

* NB: Always “under construction”

ENVS 450/550: POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Spring 2015

Monday/Wednesday 10:00-11:50, 142 Columbia

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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 of the political ecology research comes from studies of the less-developed ‘third world,’ this course also examines the political ecology of the ‘first world’.

Course requirements:

This is a reading-intensive course, with about 60 pages of required reading per class, much 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.* Students will post responses to each set of readings on Blackboard before the beginning of every class (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, using concepts from political ecology (40% of course grade).

There is one textbook for this course: Paul Robbins’ *Political Ecology, 2nd Edition* (2012), which is available at the UO bookstore (Duckstore). All readings other than the Robbins textbook will be posted on the class Blackboard page.



Above: Poor women in Nigeria seize ChevronTexaco facility and win major concessions (July 2002)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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 homework assignments. 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. *Students who are not able to devote this much time to preparing for each class session SHOULD NOT ENROLL. No kidding.*

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 lecture as well as active student discussion. The instructors understand that not all students are equally experienced and comfortable with public speaking. Student contributions to in-class discussions will be evaluated 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.

Daily reading responses: To aid reading comprehension and reinforce the policy that students must come to class having read the assigned readings and be prepared to contribute to in-class discussions, students will post ~250 word (about two double-spaced, 12-point font paragraphs) reading responses on Blackboard. These are NOT mere summaries of the readings; rather, these should *describe your reactions to the readings, and what you see as their strengths, weaknesses, or omissions*. These are the “so what” questions: what difference did these readings make in your understanding of the issues examined? Responses must be posted as text (not as an attached document) in the Blackboard journals page by the beginning of each class, and count in total for 40% of your grade. **DO NOT E-MAIL READING RESPONSES.**

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 April 30.***

Classroom attendance and etiquette: Attendance will be recorded each class session. Absences will be excused only in circumstances of *extreme* and *documented* health or family emergency. *If you are ill, it is your duty to get medical attention and documentation of your illness*. Likewise, late reading responses will be accepted *only* in these dire circumstances. Please do not ask for exceptions. To receive full credit for attendance and participation, students must display respectful and mature conduct, including: 1) TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE (cell phones that go off during class will be turned into garden mulch... no, wait, that's bad for the garden (but you get the idea); 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.