Course Description

This course explores the broad sub-field of cultural and political ecology. For the purposes of this course, we define political ecology as the study of unequal control and access of natural resources. Cultural ecology focuses on human-environment interactions, with particular attention to the social meanings of resources in the context of sustainable development and conservation processes. During this course, we will explore many theoretical and methodological approaches to cultural and political ecology as geographers have sought to broaden the impact of the field. We also look to other disciplines whose work has influenced cultural and political ecology in geography. The course material covers a range of topics in order to give students breadth of knowledge about the foundations of current debates and potential future directions.

This course aims to guide students through critical debates that frame scholarship in political ecology. It traverses the history of ideas about relationships between humans, nature and environmental change, while emphasizing the important geographic contributions to this body of thought. The course begins by exploring the definitions of cultural and political ecology. We will trace the intellectual history of cultural and political ecology through environmental determinism and hazards research. Our seminar will explore examine ideas about nature, nature/society relations, and environment/development theory, with attention to key debates and empirical studies that continue to inform current research. We will also cover the theoretical perspectives that structure current debates, including ideas about: Green Marxism, post-structuralism, feminism, contested epistemologies, and neoliberalism. The final weeks will include reading and discussion on frontiers in the sub-field, including biopolitics, political ecology of health and food, and urban political ecology.

Learning Outcome

Students will be able to discuss, engage, and debate in written and oral form the major controversies, findings, theoretical frameworks, key ideas and methods in cultural and political ecology.
Course Format

This course will be conducted at an advanced level. I expect students to come to class sessions prepared to discuss the readings in depth. Individual students will take responsibility for presenting a review of readings to the class and for facilitating group discussion with the instructor. Student facilitators will prepare both written and oral reviews of readings. (See details in course requirements)

There will be some lecturing, and I will be ready at any time to answer questions and/or define terms that are troubling anyone about the readings, their themes or their implications. But I expect students who have questions to have made sufficient effort outside of class to inform himself or herself. If you are unfamiliar with key theoretical concepts in the social sciences, I recommend that you have a copy of The Dictionary of Human Geography as a key reference.

Required Reading & Materials

The syllabus represents only a fraction of significant work in cultural and political ecology; further reading is imperative for serious students and doctoral students in the human-environment research group.

- Journal articles and book chapters will be made available on Blackboard (E-learning)

Because the discussion of readings forms the core of the course, assignments must be read before coming to class. We may not get to all readings in every class, but we will always discuss those indicated as required.

Course Requirements & Assessment

**Critical Reviews (25% Final Grade).** Each student will be responsible for five reviews. At least three must be turned in before Spring Break with the remainder completed by 30 April 2013. Each review will include:

- a minimum of 2 paragraphs that summarize the article;
- important quotes from the article (cited with page numbers);
- a minimum one paragraph critique;
- A list of questions to stimulate discussion.
It is more important for the review to stimulate ideas and discussion than for it to be the correct interpretation of the work. It is also more important for it to be easily comprehended than to be jammed with complex details. If there is something that you do not understand, try to explain what that something is, and why you are not clear about it. Go beyond “I don’t get it” and try to specify what is confusing you.

Publish your review on E-Learning by **NOON MONDAY before it will be discussed in class (TUESDAY)**. Reviews do not stand as a substitute for in-depth readings by all class members.

**Participation (20% Final Grade).** All students are expected to be in class every day, prepared to participate and discuss. You will be graded on participation. Participation involves more than simply showing up. It entails contributing to discussion with thoughtful comments and questions about the material. You will be evaluated on your contributions to each class.

For further information on the Texas A&M University attendance policy refer to [http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule7.htm](http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule7.htm)


**Research Paper (40%).** A 20-25 page research paper is required for students. You will select the topic, but you are required to discuss your topic with me before Week 3. The topic must be clearly related to the course, but I encourage you to use the opportunity to develop your own research interests. The research paper will be due on **30 April 2013**

The topic should be a critical evaluation of an issue that arises out of the literature (and its extensions) that we have discussed. Identify a theme early in the paper and then use the text of the paper to explore perspectives on the theme, come to judgments about the alternative perspectives, and present your own analysis of the issue. The tone should be critical; the style and language scholarly. The literature should be well reviewed and referenced. The bibliography should go well beyond the course readings.

Use Chicago Style for your bibliography. The following website offers some basic guidance on writing a literature review should you need assistance: [http://library.ucsc.edu/ref/howto/literaturereview.html](http://library.ucsc.edu/ref/howto/literaturereview.html). I am also available to help.

**Classroom Policies**

Graduate level discussion involves taking risks with ideas, questions, and insights. For this reason it is imperative that we all behave respectfully towards others. TAMU is committed to providing an educational and work climate that is conducive to the personal and professional development of each individual. See [http://student-rules.tamu.edu](http://student-rules.tamu.edu)
Academic integrity and Plagiarism. I will not tolerate any form of dishonesty, cheating or plagiarism. The Aggie Honor Code is: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do."

Please refer to the Aggie Honor Code and Honor Council Rules and Procedures on the web at http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor. Simply put, do not do it! In this course, you are expected to do your own, original work that has not been previously submitted for credit. If you have additional questions or concerns about academic integrity, please bring these to my attention.

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with this definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of that person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the latest issue of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, http://student-rules.tamu.edu/, under the section "Scholastic Dishonesty."

Students with Disabilities The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room B118 of Cain Hall. The phone number is 845-1637. http://studentlife.tamu.edu/

Copyrights All course materials are copyrighted. These materials include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these materials are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless permission is expressly granted. Taping and reproducing of course material for other than personal use will be regarded as copyright infringement and referred to University lawyers for action. Before tape recording, ask me first. Professional note-takers must be enrolled in this course (university policy) and receive my permission prior to any commercial transaction involving course notes (state law).
Course Readings

Week 1 – Cultural Ecology – Origins, Systems Theory, and Adaptation

**Required Reading**
Robbins, P. (2012) Political Ecology (Introduction; Chapters 1 and 2)

**Suggested Reading**

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**Week 2 - Population and Other Hazards**

**Required Reading**
Robbins, P. (2012), Chapter 3, 4


**Suggested Reading**


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**Week 3 – Emergent Political Ecologies**

**Required Reading**
Robbins, P. (2012), Chapters 5

**Suggested Reading**

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**Week 4 – Nature**

**Required Reading**
Smith (2012 [1984]), Chapters 1 and 2
Loftus (2012) Chapter 1 and 2
Robbins (2012) Chapter 6
Suggested Reading

Week 5 – Marx and Nature

Required Reading
Robbins (2012) Chapter 7

Suggested Reading

Week 6 - Environmental degradation and conflict

Required Reading
Robbins (2012) Chapters 8, 9 and 10
Suggested Reading

Week 7 - Contested Environmental Knowledge & Narratives

Required Reading

Suggested Reading


**Week 8 - Feminist Political Ecologies**

**Required Reading**

Carney, J. "Gender Conflict in Gambian Wetlands", in Peet and Watts.


**Suggested Reading**


Truelove, Y. (2011) (Re-) Conceptualizing water inequality in Delhi, India through a feminist political ecology framework. *Geoforum*, 42, 143-152.

**Week 9 - Spring Break**

**Week 10 - Scale in Political Ecology**

**Required Reading**


**Suggested Reading**


*Water Alternatives* (Special Issue 2011)


**Week 11- Neoliberal Nature I - Accumulation by Dispossession**

**Required Reading**

Bakker, K. 2010. *Privatizing Water: Governance Failure and the World’s Urban Water Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4


Suggested Reading

Week 12 - Neoliberal Nature II - Unpacking Ecosystem Services

Required Reading

Suggested Reading

**Week - 13 Neoliberal Nature III - Sympathetic Critiques**

**Required Reading**
Loftus (2012) Chapter 3

**Suggested Reading**

**Week 14 - Biopolitics**

**Required Reading**

**Suggested Reading**

**Week 15 – Political Ecology of Health and Food**

**Required Reading**

**Suggested Reading**


**Week 16 – Urban Political Ecology**

**Required Reading**
Loftus, A. (2012) Chapters 4, 5, 6, Conclusion

**Suggested Reading**