ENVS 411: Environmental Action in the Americas

CRN: 37420         MW 2-3:50pm         Room: COL 142

Instructor: Liz Veazey | veazey@uoregon.edu | Office hours: W 11:30-1:30pm COL 47A

Course Description

This course will discuss the recent history of environmental concern and action within social movements in North, Central and South America, highlighting the connections between environmental action and social justice, development, democracy and international relations issues. We will critically examine the tensions between environmental narratives and practices and between grassroots movements and institutions. A review of relevant sociology, political ecology, environmental justice and social movement studies in the first part of the course will frame a further discussion on the recent history of environmental action in the Americas. Cultural and political grassroots responses to socio-environmental degradation and resource conflicts across the Americas will be analyzed as emerging out of the interplay of social agents, institutions and political processes. This discussion will proceed through a series of thematic, interdisciplinary North/South comparative analyses of socio-environmental conflicts emblematic of their political, cultural or theoretical implications. During the term, we will consider local environmental action in the context of transnational environmental problems and the equally transnational cultural and institutional responses and ways forward being developed in the Americas as we highlight their locus in environmental histories embedded in the region. The course will provide direct dialogue between students and at least four guest speakers engaged in or studying environmental action in the Americas including in-person and video-conference guests. Students will be required to engage in community connection activity and prepare final presentations on an environmental action topic of their choice. The creative application of the theoretical frameworks proposed at the beginning of the course to ‘real life’ scenarios presented throughout the class and synthesis of concepts from multiple cases will be the main criteria for successful learning.

Goals of the class:
* Introduce and apply theoretical frameworks for an interdisciplinary understanding of environmental issues and movements across the Americas.
* Expand knowledge of environmental action in the Americas through a review of case studies, class discussions, talks with movement leaders, and a final project.
* Understand and be able to characterize similarities, differences and connections between movements within varying contexts and areas of the Americas.
* Improve reading, writing, discussion, public speaking, and research skills.
* Use a campus community connection project to strengthen understanding of theories and ideas learned in the class by connecting them to local environmental action in our community.
* Prepare students for work in fields where they will engage with complex and evolving scenarios of environmental action.

Learning Objectives:
By the end of this course, participants will be able to:
* Use tools from various disciplines and schools of thought in an integrated approach to environmental action.
* Analyze case studies in terms of Political Ecology, Sociology of Social Movements and elements of Geography and Development Studies.
* Identify the overlaps of and/or connections between environmental, social justice and identity movements in the Americas.
* Identify similarities and differences of the contemporary environmental histories of North and South America.
* Communicate more effectively verbally and in writing about social movements and the environment in the Americas.

Methods of Instruction will include:
* Class discussion
* Small group discussion and presentation
* Tele-conference and in-person discussions with social movement leaders.
* Lecture
* Student-led discussion
* Short-films and movie clips
* Group presentations
* Community engagement

Grade Scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
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Requirements:

- Come to class prepared and participate in class including occasional in-class writing assignments and student-led discussion.
- Complete the readings for every class.
- Lead one class discussion with your discussion group.
- Post at least three times on the class blog.
- Complete one midterm essay paper.
- Complete group research project including a 15-20 minute class presentation.
- Participate in community connection project.

Required Materials
There is no required textbook. All readings will be posted as PDFs on Blackboard (https://blackboard.uoregon.edu) in the Course Documents folder. Some films will also be required. The links will be in the syllabus and on Blackboard. **NOTE:** All readings are subject to change. All changes will be made on Blackboard and emailed to the class at least one class period in advance.

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class session, and attendance will be taken via a sign-in sheet. If you miss more than TWO classes, for any reason, your final grade will be lowered by a HALF letter grade for each absence. If you consistently arrive late or leave early, this will also lower your grade; 3 late arrivals / early departures equal 1 absence. Documentation is required for absences due to health or family emergencies. Absences for any other reason are not excusable.

Grading:
* Participation/Class Engagement: 20%
  A quarter of this grade will be determined by each of the following:
  1) attendance and engagement in class,
  2) in-class writing and other assignments,
3) your participation as a discussant during student-led discussion, and
4) your submission of three blogs on the course Blackboard site.
A grade scale for your participation as a discussant will be distributed in class and on
Blackboard. Blogs could be comments you thought of after class, a response to class
discussion or an earlier blog post, or something related to class that you want to share. An
example blog will be posted.
- **Student-led Discussion 20%**
  To build student leadership and facilitation skills and add diversity to class discussions,
everyone will be responsible for leading one class discussion in teams of 3-4 students.
Teams are encouraged to incorporate multimedia materials such as short films, art, music or
photos. Before leading discussion, each team will meet with the instructor to discuss their
plan and get feedback. An assignment sheet will give more a more detailed description.
- **Community Connection 20%**
  To encourage connections between students and local organizations and to reinforce key
concepts of the course through experiential learning, students will participate in a community
connection project. Students will be encouraged to participate in the UO Coalition Against
Environmental Racism (CAER) Conference on April 7 or attend the Toxics Tour of West
Eugene put on by Beyond Toxics on Friday April 13. If neither of these opportunities works
for you, then you will be able to volunteer for at least 4 hours with a community organization
of your choice that is working on at least one environmental issue in the Eugene area.
During your volunteer work, you will interview two people involved in the event (ideally
speakers at the CAER conference, volunteers or staff members of participating organizations
or other community members who are participants in the event). Then you will do a 2-4 page
write-up of the experience including discussion of the interviews and connection to course
themes. We will discuss the CAER conference and the Toxics Tour in class, so you should
be prepared to participate in discussion if you participate in these events. If you choose
another option, then you will be expected to do a short 3-5 minute presentation to the class
about the organization and the volunteer activity connecting them to key themes of social
action. An assignment sheet will give more a more detailed description.
- **Midterm Essay 20%**
  Students will have one midterm essay paper due during week 6 to demonstrate
comprehension of key concepts and topics. You will choose one question from a list of three
or more questions, which will be provided at least nine days in advance of the due date. The
essay should be 3-5 pages double-spaced.
- **Group Presentation: 20%**
  Each group of 3-4 students will form around an environmental problem that has motivated
social action. Within the group, each student will do further research on a specific case of
social action around this issue in the Americas. Group presentations will be during the last
two days of class with 15-20 minutes for each group. Grades will reflect both individual and
group performance. An assignment sheet will give more a more detailed description.

**Additional Policies and Procedures**

**Academic Integrity:** Enrolling in this course constitutes your agreement to abide by the
University Policy on Academic Misconduct. Please refer to the Student Conduct Code at the
Office of Student Life website
(http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/programs/student_judi_affairs/conduct-code.htm ). Neither
ignorance of these policies nor the lack of an intention to cheat or plagiarize will be considered a
legitimate defense. To learn more about your rights and responsibilities concerning academic integrity and the procedures related to academic misconduct, I strongly advise you to familiarize yourself with the Student Conduct and Community Standards webpage (http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/programs/student_judi_affairs/index.htm). Please talk with me if you have any questions about academic misconduct issues.

Access: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me within the first week of the term if aspects of the instruction or course design present obstacles to your active participation. Such obstacles may include, but are not limited to issues concerning physical access and mobility, physical or mental health and well-being, and academic learning. For additional assistance and resources, I encourage you to contact the following campus services, as appropriate for your concerns:

- Disability Services, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1155 or disabsrv@uoregon.edu; website: http://ds.uoregon.edu
- University Counseling and Testing Center, Health Center 2nd Floor, 346-3227; website: http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn
- Teaching and Learning Center, 68 PLC, 346-3226; website: http://tlc.uoregon.edu

Diversity: The University of Oregon is dedicated to the principles of equal opportunity in education and an acceptance of diversity as an affirmation of individual identity within a welcoming community. Open inquiry, freedom of expression, and respect for difference are therefore fundamental to a comprehensive and dynamic education. This course is committed to upholding these ideals by encouraging the exploration, engagement, and expression of divergent perspectives and diverse identities. Please notify me immediately if you feel aspects of the instruction or course design undermine these principles in any way. You may also notify the ENVS Program at 346-5954. For additional assistance and resources, I encourage you to contact the following campus services, as appropriate for your concerns:

- Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity, 1 Johnson Hall, 346-3175; website: http://oied.uoregon.edu
- Bias Response Team, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1134 or brt@uoregon.edu website: http://bias.uoregon.edu

Electronic Devices: Laptop computers, cell phones, iPads, mp3 players, Bluetooth devices, and other similar electronic devices must be turned off during class. The instructor will let you know if laptops can be used during class for class activities. You may be asked to leave and counted as absent if you do not comply with this policy. If you are involved in a situation that requires you to be contacted immediately by cell phone, e.g. an ill child / parent or pregnant spouse / partner, please see me before class.

Course Outline

Topic 1: Background: Theoretical Approaches & History

4/2: Day 1—Introduction/Overview of class and expectations.

4/4: Day 2—Political Ecology Introduction
We will start with Political Ecology as the main theoretical frame for the class, and a discussion of environmental justice in our communities.
4/9: Day 3—Political Ecology and Power
We will continue studying political ecology and social movements connecting to the “seeds” of community action around the Americas. We will also discuss the CAER conference that occurred over the weekend.


4/11: Day 4—Introduction to Social Movements: Case Study Environmental Justice (EJ)
We will start with an overview of social movement theory including discussion of how scholars define social movements, theories about why they form, and the diversity of tactics and strategies used by social movements through a focus on the Environmental Justice (EJ) movement.

Readings


4/16: Day 5—More on Environmental Social Movements
Environmental action will be framed in the context of late 20th century social movements. New Social Movements, Resource Mobilization, and Beck’s Risk Society will frame the more specific discussion on the connection between environmental/EJ concerns and organized expressions of citizenship, labor, livelihoods and identities.

Readings

Optional

4/18: Day 6—Global Power and Historical Context: Does the North Owe an Ecological Debt to the South?
World-system and post-structural analyses will be the main theoretical references used to frame the discussion on globalization, social change and environmental crisis. We will focus our discussion on global inequality and its socio-environmental consequences. Then, we will examine the idea of an ecological debt owed to developing countries by industrialized countries.

Readings:


Optional:


4/23: Day 7—Synthesis of Theory through Connection to local EJ issue
For the first half of class, students will engage with a speaker from Beyond Toxics on their environmental justice work in West Eugene. For the second half of class, students will work in groups to put this case study in the context of political ecology and social movement theory through answering questions and then reporting back to the entire class. Also, students who participate in the Toxics Tour on April 13 will be encouraged to share their experiences with the class.
* Potential speaker from Beyond Toxics (formerly Oregon Toxics Alliance) on their research and work in West Eugene.
Reading

Topic 2: Resource Access and Human Rights

4/25: Day 8—Access to Water
Emerging water conflicts and their relation to trade, water, livelihoods, human rights and environmental degradation, as well as catalysts of social and political change – the Bolivian water wars case. Clips will be shown in class on the Cochabamba water privatization/water war and Maine water privatization struggle from the movie Blue Gold: Bozzo, S., Achbar, M., Litvinoff, S., McDowell, M., Bertolini, H., Aichinger, T., Barlow, M., ... PBS Home Video. (2009). Blue gold: World water wars. United States: Distributed by PBS Home Video.

Readings:
Optional:
UN Declaration of Water as Human Right.

We will start with an overview of environmental history of conservation conflicts and discussion of several topics from the North and the South. The ‘Yellowstone model’ and idea of wilderness: Are Biosphere Reserves a model to reconcile peoples and biodiversity? Environmental governance: from incentives to ‘environmentality’. Discussion on relationship (and friction) between indigenous peoples and conservationism: the Makah Whale Hunt case, the Amazon conservation-indigeneity politics. Endangered species act: people v/s biodiversity?

Readings
Internet resources on the Makah Case (required):


Makah Nation website  http://www.makah.com/whalingtradition.html

Optional:


5/2: Day 10--South moving forward? Peasant, indigenous, and other contemporary environmental-related social movements and their proposals.
Review of decolonization, new agrarian reform and indigenous movements and their trajectories and prospects. Discussion on Andean socio-environmental values/concepts: Is ‘good living’ (buen vivir) a contribution of ancient Americas to a sustainable post-developmental civilization?

Reading


Optional:


**Topic 3: Fossil Fuels and Climate Change**

5/7: Day 11--Struggles Against Coal Mining in Appalachia and Colombia.
We will explore social movements in the Appalachian region of the US and in Colombia against the impacts of coal mining including their history, tactics, and relationships to other movements.

Reading:
Chomsky, Aviva and Chad Montrie. 2012. “North and South: Struggles over Coal in Colombia

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. 2011. “Colombia and Appalachia: The People Behind the Coal.” [http://www.kftc.org/blog/topics/Colombia](http://www.kftc.org/blog/topics/Colombia)


**5/9: Day 12—Coalition Building and Resistance to Oil Extraction**

We will start by briefly discussing the short- and long-term social and environmental impacts of oil extraction and then will look at social movements in the US, Brazil and Peru addressing these in creative ways. We will end with discussion of what past experiences could mean for the future of the US Gulf Coast and the strengths and challenges of movements in the North and South in coping with complex scenarios marked by oil money and power.

*Speaker: Meche Lu, Doctoral student in International Studies and scientist at ELAW.*

**Reading:**

Statement of Gulf Coast Fishermen, Seafood Worker, and Maritime Communities on the Gulf of Mexico Oil Drilling Disaster. 2010. Pgs: 1-3.


Note: only pages 1-4 are required, the rest is optional.

**Optional Reading:**

**Optional Resources on the Impacts of Oil Spills:**


**Optional Resources on Corporate Campaigns and Actions Against Oil Companies**
[http://ran.org/content/ran-yes-men-punkd-chevron](http://ran.org/content/ran-yes-men-punkd-chevron) [http://changechevron.org/about/](http://changechevron.org/about/)
5/14: Day 13—Climate Justice: A Powerful Frame
We will examine the use of the framework of climate justice in the fight against the Tar Sands pipeline in the US, UN climate negotiations, and creation of alternatives to the UN climate negotiations and the UNFCCC’s REDD carbon trading program.

Readings

2010 Cochabamba Declaration - http://pwccc.wordpress.com/support/


5/16: Day 14--North moving forward? The Occupy movement and Renewable Energy
We will discuss the potential of and the challenges to contemporary environmental-related social movements with a focus on green jobs and a success story of indigenous action.

Readings:


Topic 4: Food, Agriculture and Land

5/21: Day 15--Resistance to GMOs and Monocultures.
Green revolution, agri-business, monocultures, tree farms and their impacts North and South, as well as the social conflict and cultural and practical alternatives being proposed in both hemispheres.

Readings:
RECOMA(2009)Declaration by the Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations 1 August 2009 – Villa Serrana, Uruguay (2 pages)


Optional:


5/23: Day 16: Fair Trade Movement goals and the reality of Fair Trade
Movements within the US and Europe to provide more support for small farmers and to support environmentally friendly coffee-growing became institutionalized within the international and national Fair Trade certification organizations. What impacts has this movement had in the US and Europe and on small farmers? How has institutionalization changed movement goals?


5/28: Day 17: Memorial Day holiday, no class

5/30: Day 18—Moving Forward Across the Americas: Food Security and Sovereignty
We will examine the movement around food justice across the Americas including support for small farms, local food sovereignty, and urban gardening and the connections between food and indigenous rights and environmental justice more broadly.

Readings


Altieri M (2009) Small farms as a planetary ecological asset: Five key reasons why we should support the revitalization of small farms in the global South. Third World Network.(6 pages)


Optional
Topic 5: Final Presentations

6/4 & 6/6: Days 19 & 20: Final Presentations

**There will be no final exam during the final exam period for this class**