend this course regularly. Furthermore, your input is necessary to keep our discussions lively and rich.

**Assignments**

**Quizzes**

As stated above, there will be two in-class quizzes given in this course. The quiz will consist of one or two essay questions. Students will know beforehand what the questions on the quiz will be, and will complete the quiz within the first half-hour of the class.

Each quiz will be worth 5% of the final grade.

**Leading Class Discussion**

Twice during the course of the semester, each student will lead class discussion. This will be done in pairs; students will have a chance to choose their weeks on the first day of class, and should work closely well in advance of class to ensure close cooperation.

On most days, we will begin class with a student-led discussion of that day’s readings. Leading the discussion does not mean providing a summary for the students, nor does it mean delivering a lecture on the material. Instead, the task for discussion leaders is to facilitate discussion among their fellow students. This could be done in many ways: students may wish to use handouts or other materials that help to clarify key points or to insert new ideas. Generally, discussion leaders will bring to class a list of provocative questions that help to highlight key concepts or contested ideas. They may also wish to identify confusing passages or ask for help from other students to understand unfamiliar concepts.

In general, leading a discussion shouldn’t require much additional work for discussion leaders; instead, it requires a different style of reading and engaging with the material.

**Final Project**

During the course of the semester, students will investigate an environmental topic from the perspective of political ecology. During their investigations, students will conduct at least two “site visits” - physical trips to sites that are relevant to their investigation. This may take a number of forms, so students should speak with the instructor if they have any questions before choosing topics/sites.

The project will be completed in a number of steps.

**Step 1 - Statement of Interest - Due Feb 4**

Early on in the semester, each student should identify a topic/region/phenomenon that s/he plans to investigate for their final project. For this assignment, the student will submit a paragraph-long statement of interest that identifies the topic to be investigated. Students may work in pairs during their investigations. Collaborative statements should be a full page, and both students will be given the same grade. Topics chosen should involve an accessible “site”,
since the final paper will require two site visits.

The grade for the Statement of Interest is a completion grade, worth 10% of the final grade.

**Annotated Bibliography - Due Feb 25**

This annotated bibliography will contain a minimum of 5 sources from peer reviewed journals. (A list of journals is attached to the end of this syllabus). Readings from class may be included, but will not be counted toward to total for grading purposes.

For each entry, after giving a full citation for the article (APA format), students should provide a brief summary of the article, and a statement about why the article is relevant to their chosen topic. This assignment is worth 10% of the final grade.

Students may work in pairs during their investigations. Collaborative bibliographies should contain at least 10 references. Both students will be given the same grade.

**Rough Draft**

10%

**Presentation**

For the last day of class, students will prepare a professional presentation of their final project. (Final projects may not be completed by this time, so in-class presentations are an opportunity not only to share what the student has learned, but to get valuable feedback from peers.

Presentations should be professionally-done, and may incorporate a number of different tools, including but not limited to: PowerPoint, video, audio, lecture, and so on. They should last no less than 10 minutes, and no more than 20. Presentation grades are part of participation (see below).

Students working in pairs should prepare a presentation between 15 and 30 minutes. Both students will be given the same grade.

**Final Draft**

30%

**Participation**

Participation counts for 30% of your final grade. Participation grades take into account your role in both facilitating and taking part in discussions in class. Your presentation of your final paper is also incorporated into this grade (see above).

**Formatting of Written Work**

All written work should use Times New Rowan font, size 12, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Title page is not necessary. All assignments should include a title and the student’s name. No other heading is necessary. A references page is required any time a student cites other work. Papers that don’t follow these guidelines are annoying.

**Special Needs**

All efforts will be made to accommodate students with special needs. However, students are responsible for making their needs known to me and for seeking assistance in a timely manner.
Please contact me to privately discuss your personal requirements.
## Course Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Jan 21</td>
<td>Introductions, using the library, syllabus and lecture</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Vollers (1990) “Light in the Darkness”, <em>Sports Illustrated</em></td>
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<td>Labban (2014) “Deterritorializing Extraction: Bioaccumulation and the Plantary Mine”, <em>Annals</em></td>
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<td>4 - Feb 11</td>
<td>Deep Breath</td>
<td>Watch Film in two parts: Food, Inc</td>
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<td>5 - Feb 18</td>
<td>Social Constructivism</td>
<td><em>This is Not a Pipe</em></td>
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<td>6 - Feb 25</td>
<td>The Politics of Knowing</td>
<td>Cronon, “Pricing the Future”, in <em>Nature’s Metropolis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading Material</td>
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Kenis and Mathijs (2014) “Climate change and post-politics: Repoliticizing the present by imagining the future?”, *Geoforum*  
Madra and Adaman (2014) “Neoliberal Reason and Its forms: De-Politicisation Through Economisation” *Antipode* |
| 13 - Apr 29| Final Paper Due May 5         | Student presentations; individual meetings                                           |

**Peer-Reviewed Geography Journals**

- *Journal of Political Ecology*
- *Geoforum*
- *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*
- *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*
- *Environment and Planning A*
- *Environment and Planning D*
- *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*
- *Antipode*
- *Progress in Human Geography*
- *Political Geography*
- *Social Geography*
- *Economic Geography*
- *Cultural Geographies*
- *Journal of Cultural Geography*
- *Urban Geography*
- *Journal of Urban Affairs*
- *Journal of Historical Geography*
- *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*
- *Journal of Latin American Geography*
- *Professional Geographer*
- *Area*
- *Geography Compass*

*This list is designed to get you started, and it is not exhaustive. There are many more journals where you are likely to find useful material.*