

Geography 3801, Political Ecology

Spring 2021, 3-credit lecture course meeting 80 minutes twice per week (Office Hours TBA)

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Course description: Political Ecology is a prominent school of thought in Geography that seeks to describe human-environment interactions, explain socio-ecological problems, and offer pathways to environmental and social justice. Political Ecology (PE) arose in the 1970s as a critique of mainstream approaches in academia and environmentalism, which political ecologists criticized for being inattentive to how power (dynamics of influence and advantage) shape human-environment dynamics. Mainstream perspectives consistently misdiagnose causes of problems and propose solutions that are not only misguided, but, because they themselves are embedded in unacknowledged power relations, exacerbate both ecological degradation and social inequity across multiple intersectional axes such as gender, race, and nationality. As an alternative, political ecologists not only insist that environmental and social issues are always intertwined, but also that knowledge about nature is also always shaped by power dynamics: nature itself is always social and vice versa. With its attention to power, intersectional axes of inequality and injustice, and socio-natures, political ecologists have offered robust alternative ways of thinking about environmental change, governance, and both human and planetary health and well-being. PE perspectives have only become more relevant and necessary with the recent widespread acknowledgement of anthropogenic global environmental change, often called the Anthropocene, in which the intertwining of humans and nature is inherent.

This course introduces students to this geographical school of nature-society thought. It situates PE in the hundred years of geographic thought on nature-society relations prior to PE's emergence in the 1970s, and follows how the field developed since then. It introduces key concepts and methods in the field, and helps students understand how, why, and with what effects PE differs from other approaches. Students will learn how PE concepts and methods have been applied in existing research and engagement, and the course will include a faculty research focus on PE of environmental chemicals in the Anthropocene. The course explores how PE approaches are relevant for understanding today's issues, and students will themselves learn to apply PE concepts and methods to issues of their choosing.

Course objectives

1. Students understand foundational theories and methods in Political Ecology. They can define key PE concepts and describe how they are used as analytical lenses, define critique as a method, and critically read academic papers in PE.
2. Students understand the history of geographic thought in nature-society relations. They can describe key schools of thought since the 19th century that led to emergence of PE in the 1970s, describe how PE differs from past approaches, and describe PE as practiced in OSU geography.
3. Students can apply PE theories and methods to analyze nature-society relations. They can identify and evaluate existing approaches in specific real-world issues and cases, including their ethical dimensions, especially as related to questions difference and intersectional justice for humans and non-humans.
4. They can apply PE theories and methods to analyze an issue of their own choosing, demonstrating ability to ask questions; gather, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information; and communicate their findings.

Statement on Academic Misconduct It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

Statement on Disability Services The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

Statement on mental health As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student’s ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life’s Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614- 292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766 and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Statement on sexual misconduct/ relationship violence Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at titleix@osu.edu .

Statement on diversity The Ohio State University affirms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

Weekly course schedule

Unit	Week	Topic	Readings	Assignments
Introduction to PE	1/11	Power, nature, difference, and knowledge	Robbins Intro, 1	
	1/18	Historical development of PE	Robbins 2, 3 Current events TBD	Current Events 1
PE of environmental change	1/25	Colonialism and marginalization	Robbins 4, 8	Quiz 1
	2/1	Development	Adger et al. Academic TBD	Academic 1
	2/8	Population	Sasser 1-2 Current events TBD	Current Events 2
PE of environmental governance	2/15	Protected areas, violence, and control	Robbins 9, 10	Quiz 2
	2/22	Sustainable Development	Adams 3, 4 Academic TBD	Academic 2
	3/1	Market-environmentalism	Dempsey 1, 7 Current events TBD	Current Events 3
PE of the Anthropocene: intertwining planetary and human health, <i>focus on pollution / chemicals as signature</i>	3/8	Anthropocene / Socionatures	Robbins 12, 13	Quiz 3 Research topic
	3/15	Health and the body	Senanayake and King Academic TBD	Academic 3
	3/22	Governing through risk	Suryanarayanan and Kleinman, Intro, 4 Current events TBD	Current Events 4
	3/29	Green consumerism	McKendrick 1-3	Research update
	4/5	Environmental justice / Environmental data justice	Wylie et al. Liboiron Dillon et al.	
Group presentations	4/12 and 19	Student research presentations		Group presentation
Final	4/23+			Quiz 4 Individual work

Required course materials

There are 2-3 required readings per week. The mix of types of readings will be different each week but is consistent across units of the course. Each unit includes a) chapters from the overview text, b) one recent article from an academic journal, c) one current events article, and d) other supplemental academic readings (mainly book chapters, written in an accessible style).

All except the text are available in Carmen.

- **Course text to buy:** Robbins, Paul. 2019. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction, 3rd Edition*. Wiley Blackwell. ISBN: 978-1-119-16746-4. Available at the OSU bookstore or through online retailers. Assigned chapters vary in length, averaging 19pp.
- All "Current events TBD" will be from articles in reputable newspapers and magazines, published not earlier than 2 months before they are assigned. ~5pp. each.
- All "Academic TBD" will be topical, case-based political ecology articles by geographers published in 2020-21 and similar to the following 2019 articles (provided for illustration):
 - Satizábal, Paula and Wolfram Dressler. 2019. Geographies of the sea: negotiating human-fish interactions in the waterscapes of Colombia's Pacific coast. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 17pp. [Afro-descendent fishers respond to neoliberal governance]
 - Vasudevan, Pavithra. 2019. An intimate inventory of race and waste. *Antipode*. 18pp. [Race and environmental justice in an aluminum company town in North Carolina]
- Other supplemental readings as listed in the course schedule:
 - Adams, WM. 2009. *Green Development: environment and sustainability in a developing world, 3rd Ed*. Chapters 3-4. 43pp.
 - Adger, W et al. 2001. Advancing a political ecology of global environmental discourses. *Development and Change*. 29pp.
 - Dempsey, Jessica. 2016. *Enterprising Nature: Economics, Markets, and Finance in Global Biodiversity Politics*. Chapters 1, 7. 67pp.
 - Dillon, Lindsey et al. 2019. Situating data in a Trumpian era: the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 9pp.
 - Liboiron, Max. 2017. Compromised agency: the case of baby legs. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*. 20pp.
 - McKendrick, Norah. 2018. *Better Safe than Sorry: How Consumers Navigate Exposure to Everyday Toxics*. Chapters 1-3. 57pp.
 - Sasser, Jade. 2018. *On Infertile Ground: Population Control and Women's Rights in the Era of Climate Change*. Chapters 1-2. 30pp.
 - Senanayake, Nari and Brian King. 2017. Health-environment futures: Complexity, uncertainty, and bodies. *Progress in Human Geography*. 15pp.
 - Suryanarayanan, Sainath, and Daniel Kleinman. 2016. *Vanishing Bees: Science, Politics, and Honeybee Health*. Intro, chapter 4. 32pp.
 - Wylie, Sarah, Nick Shapiro, and Max Liboiron. 2017. Making and doing politics through grassroots scientific research on the energy and petrochemical industries. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*. 22pp.

Course requirements

<u>Category</u>	<u>Item percent</u>	<u>Category percent</u>
In-class work	<1%each	10%
Quizzes	4@5% each	20%
Academic article write-ups	3@5% each	15%
Current events write-ups	4@5% each	20%
Research project		35%
Topic	5%	
Update	5%	
Group presentation	10%	
Individual component	15%	

Grading scale (lower cut-off): 93=A, 90=A-, 87=B+, 83=B, 80=B-, 77=C+, 73=C, 70=C-, 67=D+, 55=D

In-class work: includes participation in large and small group discussions and short written responses to prompts regarding readings, discussions, films, and so on. In-class activities are included because they improve student learning by requiring thoughtful engagement. There will be around 15 written activities; each will be graded for completion and the lowest score will be dropped.

Quizzes (4): one per unit of the course. Quizzes evaluate grasp of key concepts (theories, methods, history of ideas) and their application in specific cases. Quizzes help consolidate the foundational knowledge students need to conduct their own research.

Academic article write-ups (3): one per unit of the course, except the Introduction. Each write-up is about 500 words, a) identifying the topic, argument, and key evidence, b) identifying political ecology theories and methods and how they matter in the analysis, c) identifying the contribution to geographic scholarship, and d) providing evaluation and personal reaction. Academic paper write-ups teach students to read and evaluate academic literature, improve their understanding of PE theories and methods, improve their understanding of the development of geographic thought, and prepare them to conduct their own research.

Current events write-ups (4): one per unit of the course, based on a current news story. Each write-up is about 500 words, a) succinctly describing the issue at hand, b) identifying how PE *is* applied and/or suggesting how it *might be* applied and with what effect, and c) providing evaluation and personal reaction. Current events write-ups give students practice applying course material to real-world events and prepare them to conduct their own research.

Research: Students will use PE approaches to describe, analyze, and communicate findings on a contemporary issue. Students will work in groups to identify a broad issue (examples will be provided, from which groups may choose, or they can propose an issue), and each individual will focus on a specific aspect of the broad issue. Each individual will provide an update on both the broad and specific topic (half to one page + bibliography) and ongoing research (at least one page + bibliography) in weeks 9 and 12 respectively. At the end of the semester, groups will present their research to the class (~15 minutes/group) and individuals will turn in their more in-depth work. Students can choose the format for both the group and individual components, as long as the group part is a presentation (e.g. video, poster, or slideshow/talk) and the individual part can be turned in (e.g. video, paper, or letter to Congress).