

Geography 138: Political Ecology
Instructor: Kimberley Kinder

Tues, Wed., Thurs., 9 -11:30am
575 McCone
July 7 – August 15

Course structure:

Political ecology examines the politics, in the broadest sense of the word, of the environment. In this course, we will examine the social and historical forces that shape resources access, the political structures that mediate control over land and property and the consequences of colonialism and uneven development. We will also foreground the implications of different ideas of nature for resource access, food security, gender, race and ethnicity, and resistance. Using a combination of case studies and theoretical works, this course explores a range of environment issues including deforestation, desertification, water conflicts, parks and protected areas, and environmental movements. In these short six weeks, we will barely scratch the surface, but the course will provide you with valuable analytical tools and critical thinking skills with which to delve deeper into this exciting sub-field of geography. Your primary objective will be to learn to “ask the right questions,” to use the framework of political ecology to analyze the complex relationships between ecological and social change that underlie contemporary environmental problems around the globe.

Each week, students will read two overview chapters from Paul Robbins’ primary textbook introducing the subtopic for the week. We will discuss these overview chapters in class on Thursdays. Students will then read four chapters from various books that explore these themes in context through specific case studies. We will discuss these readings in class on Tuesday. Wednesdays will be devoted to in-class educational videos and mock debates.

Key texts:

Robbins, Paul. (2004). *Political Ecology*. Malden: Blackwell.

Additionally, a course reader will be available from Copy Central near the corner of Euclid and Hearst.

Course Requirements:

Seminar participation (20%): This course emphasizes reading and discussion. I expect each of you to attend every course session prepared to discuss the week’s reading. Attendance and your participation in discussion during class meetings will constitute a substantial portion of your grade. Students may miss three sessions without penalty, but will have 5% percentage points deducted from their final grade for each session missed thereafter. Students who miss more seven sessions may be dropped from the course.

Excessive tardiness may also be penalized. Students anticipating unusual circumstances should speak with me individually to make up missed class time.

Critical reading commentaries (30%): A second component of the course will be reading responses (choose any 8 of the 12 text-oriented days). These short reflections should be two paragraphs (approx. 200-300 words in length). They should clearly and concisely summarize the argument and evidence presented in the day's assigned readings, as well as your critical evaluation of them. Reading responses should be 1.5 spaced in a 12 pt font. Style counts, so please edit for clarity. You may not submit a response on the day you present.

Class Presentations (20%): A third component will be an individual/group presentation. In groups, each student will be responsible for one Tuesday or Thursday opening presentation designed to introduce key themes and to provoke discussion. Rather than providing an exhaustive overview, presentations should be crisp, concise, and conceptual – at most 20 minutes total for each group of students. Presenters should pose questions oriented toward opening up further discussion.

Final Paper (30%): The final component of the course will be a critical review of a book central to the Political Ecology field. You may choose any * book in the syllabus below. You may not choose the same reading that you present on in class. Since we will be discussion portions of each book in course, your paper should move well beyond a summary analysis. They should clarify key arguments, analytically frame the text, and elaborate themes that cut across readings. Book reviews should be approximately 1500-2000 words long, 1.5 spaced in a 12 pt font. They should take the form of an expanded critical reading response, discussing the author's arguments, the types of evidence used to support them, and your critical judgment as to the effectiveness of the argument. Students should submit final papers in class (hard copy) during the last session on August 14. Late papers will be docked 10% per day if submitted to my home address in south Berkeley, but I will not accept papers after 5pm, August 17.

How to reach me:

Office hours: Monday 10-11:30 by appointment

Email: kinder@berkeley.edu (Note: I encourage you to ask questions in class or in office hours. I do not check email over the weekend and will usually take two business days to reply to messages sent during the week.)

Schedule and Readings:

Tuesday (July 8)

Course introduction & presentation sign-up.

Ideas of Nature

Wednesday (July 9)

Williams, R. "Ideas of Nature". In *Culture and Materialism*. London: Verso. Pp. 67-85.

Watts, M. "Nature/Culture: A Natural History". In R. Johnston and P. Cloke (Eds.) *Spaces of Geographical Thought*. London: Sage, 2005. Pp.142-174.

Foundations in political ecology

Thursday (July 10)

Robbins, Chapters 1 & 2: What is political ecology?

Tuesday (July 15)

*Foster, J. (2000). *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. New York: Monthly Press Review. (Introduction, Chapters 1 & 5)

Bryant (1992). Political ecology: an emerging research agenda in Third World studies. *Political Geography* 11(1):12-36. (Available online)

Wednesday (July 16)

In Class Video & Discussion Group

Critical political ecology

Thursday (July 17)

Robbins, Chapters 3 & 4: Critical political ecology

Tuesday (July 22)

*Kloppenborg, J. (2005). *First the Seed*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. (Chapters 2 & 7)

Peet, R. & Watts, M. [Ed.] (1996). *Liberation Ecologies*, New York: Routledge. (Chapters 1 & 2)

Wednesday (July 23)

In Class Video & Discussion Group

Production (and destruction) of nature

Thursday (July 24)

Robbins, Chapters 5 & 6: Destruction and construction of nature

Tuesday (July 29)

*Prudham, W. S. (2005). *Knock on Wood: Nature as a Commodity in Douglas-Fir Country*. New York: Routledge. (Chapters 1 & 5)

Kosek, J. 2006. *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Chapter 2)

Scott, J. (1998). *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven: Yale University Press. (Chapter 1)

Wednesday (July 30)

In Class Video & Discussion Group

Violence and power

Thursday (July 31)

Robbins, Chapters 9 & 10: Marginalization, Violence, and Power

Tuesday (August 5)

*Li, T. (2007). *The Will to Improve*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Chapters 2 & 5)

Moore, D. (2006). *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe*.
Durham: Duke University Press. (Chapter 5)
Davis, Mike. 2001. *Late Victorian Holocausts*. New York: Verso. (Pp. 25-59).
Wednesday (August 6)
In Class Video & Discussion Group
In Class final paper group discussions

Economy, ecology, and culture

Thursday (August 7)
Carney, J. and Watts, M. (1990). Manufacturing Dissent. *Africa* 60(2):207-240.
(Available online)
Gregory, D. (1999). Postcolonialism and the production of nature. In N. Castree
and B. Braun (Eds.) *Social Nature*. Blackwell.

Tuesday (August 12)
*Ziegler, C. (2007). *Favored Flowers: Culture and Economy in a Global System*.
Durham: Duke University Press. (Chapters 3 & 5)
Kosek, J. 2006. *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New
Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Chapter 3)
White, R. (1995). *The Organic Machine*. New York: Hill and Wang. (Chapter 1)

Wednesday (August 13)
In Class Video & Discussion Group

Future of Political Ecology

Thursday (August 14)
Robbins, Chapter 11: Where to now?
Final papers due in class.