

Welcome to **Political Ecology** (Geography 3801, AU 2024)

This in-person class meets **Tuesday and Thursday 11:10AM - 12:30PM in Derby 1080**. It is taught by **Professor Becky Mansfield**, a faculty member in the Department of Geography.

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

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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, please 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, and you need to talk about accommodations
- *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 well-being. 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 social 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 socionatures, 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 can 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 socio-natural 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. **Course materials are available at no cost in Carmen.**

Assignment overview (see the Course Schedule for due dates)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Item percent</u>	<u>Category percent</u>
Attendance and Participation	Extra credit	
In-class activities	~1%	10%
Readings and reflections	~1.5%	15%
Academic article write-ups	7%	14%
Current events write-ups	7%	21%
Semester project		40%
Topic	5%	
Update 1	5%	
Update 2	5%	
Visual/presentation	15%	
Written	10%	

Attendance and participation (Required but not graded)

Attendance and participation are required, and I do take attendance every day! I do not assign a separate grade but use your performance to bump your grade if you are on the cusp of a higher grade at the end of the semester. For example, if you have 89.7 but attended regularly and were an active participant, you will get an A- instead of B+.

In-class activities (~1% each)

Many days there will be in-class activities, about 10 of which will result in a written assignment (individual or group). These activities are not announced ahead of time, but I will drop the lowest score. These are low stakes activities that allow you to reflect on material from lecture and discussion. The precise percent each is worth will depend on the total number across the semester, but the category will remain 10% of your total grade.

General readings (~1.5% each)

“Readings” include articles, chapters, and/or films that you read or view outside of class and about which you write a short response based on a prompt I provide. Short, low-stakes responses improve learning by providing accountability and requiring you to think about course material. The syllabus currently lists 12 of these assignments, and I drop the lowest score; the number may change but the category will remain 15% of your total grade.

Academic article write-ups (2 x 7% each)

All articles will be recent, topical, case-based political ecology articles by geographers. Each write-up is 1-2 pages providing summary, identifying political ecology theories and methods and how they matter in the analysis, and 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 for your project.

Current events write-ups (3 x 7% each)

You will be assigned to read recent news stories from reputable newspapers and magazines. Each write-up is 1-2 pages providing summary, identifying how PE is applied and/or suggesting how it *might be* applied and with what effect, and providing evaluation and personal reaction. These assignments take the place of exams; they are designed to evaluate your knowledge of course material. Current events write-ups give you practice applying course material to real-world events and prepare you for your project.

Project (40% divided over a 5-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 will include both library/internet research to find existing knowledge and original research such as interviews or map analysis.

There are three scaffold assignments in which you report on progress and receive feedback (5% each). The final project is to produce a visual product that you will present to the class, such as a photo essay, video, map, poster, artwork, performance, or virtual 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 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

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.

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

Use of AI: Consider AI to be like any other internet source: you cannot simply copy its work as if it is your own. You can use AI to generate ideas, pull thoughts together, check grammar, etc., but you must do your own, unique work. Remember that these assignments are designed not only to have you communicate what you know but to help you learn more, including by reflecting on what you are learning and putting that in words. AI cannot learn or reflect for you (if AI does it, then you have neither learned nor reflected!). [Alexandra Petri, a humor/opinion columnist at the Washington Post, recently wrote a commentary that I think captures the issue quite well.](#)

I can call into question any assignment that appears to be AI generated—for example, I might give you a 0 and give you the opportunity to demonstrate that you, not AI, know the material and wrote the assignment.

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

Subject to change; updates will appear in Carmen

Date	Topic	What's due
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Unit 1: Introduction to Political Ecology

Tu: 8/20	Introduction to the course, political ecology, sustainability, and each other	
Th: 8/22	Power, nature, difference, and knowledge	Reading: Robbins 1
Tu: 8/27	Why is Political Ecology needed?	Reading: Robbins 2
Th: 8/29	Why Political Ecology, cont.	Reading: Robbins 3

Unit 2: Political ecology of environmental degradation

Tu: 9/3	Colonialism and marginalization 1	Reading: Robbins 4
Th: 9/5	Colonialism and marginalization 2	<i>No assignment</i>
Tu: 9/10	(Sustainable) Development 1	Reading: Adger et. al; Monbiot
Th: 9/12	(Sustainable) Development 2	Initial Project Topic
Tu: 9/17	Political Ecology of degradation: case study	Academic article 1
Th: 9/19	Current events and unit conclusions	Current events 1

Unit 3: Political ecology of environmental governance

Tu: 9/24	Conservation and control	Reading: Robbins 5
Th: 9/26	Protected areas, violence, and control	Reading: Betoko + film
Tu: 10/1	Market-based environmentalism 1	Reading: Lave and Doyle 1
Th: 10/3	Market-based environmentalism 2	Reading: Lave and Doyle 2
Tu: 10/8	Semester Project: In-class information and activities	<i>No assignment</i>
Th: 10/10	NO CLASS, AUTUMN BREAK	<i>No assignment</i>
Tu: 10/15	21st Century Socionatures	Reading: Film
Th: 10/17	Current events and unit conclusions	Current events 2

Unit 4: Political ecology of chemicals and environmental knowledge

Tu: 10/22	Chemical geographies/ PE of knowledge 1	Reading: Lerner; Bagenstose
Th: 10/24	Chemical geographies/ PE of knowledge 2	Project Update 1
Tu: 10/29	Chemical geographies/ PE of knowledge 3	Reading: Suryanarayanan
Th: 10/31	Chemical geographies/ PE of knowledge 4	<i>No assignment</i>
Tu: 11/5	Political ecology of environmental data 1	Reading: Goldstein
Th: 11/7	Political ecology of environmental data 2	Project Update 2
Tu: 11/12	Contesting toxicity 1	Academic Article 2
Th: 11/14	Contesting toxicity 2	<i>No assignment</i>

Unit 5: Semester projects

Tu: 11/19	Project presentations 1	Visual product
Th: 11/21	Project presentations 2	Visual product
Tu: 11/26	Work on Current Events and Written Product assignments	Current Events 3
Th: 11/28	NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING	<i>No assignment</i>
Tu: 12/3	Course conclusions	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

Ohio State has had a longstanding practice of making reasonable academic accommodations for students' religious beliefs and practices in accordance with applicable law. In 2023, Ohio State updated its practice to align with new state legislation. Under this new provision, students must be in early communication with their instructors regarding any known accommodation requests for religious beliefs and practices, providing notice of specific dates for which they request alternative accommodations within 14 days after the first instructional day of the course. Instructors in turn shall not question the sincerity of a student's religious or spiritual belief system in reviewing such requests and shall keep requests for accommodations confidential.

With sufficient notice, instructors will provide students with reasonable alternative accommodations with regard to examinations and other academic requirements with respect to students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices by allowing up to three absences each semester for the student to attend or participate in religious activities.

Examples of religious accommodations can include, but are not limited to, rescheduling an exam, altering the time of a student's presentation, allowing make-up assignments to substitute for missed class work, or flexibility in due dates or research responsibilities. If concerns arise about a requested accommodation, instructors are to consult their tenure initiating unit head for assistance.

A student's request for time off shall be provided if the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's ability to take an exam or meet an academic requirement and the student has notified their instructor, in writing during the first 14 days after the course begins, of the date of each absence. Although students are required to provide notice within the first 14 days after a course begins, instructors are strongly encouraged to work with the student to provide a reasonable accommodation if a request is made outside the notice period. A student may not be penalized for an absence approved under this policy.

If students have questions or disputes related to academic accommodations, they should contact their course instructor, and then their department or college office. For questions or to report discrimination or harassment based on religion, individuals should contact the Office of Institutional Equity.

Policy: Religious Holidays, Holy Days and Observances

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.

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 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/>.