

\* NB: Always “under construction”

# ENVS 450/550: POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Fall 2016

Monday/Wednesday 10:00-11:50am, 206 Condon Hall

Professor Peter Walker, Dept. of Geography, 100 Condon Hall, [pwalker@uoregon.edu](mailto:pwalker@uoregon.edu)

Political ecology examines the politics, in the broadest sense of the word, of the environment. Whereas “environmental politics” courses often focus on the role of government and interest groups in shaping environmental policies, political ecology expands our understanding of politics to examine the roles of: globalized capitalism; relations of power and inequality between and among social actors (differentiated, for example, by class, race, or gender); social institutions, such as land tenure; government, non-governmental organizations, and social movements; and language, symbolism, and discourse as they shape human interactions with the physical environment. Although much political ecology research comes from studies of the less-developed ‘third world,’ this course also emphasizes the political ecology of the ‘first world’.

## Course requirements:

**This is a reading-intensive course, with about 50 pages of required reading per class, some of it from academic journals with ‘thick’ prose. The materials must be read fully prior to class. *Students who are unable to meet this requirement should not enroll in the class.* Quizzes throughout the term will reward consistent reading of course assignments (40% of course grade). Students will be expected to attend all classes and participate in discussions (20% of course grade). At the end of the term student groups will present research and analysis of a real world environmental issue of their choice, applying concepts from political ecology (40% of course grade).**



There is one textbook for this course: Paul Robbins’ *Political Ecology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (2012), which is available online through the UO Library. All additional readings will be posted on the class Canvas page.

**Preparation:** It is University of Oregon policy that if you register for a 4-credit course, you should expect to spend eight hours per week on preparation. This is a 4-credit course that meets twice a week, and this course is *reading-intensive*. That means students enrolled in this course must be able to devote four hours to reading and preparation for each class in order to get a good grade.

**In-class discussions:** Full preparation for classes is essential in order to get a good grade in the class because 20% of your grade will depend on your attendance and participation in class discussions. Classes will consist of lectures and active student discussion. The instructor understands that not all students are equally experienced and comfortable with public speaking. Student contributions to in-class discussions will be assessed on the basis of the sincerity of an individual's effort and evidence of having read the assigned readings. The quality of contributions to discussion may count as much or more than the number of words spoken.

**Quizzes:** To reinforce the importance of coming to class fully prepared, a brief quiz will be administered approximately once per week. The intention of the quiz is to reward consistent preparation for class. Questions on quizzes will focus on the main "take home" lessons of reading assignments rather than specific factual details. Generally the quizzes will be in standard multiple-choice format. If you miss a quiz due to an excused absence, the quiz for that day will not be counted in your grade. If you miss a quiz due to an unexcused absence, be aware that there is no such thing as a make-up quiz. Please do not ask for exceptions.

**Term project:** political ecology is not only a "hatchet" that cuts away old misconceptions, but also aspires to be a "seed" for positive change (Robbins 2012). For this reason, student groups will research and present a "living political ecology" project that exams a modern, real-life topic related to the themes of the course, worth 40% of the course grade. The purpose of these projects will be to apply the concepts and critical tools of political ecology as a method for diagnosing the root causes of an environmental issue in order to identify appropriate solutions or responses to these issues. The group projects will be selected in class based on student suggestions. The projects must apply specific concepts and tools from our political ecology discussions and readings. Merely presenting information without political ecology analysis will not receive a passing grade. An "A" project demonstrates clear grasp of political ecology concepts and how they can be used to better understand the underlying causes and possible solutions to environmental problems. A one-page prospectus is due on Monday, Oct. 24 (guidelines for the prospectus will be provided).

**Classroom attendance and etiquette:** Attendance will be recorded each class session. Absences will be excused only in circumstances of *extreme* emergency. *If you are ill, it is your duty to get medical attention and documentation of your illness*. If you must be absent from class, if at all possible e-mail Professor Walker *in advance*. To receive full credit for attendance and participation, students must display respectful and mature conduct, including: 1) TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE; 2) do NOT turn on laptop computers in class unless asked to do so; 3) show respect for the opinions of all persons in the class, even if you do not agree—including deferring to the 'quieter' voices in the class when appropriate. Graduate students must meet with Professor Walker by week 2 to arrange appropriate additional graduate assignments.

***Learning outcomes:***

- 1. Become familiar with basic conceptual approaches in political ecology*
- 2. Understand the scholarly origins and reasons for the emergence of political ecology as a field of study*
- 3. Learn how to apply the concepts and approaches of political ecology to real-world environmental issues*
- 4. Specifically, learn the diverse meanings of “politics” as a factor that shapes human-environment interactions*
- 5. Research a specific topic of choice where politics plays an important role in how humans interact with the environment*

**Peter’s office hours:** Weds 1:30-2:30 and Thurs 2:30-3:30 in 100 Condon Hall

## **COURSE OUTLINE & READINGS**

**Please note that these readings may change as the course progresses. If you read more than two classes sessions ahead, be aware that the assignments could change.**

### ***Week 1: What is political ecology? A tree with deep roots***

Day 2: Robbins textbook Intro + Chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-48)

### ***Week 2: The Political Ecology Toolbox***

Day 1: Robbins Ch. 3, and Magdoff and Foster 2010

Day 2: Robbins Ch. 4, and Guthman 2003

### ***Week 3: Ecology and the social construction of nature***

Day 1: Robbins Ch. 5, and Blesh & Wittman 2015

Day 2: Robbins Ch. 6, and Fairhead and Leach 1995

### ***Week 4: Conservation***

Day 1: Robbins Ch. 9, and Neumann 2002

Day 2: Adams & Hutton 2007

### ***Week 5: Community-based management***

Day 1: Dressler et al. 2010, and Blaikie 2006

Day 2: Singleton 2002, and Walker and Hurley 2004

### ***Week 6: Gender, identity, and social movements***

Day 1: Robbins Ch. 10; Schroeder 1997

Day 2: Robbins Ch. 11; Robbins & Sharp 2003 *The Moral Economy of the American Lawn*

### ***Week 7: Case study: Mining, E-waste***

Day 1: Bush 2008 *Scrambling to the Bottom*; Simutanyi 2008 *Copper Mining in Zambia*

Day 2: Pellow 2007 *Resisting Global Toxics* Ch. 6

### **Week 8: Case study: Food**

Day 1: DePuis 2002 Nature's Perfect Food

Day 2: Johnson 2009 Lost in the Supermarket; Galt 2010

### **Week 9: Case study: Water and Drought in California**

Day 1: Pincetl & Hogue 2015 California's New Normal; Gleick 2015 Soft Path California Water

Day 2: HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!!!!

### **Week 10: Presentation of student "living political ecology" projects**

#### **Bibliography:**

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Blesh, J. and Wittman H. (2015). "'Brasilience': Assessing Resilience in Land Reform Settlements in the Brazilian Cerrado." Human Ecology **43**: 531-546.

Bush, R. (2008). "Scrambling to the Bottom? Mining, Resources & Underdevelopment." Review of African Political Economy **35**(117): 361-366.

DuPuis, E. M. (2002). Nature's perfect food : how milk became America's drink. New York, New York University Press.

Dressler, W., et al. (2010). "From hope to crisis and back again? A critical history of the global CBNRM narrative." Environmental Conservation **37**(1): 5-15.

Fairhead, J. and M. Leach (1995). "False history, complicit social analysis: rethinking some West African environmental narratives." World Development **23**(6): 1023-1035.

Galt, R. E. (2010). "Scaling Up Political Ecology: The Case of Illegal Pesticides on Fresh Vegetables Imported into the United States, 1996-2006." Annals of the Association of American Geographers **100**(2): 327-355.

Gleick, P. (2015). "A Soft Path for California Water" in Lassiter, Allison (2015) Sustainable Water. University of California Press, pp. 364-376

Guthman, J. (2003). "Fast food/organic food: reflexive tastes and the making of 'yuppie chow'." Social & Cultural Geography **4**(1): 45-58.

Johnston, J., et al. (2009). "Lost in the Supermarket: The Corporate-Organic Foodscape and the Struggle for Food Democracy." Antipode **41**(3): 509-532.

Magdoff, F. and J. B. Foster (2010). "What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism." Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine **61**(10): 1-30.

Neumann, R. P. (2002). "The postwar conservation boom in British colonial Africa." Environmental History **7**(1): 22-47.

Pellow, D. N. (2007). Resisting global toxics : transnational movements for environmental justice. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Pincetl, S. and T. Hogue (2015). "California's New Normal? Recurring Drought: Addressing Winners and Losers." Local Environment. **20**(7): 850-854.

Robbins, P. and J. T. Sharp (2003). "Producing and consuming chemicals: The moral economy of the American lawn." Economic Geography **79**(4): 425-451.

Schroeder, R. (1997). ""Re-claiming" land in The Gambia: gendered property rights and environmental intervention." Annals of the Association of American Geographers **87**(3): 487-508.

Simutanyi, N. (1996). "The politics of structural adjustment in Zambia." Third World Quarterly **17**(4): 825-839.

Singleton, S. (2002). "Collaborative environmental planning in the American West: The good, the bad, and the ugly." Environmental Politics **11**(3): 54-75.

Walker, P. A. and P. T. Hurley (2004). "Collaboration derailed: The politics of "community-based" resource management in Nevada County." Society & Natural Resources **17**(8): 735-751.