ENVS 411: Environmental Action in the Americas

CRN: 22755  MW 4-5:50pm  Room: COL 142

Instructor: Liz Veazey  |  veazey@uoregon.edu  |  Office hours: M 1-3pm COL 47C

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 a 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 community connection project to strengthen understanding of theories and ideas learned in the class by connecting them to 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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\begin{array}{ccc}
A & = 94-100 & C+ = 77-79 \\
A- & = 90-93 & C = 74-76 \\
B+ & = 87-89 & C- = 70-73 \\
B & = 84-86 & D+ = 67-69 \\
B- & = 80-83 & D = 60-66
\end{array}
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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.

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 announced in class or emailed 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. I encourage you to do your blogs earlier in the term but they can be done at any point during the term and are due March 18 at the latest.

- **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 communicate 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 Social Justice Real Justice Conference (SJRJ) occurring February 14-17. If this opportunity does not work 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 SJRJ 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 SJRJ conference in class, so you should be prepared to participate in discussion if you participate in these events. If you choose the other 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 7 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://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx). 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://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/tabid/68/Default.aspx). 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:

- Accessible Education Services, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu; website: [http://aec.uoregon.edu](http://aec.uoregon.edu)
- University Counseling and Testing Center, Health Center 2nd Floor, 346-3227; website: [http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn](http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn)
- Teaching and Learning Center, 68 PLC, 346-3226; website: [http://tlc.uoregon.edu](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](http://oied.uoregon.edu)
- Bias Response Team, 346-2037 or brt@uoregon.edu website: [http://bias.uoregon.edu](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**

1/7: Day 1—Introduction/Overview of class and expectations.

1/9: 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.

**Readings**


1/14: 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.

Bryant, Raymond L. 1997. “Beyond the impasse: the power of political ecology in Third World environmental research.” Area 29(1): 5-19. **you only need to read from the section on "Conceptualising power in political ecology research" at the bottom of page 10 to the end of the article (on page 17)**


1/16: 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


1/21: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, No Class

1/23: Day 5—More on Environmental Social Movements
Environmental action will be framed in the context of late 20th century social movements. New Social Movements, and 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.

Speaker: Caleen Sisk, Spiritual Leader and Tribal Chief, Winnemum Wintu Tribe
Readings


*Another reading and/or film on the Winnemem Wintu to be announced*

Optional

1/28: 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:


“Rich countries owe poor a huge environmental debt” The Guardian, Sunday 20 January 2008 [w](www.guardian.co.uk/science/2008/jan/21/environmental.debt1

Optional:


1/30: Day 7—Synthesis of Theory through Connection to local EJ issue
For part of the 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.

-- Potential speaker from Beyond Toxics (formerly Oregon Toxics Alliance) on their research
and work in West Eugene.
* Your choice for community connection project due as journal entry on Blackboard

Reading

Topic 2: Resource Access and Human Rights

2/4: 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.

*Midterm Essay Questions Provided* & * Group Presentation Proposal Due *

Readings

Internet resources on the Makah Case (required):


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

Optional:


2/11: 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

2/13: 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. * Potential speaker who worked for Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.
Reading:


2/18: Day 12—Coalition Building and Resistance to Oil Extraction
We will look at social movements in the US, Brazil and beyond 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.

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://changechevron.org/about/

2/20: Day 13—Climate Justice: A Powerful Frame
We will examine the use of the framework of climate justice in fights against fossil fuels to the UN climate negotiations.
*Potential speaker involved in Tar Sands Action campaign or other work related to climate justice.
*Midterm Essay Due*

Readings
TBD

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.

* Community Connection Assignment Due*

Readings:


**Topic 4: Food, Agriculture and Land**

2/27: **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:


3/4: **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?


3/6: **Day 17—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)


Topic 5: Final Presentations

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

3/18: All blogs are due!