

GEOG 173/ ENVS 195: Political Ecology

Fall 2014

Dr. Ingrid L. Nelson

Office: Old Mill 212 (office hr. locations will vary)

Office hrs: Tu 3:00-4:30; Th 3-4:30; or by appointment

Class Meetings: Hills Ag. Sci. 234

Tues/Thurs 1:00pm-2:15pm

ilnelson@uvm.edu

Overview and Structure

Political ecology is a community of practice best realized in conversation with others. Through a writing-intensive and research-based approach, this course examines how politics shape our understandings of and interactions with various forms and ideas of nature in geographically diverse contexts. 'Nature' is a historically and culturally contingent concept, deployed unevenly for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others. Through researching compelling topics, the course offers a unique lens on discourses and analytical assumptions about human-environment relationships in five major areas including: i) degradation and marginalization, ii) conservation (including its origins, neoliberal practices and related use of social media and technology), iii) environmental conflicts related to extraction, war and militarism, iv) environmental subjects and identities and v) political objects and actors.

Learning Objectives¹

After completing and reflecting on experiences in this course, students should be able to:

- i. Engage in informed conversations that distinguish apolitical from political ecologies, and that reveal the complex dimensions that popular narratives about the environment—concerning themes such as 'sustainability' or 'environmental degradation'—often hide (*knowledge/foundations*),
- ii. Conduct creative and critical research that integrates and synthesizes economic, historical, ecological, cultural and scientific perspectives and that distinguishes and combines conflicting forms of evidence, methodologies and theories (such research entails working independently and in groups, drawing on the diverse strengths of group members and encouraging peer- and self-assessment (*application/integration/skills*),
- iii. Think critically about sustainability and other environmental practices across a diversity of cultural values and across multiple sites of local, national, global and networked relevance (instead of immediately assuming a 'super hero' role, this entails pausing, reflecting and taking the time to listen to the seemingly obvious, the banal and the daily facets of life drowned out by the proliferation of crisis narratives) (*human dimension/personal/values/skills*),
- iv. Begin, as members of society, to deliberately recognize and assess how specific environmental narratives and technical fixes impact their own lives, shape their behavior and in turn, impact the lives of others (*human dimension/personal*),
- v. Become more interested in and take responsibility for communicating with greater precision as they express their concerns and develop their curiosity (*caring/skills*),
- vi. Develop a greater comfort in and desire to read specific texts more than once, by relating to and understanding the text differently each time (through this process, students will build a clearer sense of what they would like to learn next and what knowledge and skills will be required to do so) (*learning how to learn*).

¹ These learning objectives combine themes from the General Education 'Sustainability Learning Outcomes' proposed to the UVM Faculty Senate in Spring of 2014 (not yet under formal acceptance/implementation), the Department of Geography's Learning Goals and pedagogical approaches in L. Dee Fink's *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach o Designing College Courses* (2013).

Readings

1. **Required:** *Freidberg, S. 2009. Fresh: A perishable history.* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
Robbins, P. 2012. Political ecology: A critical introduction, 2nd Edition. West Sussex and Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
2. Recommended:
Peet, R., P. Robbins and M. Watts ed. 2011. Global Political Ecology. London and New York: Routledge.
Billig, M. 2013. Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
3. Additional required readings are available in .pdf format through the course Blackboard page and **must be printed, read and brought to class on the specified dates.**

Assessment	Percentage of Final Grade
Class Engagement	10%
Notecards (uploaded prior to class), In-class Activities and Quizzes	10%
6 'Short' Written Assignments (reflections, formal letters, peer-review)	20%
4 'Longer' Written Assignments (essays, book review, group research findings synthesis and reflection)	20%
Term Research Project (40%): - Individual paper	20%
- Group report + presentation	15% + 5%
Total	100%

Guide to Assessments (specific instructions and rubrics will be posted in Blackboard):

Class engagement includes both attendance and participation in class discussions and activities.

Quizzes are short and include multiple choice and short answer questions. The professor reserves the right to administer them at any time during class (there are no make-up quizzes). Notecards for each reading (except for Robbins 2012) must be completed before class. Quizzes and notecards help gauge understanding of core concepts and identify 'trouble spots' needing review.

The *short written assignments* have specific guidelines and rubrics that encourage reflection about the reading and that connect to prior learning experiences and current curiosities. Other assignments involve specific technical reading, note-taking and peer-reviewing tasks.

The *longer written assignments* have specific guidelines and rubrics that encourage critical analysis of the course material and build upon the shorter assignments. Longer assignments include essays, a review of our core case study textbook, *Fresh: a perishable history* (2009) by Susanne Freidberg, and a reflection connecting individual research findings to broader group research themes.

The *term research project* consists of individual and group components, including a topic proposal diagram, a group work plan, and an individual term paper that addresses a sub-topic or lens that informs the group's final report. The individual paper is due before Thanksgiving Break to ensure time to synthesize the project components. The final group report consists of introduction and context sections and a synthesis of key themes developed from the findings from each of the individual student papers (a group discussion and conclusion drafted collectively). Each group will have 15-minutes to present their work during the scheduled exam period for the course. Up to 8 students may 'opt in' to a pilot campus-based research project led by Prof. Nelson (details provided in class).

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change due to scheduling logistics and solicited student input.

Course Policies

1. Throughout the course, please feel free to express your ideas and enter into dialogue with your fellow students. Although I encourage you to express your views, I expect that you will be courteous to others, respect different views, and refrain from personal attacks—both in class and on-line. In this class we do not debate, we discuss.
2. No late work will be accepted unless you provide documentation from Student Services in your Dean's Office.
3. All submitted work must be your own. You must distinguish your own words and ideas from those of others by utilizing proper citations and references. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Detailed style guides are in our course 'Learning Resources and Guides' folder. Please also refer to [UVM's Code of Academic Integrity](#) and the [Academic Integrity Program in The Center for Student Ethics and Standards](#) for further clarification.
4. During class, all phones must be turned off (no texting allowed). Laptops may be used for taking notes only and must not be connected to the Internet during class unless otherwise directed during specific activities. All assigned readings must be complete before class and all students must arrive on time. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Failure to abide by these expectations will result in a reduced class engagement grade or disenrollment.
5. ACCESS: I encourage students with documented disabilities to contact me in **the first two weeks of classes** to discuss and arrange accommodations in co-ordination with the ACCESS office. In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact ACCESS, the office of Disability Services on campus. ACCESS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to faculty with recommended accommodations as early as possible each semester. Contact ACCESS: A170 Living/Learning Center; [802-656-7753](tel:802-656-7753); access@uvm.edu; or www.uvm.edu/access.
6. All classroom policies, including athletic and religious schedule accommodations, follow UVM policy, which can be viewed at <http://www.uvm.edu/cses>.
7. Consistent with the University's policy on intellectual property rights, teaching and curricular materials (including but not limited to classroom lectures, class notes, exams, handouts, and presentations) are the property of the instructor. Therefore, electronic recording and/or transmission of classes or class notes is prohibited without the express written permission of the instructor. Such permission is to be considered unique to the needs of an individual student (e.g. ADA compliance), and not a license for permanent retention or electronic dissemination to others.
8. Use of student work: This course may use course participation and documents created by students for educational purposes. In compliance with the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, works in all media produced by students as part of their course participation at UVM may be used for educational purposes. It is understood that registration for and continued enrollment in a course where such use of student works is announced constitutes permission by the student. After the course has been completed, any further use of student works will meet one of the following conditions: (1) the work will be rendered anonymous through the removal of all personal identification of the work's creator/originator(s); or (2) the creator/originator(s)' written permission will be secured.

GEOG 173 / ENVS 195 – Political Ecology Schedule (bring readings to class on the assigned day)

Dates	Topics	Readings and Assignments (due on date listed)
Aug. 26	Introduction: What is PE? What is 'Fresh'?	Read syllabus; Robbins textbook (2012) p. 11-24
Aug. 28	Overview and Foundations I: What is PE?	DOPE 2014 Program section; Assignment #1 Due
Sept. 2	Overview and Foundations II: 'Rotten' Things	Freidberg (2009) p. 1-48
Sept. 4	Overview and Foundations III: The Hatchet & Seed	Robbins (2012) p. 84-100; Assignment # 2 Due
Sept. 9	Degradation and Marginalization I: Second Nature	Fairhead & Leach (1995)
Sept. 11	Degradation and Marginalization II: Connections	Robbins (2012) p. 103-42; p.47, 78-9
Sept. 16	PE Research: Campus Green, Gold and Platinum	Assignment # 3 Due
Sept. 18	Political Objects and Actors I: Beef and Eggs	Freidberg (2009); p.49-121; Project Diagram Due
Sept. 23	Conservation and Control I: Enclosures	Neumann (2004); Begin Grp. Project Office Hours
Sept. 25	Conservation and Control II: Purity/Pollution, Race	Required: Kosek (2004); Optional: Kosek (2006)
Sept. 30	Environmental Conflict I: Militarism (Avatar)	Assignment # 4 Due
Oct. 2	Neoliberal Conservation and Nature 2.0	Büscher (2015)
Oct. 7	Environmental Conflict II: 'Technonatures'	Kosek (2011)
Oct. 9	PE Research: Databases (who paid for that data?)	Assignment # 5 Due; Class held in Bailey/Howe
Oct. 14	Environmental Subjects and Identities I (ESI)	Assignment # 6 Due; Robbins (2012) p. 215-230
Oct. 16	ESI II: Fruit & Vegetables	Freidberg p. 122-196
Oct. 21	In-class Research Project Group Work	Assignment # 7 Due
Oct. 23	Political Objects and Actors II: Milk	Robbins p. 231-43; Freidberg p. 197-234; Class held in Fleming Museum, Group Contract Due
Oct. 28	ESI III: Activism, Organizing and Identity	Di Chiro (2010)
Oct. 30	Project Feedback Activity; M. Pollan Talk 5:30pm	Assignment # 8 Due; Pollan (2013) p. 1-24
Nov. 4	Political Objects and Actors III: Waste	Moore (2011)
Nov. 6	Political Objects and Actors IV: Fish	Freidberg p. 235-83
Nov. 11	PE and Scale: Where Globes and Genes Meet	Peet, Robbins and Watts (2011); Braun (2011)
Nov. 13	In-Class Peer-Review	Draft of Individual Term Paper Due In Class
Nov. 18	In-Class Individual Presentations	Assignment # 9 Due, Class in John Dewey Lounge
Nov. 20	Workshop: Presentation feedback, Group Project	Revised Individual Term Paper Due (1pm)
Nov. 25-7	THANKSGIVING RECESS	
Dec. 2	Project Feedback and Synthesis Workshop	Re-read Robbins p. 82-100; Assignment # 10 Due
Dec. 5	Final Exam Period (classroom 10:30am-1:15pm)	Group Presentations , submit Group Report

Full Citations for the Additional Required Readings Posted in Blackboard

- Braun, B. 2011.** Governing disorder: biopolitics and the molecularization of life. In *Global Political Ecology*, ed. R. Peet, P. Robbins and M. Watts, 389-411. London and New York: Routledge.
- Büscher, B. 2015.** Nature 2.0: Exploring and theorizing the links between new media and nature conservation. *New Media & Society* (SAGE OnlineFirst early view doi:10.1177/1461444814545841).
- Di Chiro, G. 2010.** Polluted politics? Confronting toxic discourse, sex panic and eco-normativity. In *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. C. Mortimer-Sandilands and B. Erickson, 199-230. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Fairhead, J., and M. Leach. 1995.** False forest history, complicit social analysis: Rethinking some West African environmental narratives. *World Development* 23 (6): 1023-1035.
- Kosek, J. 2004.** Purity and pollution: Racial degradation and environmental anxieties. In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. ed. R. Peet and M. Watts, 125-164. New York: Routledge.
- Kosek, J. 2011.** The natures of the beast: On the new uses of the honeybee. In *Global Political Ecology*. ed. R. Peet, P. Robbins and M. Watts, 226-253. London and New York: Routledge.
- Neumann, R. 2004.** Nature-state-territory: Toward a critical theorization of conservation enclosures. In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. ed. R. Peet and M. Watts, 195-217. New York: Routledge.
- Peet, R., P. Robbins and M. Watts. 2011.** Global nature. In *Global Political Ecology*, ed. R. Peet, P. Robbins and M. Watts, 1-47. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pollan, M. 2013.** *Cooked: A Natural history of transformation*. New York: Penguin Books. (p. 1-24)