Course outline

This course uses a geographical political ecology lens to interrogate conflicts (broadly defined) between people and institutions over natural resources, in both developed and developing world contexts. The course will first review the literature on political ecology as an explanatory framework by tracing out its intellectual genealogy and outlining some of the current approaches and perspectives utilized in this subfield. Next, we will critique traditional approaches to the study of natural resources related conflicts. The remainder of the course will rely on theoretical and empirical studies, which help to unveil the complexities associated with conflict environments. Seven specific themes will be addressed in two parts. The first part concentrates on political ecological approaches to the study of environmental commodities and (violent) conflict and encompasses: (1) population, resource scarcity and green security, and (2) conflict commodities and extractive natural resources (oil, diamonds, forests, and water). The second part of the course probes deeper into the social and political aspects of environmental conflicts and specifically examines: (3) gender & the environment; (4) land, culture & identity; (5) climate change; (6) food security, and; (7) conflicts between people and protected areas.

Course prerequisites

There are no prerequisites, but it is assumed that students have a working knowledge of where places are located and have the ability to find out if they do not. This is a class that is primarily intended for master’s and PhD students who are focused on research. It is theoretically heavy and draws on multiple epistemological approaches to the study of people and the environment.

Academic Misconduct

Students are advised to thoroughly examine the student advocacy and judicial affairs website to understand what is meant by academic misconduct. The website can be accessed from here (http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/).
**Course readings**

Additional readings (required): Will be provided as needed as pdf files on CANVAS

Textbook (Required):
   *Also available as an ebook*

Textbooks (Supplementary):

**Readings Responses**

A critical component of graduate education is the gain the ability to thoughtfully read and critique academic works as well as to formalize these critiques in a written form. To help you achieve this goal, you will be required to write a two to four-page response to the readings each week interval. You will receive a prompt for the first of the three responses You will post these responses to the CANVAS —Discussion section at preset due dates. During the end of each class period the instructor will provide a preview of the following assignment. It is important to develop and refine your own ideas as part of these responses in preparation for the final (term) paper (30% of Final Grade)

**Discussion Leadership**

Classes are discussion-oriented and draw heavily on readings from the literature (both the required and in some cases, the supplemental readings). To help facilitate class discussion, two students will volunteer to provide a series of questions for each class meeting. Questions must address concepts covered in the readings for that week and students must be prepared to clarify the material. Questions and any relevant discussion points should be posted to Canvas by the day before class. (10% of Final Grade).

**Term Paper and Research Proposal**

A major component of this class is a research paper. This will involve posing an interesting question related to political ecology, environmental security and conflict, and then setting out to answer this question through library research (in some cases you may want to examine existing datasets on conflict, such as those related to climate change or human rights). You will be graded based on the content presented in the paper as well as organization, clarity, citations, etc. A number of intermediary due dates will be established, to help you along with the paper. The research paper should not exceed 20 double-spaced pages.

1. Research Proposal and Bibliography (2to 5 pages) - Due (to the GSI by Friday October 11 at 5:00pm (10% of Final Grade)
   - This will entail posing an interesting problem or question related to ‘conflict’ and the ‘environment’ both of which are broadly defined.
   - Topics should be related to your on-going career and research interests
• A tentative outline should provide you with the starting point for your investigations. This outline should be similar to the structure you have followed in previous papers (Introduction -> research question -> Literature Review -> Methods -> Study area/Region -> Results/discussions -> Conclusions
• You will then provide a list of references from which you will draw on to either support a line of argument or to refute a dominant narrative
• Should be built on themes which we have been addressing as part of the class
• Be sure to sketch out preliminary diagrams and/or figures that illustrate conceptual models or networks of actor interactions

3. Peer Review of Paper Draft - Due (to reviewers) Sunday December 1 at 5:00pm (10% of Final Grade)

Peer Review Exercise:
A peer review exercise will be conducted to help you strengthen the structure and execution of your term paper. You will receive comments from at least three other class members (and you, in turn will provide three students with feedback). The modalities of this exercise will be discussed on the first day of class and a guideline sheet will be prepared to help you organize your critiques as part of the peer review process. More information will be provided as the semester progresses.

• The research question should be clearly spelt out (i.e. the purpose of this paper is to...)
• You will then set about out to answer this question through library research, and in some instances, the analysis of relevant data sets.
• The scope and intent of the investigation in the paper must also be clearly delineated as well as any supporting analytical and theoretical frameworks
• More fully fleshed out narrative emanating from the proposal
• Should be properly structured
• Should rely on evidence from secondary sources (either journal articles) or existing datasets
• Methods should be clearly delineated
• Papers should be organized, written clearly and free of errors.
• All sources used in preparing your paper as well as references for supporting maps, figures and tables, must be cited, including data sources.
• Use standard citation and presentation forms (e.g., Kate Turabian’s Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations)
• Paper should ideally be innovative and build on lines of investigation, which are new and novel. They should provide a good counter-narrative to dominant discourses of conflicts over natural resources.
• Paper should also try and stay away from using ‘straw-person’ arguments (for example, commonly citing neo-Malthusian and apolitical explanations). Rather the paper should expand on existing literatures, which have already demonstrated that these explanations are less accurate and imprecise. Your work should seek to move these conversations forward without necessarily grounding it in, for example, Neo-Malthusian narratives.
• Should be as detailed as possible
• Peer review sessions will occur outside of class hours
• The guiding principles for a useful peer review are as follows: 1) engage at the level of ideas; 2) back up your comments with specific examples from the draft; and 3) be precise when giving advice.
• Comments should revolve around: (1) structure, and; (2) execution.
• You will prepare two sets of written evaluation: (1) confidential comments to the ‘editor’ (me); (2) blind comments to the author. These should be e-mailed to the GSI (bsindhu@umich.edu) by the due date.
• The peer review exercise will be double blind. I.e. you do not know who is writing the paper and the author of the paper will not know who the reviewer is.
• You will provide a rating out of 5 (5 being a high rating and 1 a low rating)

4. Final Paper (14-15 double spaced pages excluding references) - Due (to me and on CANVAS) Friday December 13 @ 5:00 pm (30% of Final Grade)

• The paper should be a polished, clear and concise product. Don't BS your way through the paper – I will know!
• Should also significantly incorporate changes from the project draft and peer review
• Final format should be similar to a journal which you would ideally like your work published in

Finally, I will not tolerate late submissions, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Grading

Seminar Participation: 10%
Discussion Leadership: 10%
Readings Responses (3 in total): 30%
Research Proposal and Bibliography: 10%
Peer Review of Paper Draft 10%
Final Paper: 30%
Total: 100%

Final grades are based on a total percentage for the term. Grade cutoff points (in terms of percentages) are as follows: A+ (100%), A (95.00 to 99.99%), A- (90.00 to 94.99%), B+ (87.00 to 89.99%), B (83.00 to 86.99%), B- (80.00 to 82.99%), C+ (77.00 to 79.99%), C (73.00 to 86.99%), C- (70.00 to 72.99%), D+ (67.00 to 69.99%), D (63.00 to 66.99%), D- (60.00 to 62.99%), E (50.00 to 59.99%), F (40.00 to 49.99%)

*Tentative Schedule

* Note that during the course it is possible that some of the topics and readings will have their dates changed, or contents altered. I will try to provide as much advance warning of changes as possible.

PART I: POLITICAL ECOLOGY AS A CONCEPTUAL & ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Week 1: Course Overview

Tuesday Sep 3 Course Overview and Orientation

Week 2: What is Political Ecology I?

Tuesday Sep 10 Introduction to Political Ecology

Required Readings

Supplementary


Week 3: What is Policy Ecology II?

Tuesday Sep 17

The Critical Tools of Political Ecology

Required Readings


Supplementary

(Note: Please also read the commentary [by Michael Watts and Nick Middleton] and author response [by Piers Blaikie] in the ‘Classics in Human Geography Revisited’)
Week 4: What is Political Ecology III?

Tuesday Sep 24  Challenges in Ecology, Social Construction & Explanation

Required Readings


Supplementary


Week 5: What is Political Ecology IV?

Tuesday Oct 01  Degradation & Marginalization, Conservation & Control, Environmental Conflict, etc.

Required Readings:


Supplementary


Tuesday Oct 01  Reading Response 1 Due (Post on CANVAS AND as a hardcopy)
PART II: POLITICAL ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMODITIES AND (VIOLENT) CONFLICT

Week 6: Population, Resource Scarcity & Green Security

Tuesday Oct 08

*Neo-Malthusian and apolitical explanations of population & scarcity*

**Required Readings (First Half):**


**Supplementary**


*Political-Ecological Explanations*

**Required Readings (Second Half):**


**Supplementary:**


RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHY (2 TO 5 PAGES) - DUE (TO GSI) FRIDAY OCTOBER 11 AT 5:00PM
Week 7: NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)

Tuesday Oct 15  No Class (Fall Break)

Week 8: Conflict Commodities (Oil)

Tuesday Oct 22  *The Political Ecology/Economy of War*

Required Readings (First Half):

Supplementary

*Petro violence*

Required Readings (Second Half):

Supplementary


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**Week 9: Conflict Commodities (Diamonds & Other Gems)**

**Tuesday Oct 29**

**Gems: A Resource Curse?**

**Required Readings (First Half): Conceptual Approaches**


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Certification & Commodity Chains**


**Supplementary**


Tuesday Oct 29  
Reading Response 2 Due (Post on CANVAS and hardcopy to class)

Week 10:  
Conflict Commodities (Forests)

Tuesday Nov 05

Required Readings (First Half):

**Forest exploitation in the developing world**


Supplementary


**Required Readings (Second Half)**

*The Politics (and life) of Forests in the developed world*


**Supplementary**


Week 11: **Conflict Commodities (Water)**

Tuesday Nov 12

**Required Readings (First Half):**

*Conceptual Overviews*


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Case studies**


**Supplementary**


**PART III: PROBING DEEPER INTO THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL ASPECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS**

**Week 12:** Gender & Environmental Conflict

Tuesday Nov 19

**Required Readings (First Half):**  
*Slow Violence and Feminist political Ecology*


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half):**  
*Gender Politics and Conflicts*


**Supplementary**


**Tuesday Nov 19  Reading Response 3 Due to GSI and Post on CANVAS**

**PEER REVIEW OF PAPER DRAFT - DUE (TO REVIEWERS) SUNDAY December 1 AT 5:00PM (10% OF FINAL GRADE)**

**Week 13: Climate Change & Environmental Conflict**

**Tuesday Nov 26**

**Required Readings (First Half): Climate Change & Conflict in Darfur: Fact or Fiction**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Does Climate Change Drive Violence?**


**Supplementary**


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**Week 14**  
**Food, Security & Environmental Conflict**

**Tuesday Dec 3**

**Required Readings (first Half)**

**Neoliberalism and Food Security/Politics**


**Supplementary**

Required Readings (Second Half):  

**Food Sovereignty**


Supplementary  


**Week 15:** Conservation Conflicts

Tuesday Dec 10

**Required Readings (First Half): War, by Conservation**


**Required Reading (Second Half): Should a Political Ecologist also be an Activist?**


**Epilogue (supplementary)**


**Supplementary**


**HARDCOPY FINAL PAPER (NO MORE THAN 3500 Words Approx. 14 – 15 DOUBLE SPACED PAGES EXCLUDING REFERENCES) - DUE ON CANVAS and to the GSI FRIDAY DECEMBER 11 @ 5:00 PM (30% OF FINAL GRADE)**