

**ES224**  
**Fall 2017**

**T R 9:40-11:00**  
**Palamountain 301**

## **ES224 Political Ecology**

**Instructor:** Nurcan Atalan-Helicke, Ph.D. Assistant Prof. Environmental Studies

**Office:** Dana 192

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 2-3 pm, Thursday 11:30-12:30 and by appointment

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**Phone:** 580-8372

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Course web page: on **Blackboard** (<https://learn.skidmore.edu/webapps/login/> )

You should check Blackboard regularly for updates and news about the course and to access readings from sources other than the textbook, the syllabus, announcements, exam study reviews, and all other course-related material. If you have registered late and cannot access the website for the class, be sure to contact me so that I can add you to the list!

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### **Course Description:**

How does political ecology differ from ecology? How is nature constructed and deconstructed? How do existing policies and stakeholder interactions affect the society’s use of natural resources? To address these questions, this course provides a multiple-perspective approach on the relationship between society and the environment, specifically focusing on literature from the growing field of political ecology. Political ecology is based on the belief that environmental conflicts and management cannot be studied without careful examination of the pertinent political, cultural and historical factors.

Political ecology approaches the relationship between humans and nature by focusing on the so-called social-environmental “dialectic”: the ways humans and their environments mutually shape each other and the ways culture and nature “interpenetrate.” Drawing on political economy and human ecology, political ecology approach highlights how these dynamics are a product of the history of particular places and people, and how they interrelate across different spatial and temporal scales, from the individual resource user to international regulatory bodies and from earlier times to the present day.

A specific question political ecology deals with is how resource conflicts arise and become resolved. As will be clear in the range of case studies we cover, practitioners of political ecology try to explain environmental conflicts in terms of the particularities of place, culture and history. The nuances of local level details are set in relation to larger events occurring in the broader political economy since both local and non-local factors influence the decisions of a resource user. The field is predicated on the assumption that our environmental problems are often common, but their causes are complex and changing therefore solutions must be specific to time and place.

Throughout this course, we will consistently return to the theoretical frames we will develop in the first few weeks of the class. These are not only crucial for an understanding of political ecology as an

analytical approach, but also to understanding the mechanisms of the uneven distribution of environmental and political economic opportunity and goods across different groups of people. The course will introduce students to the array of broad political and socio-economic forces that shape the relationship between humans and nature. These forces are multiple and interact in complex ways over a set of interlocking scales from the local to the global and require each of us to rethink many of the ways we have learned to analyze and understand “environmental phenomena.”

### **Course Goals:**

By drawing on political various theories, this course will develop a critical and historical analysis of human-environment interaction that integrates the study of ecological and social-cultural processes. The various case studies, including four regional political ecology studies, will help to place environmental politics in the context of broader social and political dynamics. The service learning component offers a case study of urban political ecology, uneven access and power relations and will help us consider how institutional and social arrangements for environmental governance affect political economic, social, cultural and ecological dynamics. There is much more material than we can possibly cover during the semester. I hope that the course will encourage you to explore further on your own questions of how to analyze and understand environmental issues from a new perspective.

### **Learning Objectives:**

#### Basic Concepts—students should be able to:

- define key concepts used by political ecologists, such as political economy, ecological imperialism, ecological injustice, and differentiate between various narratives of environmental change and their repercussions of policy solutions.
- understand different theoretical frameworks that guide political ecology work
- identify connections among diverse forces and phenomena—such as uneven patterns of human consumption and production and uneven distribution of economic and environmental consequences—within societies and across nations and world regions.
- describe how politics, economics, ecology, consumption, and identity interact in a range of empirical cases from different geographical regions.
- analyze how multiple forces interact on a set of interlocking scales from local to global to shape specific environmental problems and their solutions.

#### Skills and application—students should be able to:

- work in collaborative and interdisciplinary contexts to address the relationship of human and environment issues.
- respond originally and lucidly to a series of reading based, experience based, and research based topics.
- become familiar with and employ interdisciplinary group problem-solving skills in solving a real-world environmental problem for a real client (asking questions, analyzing empirical evidence, applying methodologies to answer questions, and reporting results).
- gain experience in working within a diverse cross-section of stakeholders to enrich their understanding and appreciation for the diversity of issues and perspectives within an urban setting.

**Honor Code:** As students of Skidmore College you will be held to the academic and ethical standards outlined in the Skidmore College Honor Code. Please refer to the website below for the full honor code, which is also available in the college catalog. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated in this class and will be brought to the appropriate academic authorities.

<http://cms.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.cfm>

**Academic Services:** The Office of Student Academic Services (Located on the first floor of the Starbuck Center) offers a wide variety of services to improve academic skills and help students take full advantage of the academic opportunities available at Skidmore. For example, current services include (but are not limited to): peer tutoring; one-on-one or small group academic support; support for students with disabilities; ESL support (including additional professional tutoring support to the Writing Center); support to some students on waivers, returning from medical leaves, and recipients of Unsatisfactory Work Notices.

**If you are a student with a disability and need any academic accommodations, please be sure that you have made your requests for such accommodations to the [Coordinator for Students with Disabilities](#), Meg Hegener. You will need to provide documentation that verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call Meg at 580-8161, contact her by e-mail at [mhegener@skidmore.edu](mailto:mhegener@skidmore.edu), or stop by the Office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.**

**ADVISING and COMMUNICATION.** For us to get to know each other and for me to be of assistance, **I urge you to come see me during my office hours.** In addition to issues related to our class, you can use these hours to talk about your education, your career path, and your engagement with the world around you. If my office hours do not work, you can also schedule an appointment for another time by email (Please put ES224—PolEcol in the subject line).

I also believe that many of the most important things we learn happen outside this classroom. If you would like to communicate with me outside the classroom and office hours, please note that I endeavor to return all emails within 24 hours, but please be advised that I reserve my weekends for my family and do not check e-mail.

You should also know how to get in touch with at least two of your classmates to get notes, check facts and discuss issues.

1) Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

2) Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

## Course Format and Requirements

This class has one required textbook:

Robbins, Paul. 2012. Political Ecology (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard.

ES224 emphasizes reading, writing, talking and listening. To do well in the class and to achieve course goals, students must do the assigned readings before class, attend class, participate in discussions and complete the assignments.

This course is also a service learning class, which means that a core component of the course will actually happen outside of the classroom. You are required to work 15 hours during the semester on a service-learning project. It is important to understand from the beginning that this component of the class is time-consuming, and you should be prepared to devote the necessary effort to fulfill this requirement. Service learning assignments contribute to one-third component of your final grade, and you need to commit yourself to working on it effectively. That is, you will need to show up for your service-learning project when you say you will, you will need to work well with others in your group and with your community partners, and to write in your service-learning journal regularly.

The course is based around interactive lectures, including small and large group discussions. There will be short lectures, but the emphasis is on student involvement in discussions and other activities. You should feel free to ask questions and offer comments at all times. We will read approximately 30-40 pages besides chapters from the book assigned to you.

Grades/Evaluations will be based on:

Attendance, Participation and reading reflections	20%
Exams (Midterm 20%, Final exam 25%)	45 %
Class discussion facilitation	10 %
Service Learning Project	25%
Journal Entries	5%
Project report	15%
Presentation to the organization	5%

**LATE WORK: A late penalty of 10% of the total points for an assignment will be subtracted for each 24 hour period that any of the above assignments are handed in late.**

**LECTURE.** Lectures start promptly at 9:40 am. Please show your fellow students and me the courtesy of coming to class on time. Further, please do not sleep, read, text message, or listen to an i-Pod during class. If you do so, you may be asked to leave the classroom. This means that you not only lose points for attendance/participation but also miss important material covered for the exam. Laptops may be used during lecture for note taking or if you have academic accommodations that include the use of a laptop or other electronic device. However, if you are found to use the laptop for other reasons, you will not be able to use your computer anymore through the rest of the class. Please keep cell phones turned off during class.

**ATTENDANCE.** Your attendance grades consist of attendance, participation and reading comments. We will carry out in-class discussions based on readings. Thus, it is crucial for you to attend the class and do the readings beforehand. You will also complete reading responses based on readings, assigned for that particular class. Attendance/participation grade is worth **20 percent**.

Please note that you cannot miss class on a Service Learning discussion day. Check the syllabus for due dates and meetings times with Sustainable Saratoga.

**EXAM:** There will be two exams for this class, which will consist of a combination of short-answer definitions of concepts and long-answer essays that draw from the material covered in lecture and the reading assignments. The mid-term is **20 percent** and the final exam is worth **25 percent**.

**CASE STUDY ANALYSIS:** Throughout the semester, we will examine several case studies, six of them are countries (China, Japan, India, the USA, Mexico, Brazil) and one of them is about zika and public health. The goal is to understand local contexts in which environmental values are translated into environmental action. You will work in groups of 3, summarize the paper with 4-5 highlights in 10 minutes, and how it connects to the concepts we discuss in class. You will bring 6-7 questions to guide the class discussion, submit to the instructor, and use the next 50 minutes to guide the session. The questions, your presentation and class facilitation is worth **10 percent**.

**SERVICE LEARNING:** Service-learning emphasizes the connections between community needs and what you learn in the classroom. It enriches your academic life and life-long learning by engaging you in meaningful hands-on service to the communities. There is a circular relationship to service-learning: you should apply what you learn in the classroom to your community work, and your community work should feed back into the class. During the semester, while completing your SL project, you will complete a journal. Each journal entry should run about 250-300 words each and you will turn in two of these journal entries. You should create a word document and add it to your SL project visits. In each of your journal entries, you may briefly recount what you did for your project during that week/ duration between two entries and issues for follow up.

Your journal is an analytical and reflective space; pick apart the readings and your service-learning work, and try to develop insights about one, or both, in each journal entry. In addition, you should use the journal space as a place to reflect on your own behaviors, attitudes, and outlooks in light of the readings-project interactions that you present.

More information can be found in the Service Learning Project description.

## **COURSE READINGS\***

### **WHAT IS POLITICAL ECOLOGY?**

Sep 7 R – Introduction (SL + writing+ concepts)

Robbins, Paul. 2012. Political ecology: a critical introduction. Ch. 1, —The hatchet and the seed: what is political ecology? 11-24

Sep 12 T Service learning project discussion 1: Off-setting Scope 3 GHG emissions  
Environmental footprint of air travel:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/apr/06/aviation-q-and-a>

Sustainable study abroad?

<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/environment/universities-carbon-footprint-of-study-abroad-programs/>

Skidmore Greenhouse Gas emissions (2013 report)

<https://www.skidmore.edu/sustainability/documents/GreenhouseGasReport.pdf>

Sep 14 R: Waste

Moore, 2011. Global garbage: waste, trash trading and local garbage politics

Delhi garbage wars (16:35)

<http://www.politicaecology.eu/new-media/entitle-tv-content/31-entitletv/169-delhi-waste-wars>

Sep 19 T (Sustainable Saratoga representative class visit)

Robbins, Paul. 2012. Political ecology: a critical introduction. Ch. 3, —The critical tools (pp. 49-67) (read carefully) \*Marxism; feminism; critical environmental history

Keil, R. (2003): —Urban Political Ecology Urban Geography, 24(8), 723–738

Sep 21 R Robbins, Paul. 2012. Political ecology: a critical introduction. Ch. 3 —The critical tools (pp. 67-81) (starting with postcolonial studies)

Neil Smith: There is no such thing as a natural disaster (RR1)

*(ONE-PAGE, double spaced, Reflection submitted in class: What does Neil Smith argue? Which perspective does Smith use? How does he substantiate his argument? What is your take on Smith's argument?)*

Sep 26 T Judith Enck class visit

ProPublica 2016. Hell and High Water: Preparing Houston for the next storm

Interactive version: <https://projects.propublica.org/houston/>

### **CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

Sep 28 R Robbins, Paul. 2012. Political ecology: a critical introduction. Ch. 4 —82-100

Galt, R. 2008. "Toward an integrated understanding of pesticide use intensity in Costa Rican vegetable farming." Human ecology 36(5): 655-677.

Oct 3 T →

Robbins, Paul. 2012. Ch. 5—Challenges in Ecology 103-121

Jepson, W. 2005. A Disappearing Biome? Reconsidering Land-Cover Change in the Brazilian Savanna. *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 171, No. 2: 99-111 (RR2)

*(ONE-PAGE, double spaced, Reflection submitted in class: What kind of data does the author use? What does she say? How does she say it? What does she mean?)*

### III. POLITICAL ECOLOGY NOW

Oct 5 R Robbins, P. 2012. Ch. 6: Challenges in social construction (pp.122-142).

Davis, Diana K. (2004) —Desert 'Wastes' of the Maghreb: Desertification Narratives in French Colonial Environmental History of North Africa, *Cultural Geographies* 11(4): 359-387. (I-C discussion—group-short-10 min)

Oct 10 T *Case Study 1: China (Facilitation 1)*

P. Ho. 2001. Greening Without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China. *Development and Change*. 32: 893-921.

Oct 12 R

Degradation and marginalization

Robbins, Paul. 2012. Ch. 8: Degradation and marginalization. (pp.157-175)

Benjaminsen, Tor A., Jens B. Aune, and Daouda Sidibé. 2010. "A critical political ecology of cotton and soil fertility in Mali." *Geoforum* 41 (4): 647-656. (RR3)

*(ONE-PAGE, double spaced, Reflection submitted in class: What kind of data do the authors use? What do they say? How do they say it? What is your take on their argument and their research methods?)*

Oct 17 T

*Service Learning Project*

*Discussion 1*

Robbins, 2012. Conservation and control- Ch. 9 pp.176-198

Archabald, K., and L. Naughton-Treves. 2001. Tourism revenue-sharing around national parks in Western Uganda: early efforts to identify and reward local communities. *Environmental Conservation* 28 (2):135-149.

Oct 19 R

S, B. Pritchard, 2012. Japan Forum: An Envirotechnical Disaster: Nature, Technology, and Politics at Fukushima. *Environmental History*

### Oct 24 T **MID-TERM EXAM**

Oct 26 R Carbon offset markets

Bumpus, A.G. and D. M. Liverman. 2011. Carbon colonialism? Offsets, greenhouse gas reductions and sustainable development. In *Global Political Ecologies*. Peet et al (eds). pp. 203-224.

Oct 31. *Case Study 2- Zika, poverty and global public health (Facilitation 3)*

E. Tambo et al. 2016. Deciphering emerging Zika and dengue viral epidemics: Implications for global maternal–child health burden. *Journal of Infection and Public Health*. 9(3): 240-250

Nov 2 R Environmental conflict -I

Robbins, P. 2012. Ch.10 Environmental conflict (pp. 199-212).

Turner, Matthew D. "Political ecology and the moral dimensions of “resource conflicts”: the case of farmer–herder conflicts in the Sahel." *Political geography* 23.7 (2004): 863-889. (RR4)

Nov 7 T Political ecologies of energy - I

Ariza-Montobbio, Pere, et al. "The political ecology of *Jatropha* plantations for biodiesel in Tamil Nadu, India." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37.4 (2010): 875-897.

Nov 9 *Case Study 3: India (Facilitation 4)*

D. A. Ghertner, 2011. *Green evictions: environmental discourses of a “slum-free” Delhi*. Pp.145-165.

Nov 14 T Political ecologies of security –I\*\*

J. Kosek. 2011. The natures of the beast: On the new uses of the honeybee pp.227-253.

J. Masco, 2011. Mutant ecologies: radioactive life in post-Cold War New Mexico. pp. 285-303.

Nov 16 R *Case Study 4- USA*

P. Bigger and B. Neimark. 2017. *Weaponizing nature: The geopolitical ecology of the U.S.’s biofuel program*. *Political Geography*. 60: 13-22.

Nov 21 T–Environmental identity and social movements

Robbins, P. 2012. Ch. 11 Environmental subjects and identities (pp. 215-230).

Ishiyama, N. 2003. Environmental justice and American Indian tribal sovereignty: Case study of a land-use conflict in skull valley, Utah. *Antipode* 35 (1):119-139.

Service Learning (SL) Journal Entry Two Due- SL Discussion (20 minutes)

## **NOV 23, THANKSGIVING, NO CLASS**

Nov 28- Political ecologies of security- II

J. Sundberg. 2011. Diabolic Caminos in the Desert and Cat Fights on the Río: A Posthumanist Political Ecology of Boundary Enforcement in the United States–Mexico Borderlands. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 101 (2): 318-336.

Nov 30 R Political ecologies of energy-II

Luiz A. Martinelli and Solange Filoso. 2008. Expansion of Sugarcane Ethanol Production in Brazil: Environmental and Social Challenges. Vol. 18, No. 4 (Jun., 2008), pp. 885-898

Dec 5 T  
Service learning Discussion 2- presentations

Dec 7 R  
Robbins, 2012. Ch. 12. 231-243.  
Turner, M. 2013. Political Ecology 1: An alliance with resilience? Progress in Human Geography.  
38(4): 616-623.

**FINAL EXAM (Partially Cumulative) December 13, 2016; 9:00-11:00 Palamountain 301**

***\*\*Any part of this syllabus and schedule may be altered throughout the semester.\*\* Changes in topics, readings (different/additional readings) or assignments will be announced in class and on Blackboard.***