

Welcome to **Political Ecology** (Geography 3801, AU 2023)

This in-person class meets **Tuesday and Thursday 11:10AM - 12:30PM in McPherson Lab 1041**. It is taught by **Professor Becky Mansfield**, a faculty member in Geography.

The course **Carmen** will have all information and course materials. If you need assistance with Carmen, please contact **OSU Tech Help and Support**: <https://ocio.osu.edu/help>, 614-688-HELP (4357)

Contact information

How to contact me:

You can message me through Carmen or email (mansfield.32@osu.edu) or talk to me in person. If you message me, I will try to get back to you within 24 hours on weekdays (but I'm unlikely to get back to you at all over the weekend). To talk to me in person, you can come without an appointment to my student office hours—the hour right after class. Alternatively, we can make an appointment to meet at another time; to schedule an appointment, message me or talk to me before or after class.

Reasons to contact me

You can contact me for many reasons, including:

- *you have questions* about course material, assignments, or grades or you need extra time on an assignment.
- *you are having difficulties* that prevent you from engaging fully in the course, whether those are related to health (including mental health), work, family, or anything else.
- *you are excited about course material* and want to learn more.
- *you want to learn about opportunities beyond the course*, e.g., research, internships, careers, other courses.

Course description

This course introduces you to core concepts, methods, and applications of **Political Ecology**, a unique approach to describing human-environment interactions, explaining socio-ecological problems, and offering pathways to environmental and social justice. What makes Political Ecology “political” is that it insists that nature and society are always intertwined and shaped by power, defined broadly as dynamics of influence and advantage within economic systems and across multiple scales (micro to macro) and intersectional axes (class, gender, race, nationality, and so forth).

With its attention to power, intersectional axes of inequality and injustice, and socratures, Political Ecology offers alternatives to dominant, mainstream approaches to environment and development. Because mainstream approaches are not fully attentive to multiple forms of power, they consistently misdiagnose causes of problems and propose solutions that are not only misguided, but often exacerbate both ecological degradation and social inequity.

Political Ecology offers robust alternative ways of thinking about environmental change, governance, and both human and planetary health and well-being. These 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.

In short, Political Ecology as a field offers alternative perspectives on **sustainability**, addressing throughout the semester all six dimensions of sustainability as defined at OSU. In this course, the six dimensions are covered as follows:

- *Human and natural systems* is a core idea of the course, addressed in the emphasis on integration of nature and society with variation over space and time
- *Earth and environmental systems* are addressed through attention to the causes and consequences of human degradation of natural systems, with attention to natural processes especially in case studies.
- *Economy and governance* are core ideas of the course, addressed through the emphasis on political economy and socio-economic inequalities across scales
- *Society and culture* are core ideas of the course, addressed through the emphasis on power and on social and environmental justice
- *Engineering, technology, and design* are addressed through emphasis on technological knowledge in the politics of the environment and through emphasis on the visual/design as a mode of political ecological communication
- *Health and well-being* are addressed through the course emphasis on issues of pollution and environmental health

OSU's Sustainability Education and Learning Committee emphasized these six dimensions, rather than prescribing a single approach, because there is not a single definition of "sustainability." Emphasizing *content* across the six dimensions (rather than the *word* "sustainability") allows OSU to welcome multiple approaches to sustainability. Because the field of Political Ecology engages all six dimensions, it is uniquely situated to provide synthetic perspective on sustainability in the past, present, and future.

Course goals

1. Students understand foundational theories and methods in Political Ecology (PE). You can define key PE concepts, describe how they are used as analytical lenses, and critically read academic scholarship in PE.
2. Students understand the history of geographic thought in nature-society relations. You can describe ideas that led to emergence of PE in the 1970s and how PE differs from other approaches.
3. Students can apply PE theories and methods to analyze nature-society relations. You can identify and evaluate existing approaches in specific real-world issues and cases, including their ethical dimensions, especially as related to questions of difference and intersectional justice for humans and non-humans.
4. Students can apply PE theories and methods to analyze an issue of their own choosing. You are able to ask questions; gather, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information; and communicate your findings in multiple formats.

General education: Sustainability

This course meets the goals and learning objectives of the **Sustainability Theme of the GE curriculum**:

1. Successful students will analyze sustainability at a more advanced and in-depth level than in the Foundations component.
 - 1.1 Engage in critical and logical thinking about the topic or idea of sustainability.
 - 1.2 Engage in an advanced, in-depth, scholarly exploration of the topic or idea of sustainability.
2. Successful students will integrate approaches to sustainability by making connections to out-of-classroom experiences with academic knowledge or across disciplines and/or to work they have done in previous classes and that they anticipate doing in future.
 - 2.1 Identify, describe and synthesize approaches or experiences as they apply to sustainability.
 - 2.2 Demonstrate a developing sense of self as a learner through reflection, self-assessment and creative work, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts.
3. Successful students will analyze and explain how social and natural systems function, interact and evolve over time; how human well-being depends on these interactions; how actions have impacts on subsequent generations and societies globally; and how human values, behaviors and institutions impact multifaceted potential solutions across time.
 - 3.1 Describe elements of the fundamental dependence of humans on Earth and environmental systems, and on the resilience of these systems.
 - 3.2 Describe, analyze and critique the roles and impacts of human activity and technology on both human society and the natural world, in the past, present and future.
 - 3.3 Devise informed and meaningful responses to problems and arguments in the area of sustainability based on the interpretation of appropriate evidence and an explicit statement of values.

As reflected in the Course Description and Course Goals, political ecology is a unique and inherently synthetic approach to sustainability. It starts from the premise that nature and society are intertwined and it explicitly incorporates values of equality, justice, and an environmental ethic. You will be learning to describe and analyze these socionatural dynamics, and to understand how they function in the context of real socio-environmental problems.

The course content builds from your basic literacy across the GE foundations by teaching political ecology concepts and methods, and how they are different from other approaches. This teaches and requires advanced skills in critical thinking and interpretive analysis.

You will learn to apply these to understanding real-world situations in assignments, including a project on a place and topic that is meaningful to you for which you will produce both a visual and written product.

As noted in the Course Description above, the course engages all six dimensions of Sustainability as defined at OSU. While “sustainable development” is the explicit topic of one week of the course (see the Course Schedule), *sustainability* as a phenomenon and goal is core to the course from the first day to the last.

Course requirements

Required course materials

There are 2-3 readings (or films) most weeks, divided between general readings, “current events” readings, and “academic articles” readings. There are assignments associated with each. A full list of readings is provided at the end of the syllabus. **Course materials are available at no cost in Carmen.**

Assignment overview (see the Course Schedule for due dates)

Category	Item percent	Category percent
Readings and reflections	<1.5%	17%
Academic article write-ups	8%	24%
Current events write-ups	8%	24%
Semester project		35%
Topic	5%	
Update	5%	
Visual/presentation	15%	
Written	10%	

Readings and reflections (13 x <1.5% each):

There are currently 14 (but I drop the lowest score): one per set of readings and/or films. Short, low-stakes responses improve learning by providing accountability and requiring you to think about course material. (If I add or drop an assignment, the percent each is worth will change a bit, but the category remains 17% of your total grade.)

Academic article write-ups (3 x 8% each):

There are three, one per unit of the course except the Introduction. All articles will be topical, case-based political ecology articles by geographers, published in the last year. Each write-up is 500-1000 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 article write-ups teach you to read and evaluate academic literature, improve your understanding of PE theories and methods, improve your understanding of the development of geographic thought, and prepare you to conduct research.

Current events write-ups (3 x 8% each):

There are four, one per unit of the course. These will be news stories from reputable newspapers and magazines, published within a few months of when they are assigned. Each write-up is 500-1000 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. These assignments take the place of quizzes and exams; they are designed to evaluate your knowledge of each unit’s material. Current events write-ups give you practice applying course material to real-world events and prepare you to conduct research.

Project (35% divided over 4-part assignment):

Students apply concepts and methods covered in the course to develop a political ecological account of a place that is meaningful to them. The project unfolds over the course of the semester, and we devote class time to the project throughout the semester. Early in the semester you will identify the place and a

specific angle about it. For example, previous students' projects included: identification of the historical political economic processes that created the suburban subdivision they lived in as a kid, the factors that enabled Copenhagen to become one of the world's most sustainable cities, controversy over removal of a dam in a favorite park in their hometown, factors influencing water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, and the role of Māori conceptions of nature in New Zealand. The project can be based on library/internet research of existing knowledge or can include original research such as interviews or map analysis.

There are two scaffold assignments due in the second half of the semester in which you report on progress and receive feedback (5% each). The final project is to produce a visual and/or experiential product that you will present to the class, such as a photo essay, video, map, poster, artwork, performance, or even a fieldtrip (15%). You will also produce a written document that is complementary (10%). *Instead of the written project being primary with the visual illustrating it, here the visual/experiential is primary with the writing providing context.*

This assignment consolidates your knowledge about PE concepts and methods, gives you practice representing PE ideas in different formats, and requires you to apply PE not only beyond the classroom but to something meaningful in your own life.

Academic integrity for all assignments:

For all the individual assignments, you may discuss the assignment with other students in the class before writing your response, but you must do your own, unique write-up.

For the project, you are encouraged to talk about your project with others throughout the semester. You can propose a collaboration (group project) for the visual component of the project, but you must do your own, unique written document.

You may NOT use artificial intelligence to write your assignments. This is because the act of writing is a key part of all these assignments. When you write you not only communicate what you already know but *the act of writing helps you learn*. The assignments are also designed to have you *reflect on what you are learning*, including drawing connections with previous course material. AI cannot learn or reflect for you (if AI does it, then you have neither learned nor reflected!).

Grading

I will grade all assignments on a 10-point scale: 10=excellent; 8=good; 6=passable; 0=missing or completely misses the mark. **(Remember that even though all assignments are all graded on the same scale, they contribute different amounts to your final grade, based on how they are weighted.)**

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

Course schedule

Note that this schedule is subject to change and will be updated as necessary in Carmen. Should in-person classes be cancelled, I will notify you via Carmen as to whether there will be asynchronous activities or we will meet virtually via CarmenZoom.

Date	Topic	What's due
<u>Unit 1: Introduction to Political Ecology</u>		
Tu: 8/22	Introduction to the course, political ecology, sustainability, and each other	
Th: 8/24	Power, nature, difference, and knowledge	Read 1: Robbins
Tu: 8/29	Why is Political Ecology needed?	Read 2: Robbins
Th: 8/31	Why Political Ecology, cont.	Read 3: Robbins
<u>Unit 2: Political ecology of environmental degradation</u>		
Tu: 9/5	Colonialism and marginalization	Read 4: Robbins
Th: 9/7	Colonialism and marginalization, cont.	No assignment
Tu: 9/12	(Sustainable) Development	Read 5: Adger
Th: 9/14	(Sustainable) Development, cont.	Academic article 1
Tu: 9/19	Population	Read 6: Sasser
Th: 9/21	Population, cont.	Current events 1
<u>Unit 3: Political ecology of environmental governance</u>		
Tu: 9/26	Protected areas, violence, and control	Read 7: Robbins
Th: 9/28	Protected areas, cont.	Read 8: Betoko + film
Tu: 10/3	Protected areas, cont.	Academic article 2
Th: 10/5	Market environmentalism	Read 9: two short films
Tu: 10/10	Market environmentalism, cont.	Read 10: Lave
Th: 10/12	NO CLASS, AUTUMN BREAK	
Tu: 10/17	Market environmentalism, cont.	Current events 2
<u>Unit 4: Political ecology of <i>socionatures</i>: focus on chemicals and environmental health</u>		
Th: 10/19	21st Century Socionatures	Read 11: film
Tu: 10/24	Socionatures, cont.	Project topic
Th: 10/26	Chemical geographies / toxic landscapes	Read 12: Lerner
Tu: 10/31	Chemical geographies, cont.	No assignment
Th: 11/2	Governing through risk	Read 13: Suryanarayanan

Tu: 11/7	Risk, continued	No assignment
Th: 11/9	Political ecology of environmental data	Read 14: Goldstein
Tu: 11/14	Environmental data, continued	Project Update
Th: 11/16	Contesting toxicity	Academic article write-up 3
Tu: 11/21	Contesting toxicity, cont.	Current events write-up 3

Unit 5: Semester projects

Th: 11/23	NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING	
Tu: 11/28	Catch-up and course conclusions	No assignment
Th: 11/30	Project presentations	Visual product
Tu: 12/5	Project presentations	Visual product
Mo: 12/11 12:00pm	(in place of a final)	Written product

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.

Religious accommodations

It is Ohio State's policy to reasonably accommodate the sincerely held religious beliefs and practices of all students. The policy permits a student to be absent for up to three days each academic semester for reasons of faith or religious or spiritual belief.

Students planning to use religious beliefs or practices accommodations for course requirements must inform the instructor in writing no later than 14 days after the course begins. The instructor is then responsible for scheduling an alternative time and date for the course requirement, which may be before or after the original time and date of the course requirement. These alternative accommodations

will remain confidential. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all course assignments are completed.

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 Younkun 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.

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 can find resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at titleix@osu.edu.

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.

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/>.