

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

POL307
Fall 2019

Instructor: Takeshi Ito
Office: 10-530
Office hours: by appointment

Class meets: Monday, 1:30-3:10pm@10-B105A
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Important Dates

Final Exam Week in January: TBA

GENERAL GUIDELINE

Course Description

This course critically explores the relationship between nature and society. Nature is neither inherently pristine nor indefinitely unchanged; rather constantly shaped by human and non-human activities. The current state of nature is, then, a product of the interactions between human and non-human actors in complex social-ecological systems.

In the age of climate change, extreme weather patterns are causing unpredictable and unprecedented natural disasters. It has abundantly become clear that human activities have contributed to the accelerated pace of climate change. Various forms of environmental inequality arising from power relations among states, markets, and civil society as well as the increasing global flows of capital, goods, and people across national boundaries.

It is therefore not only important but also imperative for each of us to understand how the complex interactions between humans and non-humans have historically reworked the environment. With a proper understanding of the trajectory, we can think about ways in which humans and non-humans relate to each other—i.e., coexistence, cohabitation, and coproduction—beyond the human-centric view of the world.

Moving from theory to practice, this course provides students with analytical concepts and tools that enable students to identify key drivers of agrarian and environmental change, to understand how and why the impacts of environmental change are unevenly spread across the globe, and to develop relational approaches to and solutions for real-world issues sustainability.

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class Engagement: 20%

A main goal of this class is to nurture critical thinking. Although the class will be structured around lectures and discussions, I try to create as many opportunities as possible for students to actively engage with reading and discussions. *Being in the classroom is not class engagement.* Students' participation is evaluated based on their contributions to group-based discussions. *Please print out the readings and come to class prepared*, having completed your readings and reading to discuss them. Ask each other hard questions, listen to your peers' responses and respect the opinions of instructors and classmates. My hope is that the course will stimulate your intellectual curiosity and help you find your academic interests that you'd like to pursue in depth. Remember, there are no wrong answers; but you must be able to support your argument with sound reasoning!

Attendance is very important. I expect you to attend every class. Missing class will hurt you in two ways. First, you will miss the thesis of the readings that we will take up in class. This will have significant impact on what you get out of this course. Second, we will dock five points from your final grade for each unexcused absence. If you are late to the class and miss attendance, that also counts as missing a class. **More than two undocumented absences will automatically result in a failing grade (no credit).** Should you be forced to miss a class because of sickness or family emergency, you must present a letter from a doctor or the Chair of your department. Should you be forced to miss class because of athletic and other activities, you must inform the instructor ahead of time and present a letter from your supervisor.

2-a. Summaries: 30%

Students are expected to write a short summary (around 3-400 words) of the readings for each session and to submit to the course website on Moodle by 9 am each class the reading is due. This is a great way to organize your thoughts and to check your comprehension. Students' summaries are evaluated on the basis of comprehension and timeliness: Two points for an excellent summary; one point for a summary of acceptable quality; and zero point for late or non-submission. Plagiarism automatically results in a failing grade for the entire course (see Academic Conduct).

3. Final exam: 50%

The midterm exam is meant to test your knowledge on the basis of what we have learned in the course. In other words, if you have completed all the readings, come to the lectures, and proactively participated in discussions, you will find that the final is to reconfirm what we have learned in the class. The final is composed of two sections: ID questions and essay questions. You will be asked to identify a set of terms and phrases from the lectures and readings and to answer short essay questions. The exam will be closed-book and closed-note.

Grade Distributions

Class Engagement: 20%

Summaries:	30%
Final:	50%

Grade cutoff points are as follows: A = 91-100%; B = 81-90%; C = 71-80%; D = 61-70%; NC = < 62%.

Sophia's Ecological Footprint (Extra Points: Max 5 points)

Do you know what are our ecological footprints on campus? Over 10,000 faculty, staff, and students study and work on our campus every day. Given the size of our campus, this is a fairly large community with high population density. Our ecological footprint—i.e., the quantity of nature to support our life—must be significantly large. On one hand, our impacts on the earth can be measured by the amount of resources we use to make our activities possible such as 1) water, 2) electricity, 3) food waste, 4) plastic waste, 5) industrial waste, 6) general waste, etc. On the other hand, our conscious efforts to minimize our impacts on the earth can be measured by the ability to conserve, reuse, and recycle such resources.

Expectations and Responsibilities

I am excited about this course! I expect you to be excited about the course, too. This excitement carries us through the entire semester. However, sustaining the excitement is not easy. There are times when you are distracted by what surrounds you in everyday lives. But I want you to keep focused on what you are doing throughout the semester. I want you to engage with the readings which may seem sometimes abstract and challenging to you. **Never give up on the readings!** If you cannot comprehend at all, try to pick up some key points, and try to capture a big picture that the author is trying to put together. In other words, you should not be bogged down by every detail, and come to class with your thoughts and questions. It is my hope and responsibility that some disconnected ideas make a sense by the end of the semester. Therefore, I encourage you to keep up with your good work because only such a work habit can bear fruit in the long run.

I expect you to come to class prepared to engage. I believe that active and intelligent class participation is essential part of effective learning. Being able to address your thoughts in class is an important skill that you will need to develop in/beyond this semester. Getting readings done does not mean that you have something to say about them. **This class requires at least two-three hours of preparation each week**, depending on your familiarity with key concepts in the field. I strongly suggest that after finishing the reading assignment for each class session, you spend 15-30 minutes preparing for class. This time helps organize your thoughts that you might want to address in class. In addition, it is important to know that what I expect from you is not accuracy but your effort to engage. You can expect us to work very hard to create a valuable learning environment for you. **I am always open to suggestions as to how I can make my class a better environment for you to learn.** I will give you feedback on your paper promptly, meet with you for advising, and write you reference letters (e.g., internships, scholarships, and graduate schools) in/beyond this semester. In other words, I will make time for you.

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind are strictly forbidden. Plagiarism entails borrowing ideas from others without attributing sources. Copying from the Internet and pasting on your summaries is the most primitive form of plagiarism. We have zero tolerance for plagiarism and cheating. Any misconduct will automatically result in no credit.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability and require accommodations for this course, please speak with me as soon as possible so that your needs may be appropriately met.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and Late Work Policies

To create an effective learning environment, the use of the Internet with your cell phones and laptops is forbidden. **If the instructor or the TA finds students using cell phones and laptops, we will dock 5 points from your final grade (100 points) for each time you use cell phones and laptops.** We will not warn you or call your name in class. To avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding, please put away your cell phones and laptops in your bag. Late works will not be accepted under any circumstances. I will dock your grade third a letter grade (e.g., an B- to a C or from a C to a C-) for each day. Special Arrangements will only be made in the case of sickness (requiring a doctor's note) or family emergency (requiring a Chair's note).

Important Etiquettes

In order to create a pleasant study environment for everyone, please follow these etiquettes. **Cell phones must be put away at any time during the class. You must not use your phone to read the required reading.** *Please come to the class on time.* Please note that *voluntary late arrivals and early departures do not count as one class attendance.* These are just a few things that distract our attention. For other issues, please use your common sense, and treat one another with respect and courtesy. If problems continue to disturb the proper procedures of class, I will ask disruptive students to leave the class.

Appointments with the Instructor

Meeting with professors could be challenging for students. Although we know exactly how you feel, I encourage you to TALK to me in person on any subjects related to the class materials. If you cannot make it during my office hours, please email me for an appointment. In principle, I use my email to make appointments rather than consultations.

Textbook

We will be reading the following book in the second half of the course. Please make sure to place your order well in advance. A softcover copy of the book is sold around 2,000 yen. It is available at most real and online bookstores.

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

COURSE OUTLINE

1. September 30

Introduction

Monbiot, George. 2019. "For the Sake of Life on Earth, We Must Put a Limit on Wealth." Opinion, Climate Change, *Guardian*, September 19, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/19/life-earth-wealth-megarich-spending-power-environmental-damage>

2. October 7

What is political ecology?

Robbins, Paul. 2011. *Political Ecology*. Ch. 1 (11-24).

Suggested reading:

Peet, R., P. Robins, and M. Watts eds. 2011. *Global Political Ecology*. London: Routledge.

Bryant, R. and S. Bailey. 1997. *Third World Political Ecology*. London: Routledge.

3. October 14

Institutions and "the Commons"

Robbins et al. 2014. *Environment and Society*. Chapter 4 (49-64).

4. October 21

Political Economy

Robbins et al. 2014. *Environment and Society*. Chapter 7 (98-118).

5. October 28

In-Class Reading

6. November 11

The Producer is the Agent of History

Robbins, Paul 2011. *Political Ecology*. Ch. 3 The Critical Tools (49-81).

Suggested reading:

Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. New York Cambridge University Press,

Agrawal, Arun and Clark C. Gibson. "Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation." *World Development* 27(4), pp. 629-649.

Blaikie, Piers. 2006. "Is Small Really Beautiful? Community-based Natural Resource Management in Malawi and Botswana." *World Development* 34(11), pp. 1942-1957.

7. November 18

Human–Non-human Dialectics

Robins et al. 2011. *Environment and Society*. Ch. 4 Political Ecology Emerges (82-100).

Suggested reading:

Cronon, W. 1992. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, New York: W. W. Norton.

8. November 25

The Social Construction of the Nature-Society Divide?

Moore, J.W. 2015. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London: Verso: Introduction, pp. 13-41.

9. December 2

*****Fieldwork*****

Political Ecology of Food Production, Consumption, and Trade

10. December 9

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapters 1-3 (1-52).

11. December 16

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapters 4-7 (61-106).

12. December 23

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapters 8-10 (109-144).

13. January 6

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapters 11-15 (151-213).

14. January 20

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapters 16-20 (217-288).

15. January 27

*****Final Exam*****