Fall 2019

Anthropology 151
Nature, Culture, Power

Instructor: Richard Schroeder
Class time: M, W 2:00-3:20 pm
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Course theme and organization:

What is the relationship between humans and the natural world? How are environmental problems framed and represented, what assumptions underlie such representations, and how do they inflect related political struggles? Who are the principle victims and beneficiaries – human and non-human – of environmental change? How should we interpret patterns of ownership, access and control as they pertain to specific resources and management domains? What political and ethical issues are raised by taking different approaches to the environment in particular historical and geographical contexts? This course addresses these questions through an in-depth exploration of the interdisciplinary subfield of environmental anthropology known as political ecology.

The course is divided into three parts. The first introduces the field of political ecology, including its history and several classic issues – ‘natural’ hazards, deforestation, conservation, indigenous rights – that launched its development and continue to give it its character. The second explores how political ecology moved from a focus on rural, underdeveloped areas in the Global South to urban and First World settings, and introduces an illustrative sample of concepts and analytical tools used by political ecologists in their work: property rights, neoliberalism, green marketing and certification. The final part of the course surveys a selection of emergent issues, such as more-than-human agency, climate justice and consumption politics.

Learning goals:

This course will enable students to:

• become familiar with the history, key concepts and signature approaches of political ecology, a subfield of environmental anthropology;
• analyze historical and contemporary environmental problems from a variety of political ecological perspectives;
• develop a critical understanding of the material and symbolic relationships between nature, culture and power, and a deeper appreciation of how being human is a product of our engagements with(in) the natural world.

Course requirements:

Course grades will be determined on the basis of 100 course (percentage) points:

A. Attendance (5 pts), preparation and participation (25 pts)
Because the course is structured largely as a seminar, a premium is placed on regular attendance, thorough preparation and active participation in classroom exercises.

**B. Midterm exam (20 pts)**

A midterm exam covering the first section of the course will be administered in two parts: questions for an open book, take home essay will be handed out in class on Wednesday, **October 3**; this essay will be due in class on Monday, **October 7**, when a closed book exam consisting of short answer and identification questions will be conducted.

**C. Research workplan (5 pts) and issue paper (20 pts)**

Each student will prepare a research brief roughly five pages in length demonstrating the ability to apply relevant approaches and concepts from the field of political ecology to a contemporary environmental issue. A detailed set of instructions for completing this assignment will be available in mid-September to allow for adequate preparation. A research workplan summarizing the topic, identifying key sources, and raising preliminary questions and concerns will be due **October 18**. Submitting the workplan on-time is automatically worth five course points. The paper itself, worth 20 additional points, will be due at the beginning of class on **November 11**.

**D. Final exam (25 pts)**

A final exam will cover the second and third sections of the course; date and venue **TBD**.

**Resources:**

All assigned readings and video clips listed below are accessible via Latte. Resources relating to current events (e.g. video clips, print media articles, podcasts) will be added as appropriate during the semester. Study guides and discussion prompts will also occasionally be made available via Latte to assist with preparation. Note that the readings for Dec. 2 and 4 are listed as provisional in order to allow for flexibility in scheduling at the end of the term.

**Schedule**

**Aug. 28.** Course overview

**Part One: Classic issues in Political Ecology**

**Sept. 2.** No class – Labor Day

**Sept. 4.** Nature, culture, power


Video: “ToxiCity: Life at Agbobloshie, the world’s largest e-waste dump in Ghana.” (26 min). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mleQV01Vd11
**Sept. 9, 11. Hazards from Malthus to Marx**

Robbins, 2012, 82-100.


Video: “CBS Sunday Morning: Katrina – 10-year retrospective.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=602rez0ZA60 (10 min).


**Sept. 16, 18. Forestry and history**

Robbins, 2012, 103-121.


Video: “Second nature.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgsRnGmI3UU (41 min).


**Sept. 23, 25. Conservation and control**


**Sept. 30. No class – Rosh Hashanah**

**Oct. 2, 3 (note: W and Th). Indigeneity and sovereignty**


Video: “Awake: A dream from Standing Rock” (89 min).

Oct. 3. Essay questions for take home portion of midterm exam distributed in class

Oct. 7. Midterm in class exam; take-home essay questions due

Oct. 9. No class – Yom Kippur


**Part Two: Political Ecological Concepts and Methods**

Oct 15, 16. Traveling concepts: Making the urban/1st World turn


Oct. 18 (note: F). Issue paper workplans due

Oct. 21. No class – Shmini Atzeret

Oct. 23, 28. Property/access/control


Oct. 30, Nov. 4. Neoliberal natures


Video: “Milking the Rhino” (83 min).

**Nov. 6, 11. Green(wash)ing**


**Nov. 11. Issue papers due.**

**Part Three: Emerging topics**

**Nov. 13, 18. More-than-human agency**


**Nov. 20, 25. Climate justice**


Nov. 27. No class – Thanksgiving

Dec. 2. 4. Consuming bodies (provisional schedule)


Dec. 9. Course wrap up, final exam prep

Final exam – TBD

Course Policies

Workload:

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that you will spend a minimum of nine hours of study time per week on average in preparation for class (readings, videos, papers, preparation for exams, etc.).

Academic integrity:

Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. This means you should not submit work that is falsified or prepared by someone else. Infringement of this honor code could subject you to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions. Allegations of academic dishonesty may be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for relevant policies and procedures (https://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/2018-2019-rr.pdf). You may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify the originality of your assignments. If you are in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to this course or a specific assignment, please consult me before submitting your work. Citation and research assistance can be found at Brandeis Library guides – Citing Sources (https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723).

Concerns about academic standing or performance:

If you are on academic probation, or are concerned because you need this course (or a specific grade in the course) to meet graduation requirements or retain scholarship funding, please meet with me early in the term discuss your situation. If you wait until the end of the semester, it may be too late to address your needs.
Accommodations:

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations to facilitate your learning, and have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu. Once you have received an accommodations letter from the SAS office, please meet with me and present your letter promptly so I can best support your learning needs. Note that in order to effectively provide accommodations for exam taking, I will need to see your SAS letter more than 48 hours in advance. I cannot make accommodations retroactively.

Classroom etiquette:

Mutual respect and courtesy should be the norm in all classroom interactions. Those who feel comfortable speaking in groups are encouraged to contribute to discussions, but should also create space for others to join in as appropriate.

Preparation and participation:

You can earn preparation and participation points through completion of all reading and video viewing assignments; active listening in class; taking full part in small and large group discussions and debates; and completing short in-class writing exercises. Consistent preparation and participation will normally earn the bulk of the available course points; the quality of your in-class contributions may be used as an additional factor in determining your overall course grade in marginal cases.

Attendance:

You are allowed up to two absences (excused or otherwise) during the semester without penalty. Any absences beyond that need to be explicitly excused in advance, or could result in the loss of attendance points. Your attendance grade will be calculated as follows:

- 0-2 absences – 5 course points (out of 5 maximum)
- 3 absences – 4 course points
- 4 absences – 3 course points
- 5 absences – 2 course points
- 6 absences – 1 course point
- 7+ absences – 0 course points

Note taking and device use:

Laptop/notepad use during class meetings is discouraged to minimize distraction in a small classroom. To compensate for this, I will make my occasional PowerPoint presentations containing formal lecture notes available on Latte.