

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
INTEGRATED SOCIAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

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Rowell 244
Time: TTh 2-3:15pm
Office Hours: W. 12:30-1:45, Th. 3:30-5

Anthropology 95B: Culture and Global Environmental Problems
Course URL: www.uvm.edu/~lvivanco/95home.html

Course Description

Environmental degradation is currently one of the most pressing problems facing humanity. This course examines the socio-cultural causes and consequences of environmental degradation around the world, as well as the efforts to solve these problems. We will analyze the increasing globalization of human-nature interactions and environmental degradation, and consider how solutions to environmental problems have dealt (or not dealt) with culturally-distinct definitions of nature and social change. We will do this by examining several case studies of cultural and natural transformations, including (among others) the disappearance of tropical forests, debates surrounding water and biotechnology, population growth, and the relationship of indigenous peoples to economic development processes and ecological change. In the latter part of the course, we will closely examine the political, moral and cultural assumptions and operations of the global environmental movement, especially as it relates to non-Western cultural contexts.

Reflecting the inherently interdisciplinary character of environmental issues, this course also introduces you to social scientific approaches to environmental problems and the study of environmentalism, drawing mainly from the discipline of socio-cultural anthropology, and to a lesser extent from the disciplines of sociology, history, and political-economy. We will learn about and reflect upon the usefulness of basic social theoretical concepts as they apply to knowledge of environmental problems, including theories of human-nature interaction and environmental degradation, the global operations of capitalism, theories of socio-cultural change, and anthropological concepts of culture.

Like the other ISSP courses, this course will provide you with the opportunity to explore the relationships between the social sciences, their various approaches to issues, and contemporary social problems. While we will discuss in detail some of the solutions social scientists have offered to resolve complex environmental problems, the purpose of this course is *not* to focus simply on policy solutions to environmental degradation. Rather, the purpose of this course is to learn how to approach and reflect creatively and critically upon a number of key issues: increasingly globalized structures of inequality and dependence, the impact of development policies on specific peoples and ecosystems (and the resistance of some of those people to these policies), the global circulation of certain kinds of environmental activism, and processes of socio-cultural transformation in non-Western contexts. In other words, this course does not intend to provide right or wrong answers to the profoundly problematic issues it raises, but through case studies, to introduce and analyze patterns, persistent problems and alternatives to solutions that have already been posed.

The following required texts are available for purchase at the University Store:

1. Guha (2000) *Environmentalism: A Global History*. Longman.
2. Niezen (2009) *Defending the Land: Sovereignty and Forest Life Among the James Bay Cree*. 2nd ed. Allyn and Bacon.
3. Reed (2009) *Forest Dwellers, Forest Protectors: Indigenous Models for International Development*.

2nd edition. Allyn and Bacon.

4. Robbins (2008) *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*. 4th Edition. Allyn and Bacon.

Course Format and Requirements

The format of this course is a participatory seminar, and therefore carries with it certain opportunities and obligations. Although we will periodically have lectures and films, the in-class portions of this course are organized primarily around discussion of the readings and the broader themes raised by course materials. Therefore, it is essential that each of you comes to class prepared – this means having done the assigned readings *before* every class session and considered the issues you would like to contribute to discussion. **Needless to say, attendance is mandatory at all course activities, and the only excused absences are for family or health emergencies (with proof).**

You will be graded on the following:

EXERCISE	% OF GRADE
Class Attendance and Participation	15
Focus Papers	60
Syndicate Presentation	10
Activism Prospectus	15

This course will heavily emphasize the positive interaction between reading and writing, and therefore you will turn in focus papers roughly every two weeks. These papers will provide you with the opportunity to develop your writing skills and your critical thinking abilities.¹ There will be **six** focus papers, and they will count for 60% of your grade. The topics are listed at the end of the syllabus. These papers will be **at least 5 pages long** (typed, double-spaced), to be turned in at the end of class, the dates of which are specified in this syllabus. **In answering the question that is posed, each focus paper should (1) refer to and outline the main ideas and arguments of relevant course texts and (2) be followed by questions, commentary, assessments, analysis, protests, opinions, or any combination of these.** I will provide extensive comments and a grade for each focus paper.

You can **rewrite your two lowest-graded papers** (*except your first paper*) to boost your overall grade. This is assuming the paper is actually better and was not turned in late – be aware that I reserve the right to grade it lower if there is no improvement from the original. If you chose to do this, these will be due the last day of class (12/11). It is very much worth your while to discuss these two papers with me before you rewrite them.

During one of the first classes, you will be divided into **syndicates** of four or five people each. Each syndicate will offer a presentation or facilitate our discussion once during the course of the

¹ We will discuss what I mean by “critical,” which I do not define as negative. Rather, critical implies that you are identifying and constructively evaluating an author's intellectual and moral assumptions, as well as the intellectual and/or practical implications of his or her position.

semester. Your personal performance in these presentations/facilitations will count for 10% of your grade. **Each syndicate should meet with me during office hours before its presentation, so that we can discuss the presentation's organization.** The purpose of the syndicate presentations is to provide the opportunity to explore collaborative learning processes, and to become comfortable speaking in front of a group and leading a discussion. I encourage you to be creative in your presentations.

The final course assignment is for each syndicate to identify an environmental issue that crosses national boundaries and to collectively design a prospectus for activism that seeks to contribute to solutions. The syndicate as a whole will then produce a **5-page description** of the problem and the solution it proposes, and will make a brief presentation to the rest of the class where we can discuss the merits and logistics of your action plan. The presentations will take place and the final paper will be due during our assigned final exam time (or another time to which we collectively agree).

I encourage you to be creative in your approach to activism for this assignment, but be sure to explain precisely how you will organize your activist program. Possibilities include, and are certainly not limited to: creating a non-governmental organization that brings together different interests to work on the whole problem or on specific aspects of it (explain how it will work and who will be involved); making a study or film about the problem (of what? how will you carry out the study? who will participate in it? who is the audience?); direct activism such as protests or 'monkeywrenching' (what are the trade-offs of this?); working through governmental legislation, agency, interagency body, international treaty, etc. (who will you work with? how far will you compromise? how will it be enforced?); grassroots organizing (how will you organize, and where? who will lead? how will you sustain your movement? where will funding come from?); holding a conference (who will you invite? where will it be?); constructing a public awareness campaign (who will it target? what forms of expression – artistic, etc. – will you use?); etc. *The prospectus should address the following issues in constructing an activist platform: how will you deal with the interplay between national and cultural differences, since this problem crosses national boundaries? How will you fund this? How will you sustain your activism over time?*

Policies on writing papers:

In these days of computer-mediated writing, there are no excuses for the two following problems: 1) late papers due to computer crashes, and 2) poor spelling and grammar. Regarding the former, claiming a "computer crash" is the basically the same as telling me that your dog ate your homework. **This is not a valid excuse** if you are backing up your materials on hard drives or the UVM mainframe. If indeed this has happened, I expect you to provide a note from a computer specialist explaining the problem; otherwise your late paper will be evaluated in terms of my late paper policy. Regarding the latter problem, use your spellcheck option and proofread – **I will mark you down for poor spelling and grammar.**

My policy on late papers is that I do not accept them, although I will make an exception if you are willing to receive a lower grade. **Written work is due in class. Anything not turned in during class is late, and for every 24 hour period your paper is late, you drop a full grade from the grade I feel your paper would receive if it were not late.** For example, if your 'A' paper is not turned in at class, you will receive a 'B' if it is turned in within the next 24 hours. The next day, your grade drops to a 'C.' The day after that, it is a 'D.' If you turn in a paper late and expect to receive a non-reduced grade, you must provide evidence of an emergency.

You should familiarize yourself with the UVM Writing Center. Tutors will not write or edit your papers for you. However, they will offer advice on developing ideas, finding a thesis, seeing a draft from a reader's point of view, strengthening an argument, and advise on style and correctness. It is located in Room 244 Commons of Living/Learning, and their phone is 656-4075.

Policy on Religious Holidays

If you will miss a class because of a religious holiday, the University policy is that you must submit in writing to me by the end of the second full week of classes your documented religious holiday schedule for the semester. I will permit students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance to make up this work.

Schedule of Readings

READINGS WITH AN ('R') NEXT TO THEM WILL BE ON RESERVE. Reserve articles are available online through Bailey-Howe's Voyager. A hard copy of every reserve reading will *always* be available in the Anthropology Department office – 509 Williams Hall, open 8:00am-4:30pm. Unless otherwise noted, all readings are required. Please complete the readings listed under each date *before* that class, and if possible, bring the book or article with you to class.

Part I**Perspectives on Culture and the Globalization of Environmental Problems***Course Introduction*

Tues. 9/2: Introduction to the course, instructor's expectations, requirements, etc.

No reading

Thurs. 9/4: The Global Dimensions of Environmental Crises?

Reading: 1. Brown and Flavin, "A New Economy for a New Century" in *State of the World 1999*, pp. 3-21.
(R)

Tues. 9/4: Toward a History of the Global Environment

Reading: 1. Worster, D. "The Vulnerable Earth: Toward a Planetary History"
(R) in Worster, ed. *The Ends of the Earth*, pp. 3-20.

Connecting Anthropology, Social Sciences and the Environment

Thurs. 9/11: Culture and Ecology

Film: "In Good Hands: Culture and Agriculture in the Lacandon Rainforest"

Reading: 1. Milton, "Anthropology, Culture and Environmentalism" and "Culture and Ecology"
(R) in *Environmentalism and Cultural Theory* pp. 8-68.

Tues. 9/16: The Meanings of "Culture" in Anthropology

Reading: 1. Introduction and Chapter 1, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*.

Thurs. 9/18: Resisting Determinisms

Reading: 1. Benton "Biology and Social Theory in the Environmental Debate," in *Social Theory and the Global Environment*, pp. 28-50.
(R)

Focus Paper #1 due 9/18 in class.

Part II**Understanding the Causes and Consequences of Environmental Degradation***The Socio-Ecological Organization of Global Capitalism*

Tues. 9/23: Perspectives on Globalization, Part I: Labor and the Ownership of Resources

Film: *The Global Assembly Line*

Reading: 1. Chapters 2-3, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*.

Thurs. 9/25: Perspectives on Globalization, Part II: NAFTA and its Socio-Ecological Impacts (Syndicate Presentation)

Reading: 1. Chapter 4, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*.

Tues. 9/30: Perspectives on Globalization, Part III: Twinkies and the Nation-State

Reading: 1. Chapters 6-7, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*.

Causes and Consequences of Rain Forest Destruction

Thurs. 10/2: Tropical Forests: Representations and Mythologies

In-class rain forest activity

Reading: 1. Chapters 1-3, *Breakfast of Biodiversity*. (Luis will make this book available electronically)

Tues. 10/7: The Political Ecology of Agriculture in Costa Rica (Syndicate presentation)

Reading: 1. Chapters 4-6, *Breakfast of Biodiversity*.

(Recommended) 2. Head, S. "The Consumer Connection: Psychology and Politics."

(R) In *Lessons from the Rainforest*, pp. 156-67.

(Recommended) Nations and Komer, "Rainforests and the Hamburger Society."

(R) *The Ecologist* 17(4/5): 161-7.

Thurs. 10/9: Indigenous People in the Culture of Capitalism (Syndicate Presentation)

Reading: 1. Chapter 9, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism* (NOTE: Skip section on Guarani).

Focus Paper #2 due 10/9 in class.

Tues. 10/14: Traditional Ecological Practices in Rain Forests

Reading: 1. Chapters 1-3, *Forest Dwellers, Forest Protectors*.

Thurs. 10/16: Guarani Social Organization (Syndicate presentation)

Reading: 1. Chapters 4-5, *Forest Dwellers, Forest Protectors*.

Hydro-Power and its Socio-Ecological Effects: Sovereignty, Hydro-Quebec and the Cree

Tues. 10/21: Perspectives on Cree Lives

Film: *Flooding Job's Garden*

Reading: 1. Chapters 1-3, *Defending the Land*.

Thurs. 10/23: Cree Resistance and Sovereignty (Syndicate presentation)

Reading: 1. Chapters 4-6 and Conclusion, *Defending the Land*.

Impure Waters

Tues. 10/28: The Global Problems of Water

Film: *Thirst*

Reading: 1. Ward, Diane Raines. (2002) "Sweet Water." *Water Wars: Drought, Flood, Folly, and*

(R) *the Politics of Thirst*. New York: Riverhead Books, pp. 1-14.

Focus Paper #3 due 10/28 in class.

Thurs. 10/30: Globalizing Flows of Water

Reading: 1. Kaplan, Martha (2007) "Fijian Water in Fiji and New York: Local Politics and a
(R) Global Commodity." *Cultural Anthropology* 22(2): 685-706.

The Politics of Knowledge in the Climate Change Debate

Tues. 11/4: The Social Contexts for Constructing Climate Science and Policy

Reading: 1. Revkin, A. (2001) "Climate Research: The Devil is in the Details." *The New
(R) York Times* (3 July).
2. Trenberth, K. (1997) "The Use and Abuse of Climate Models" *Nature* vol.
(R) 386, March 1997, pp. 131-3.
3. McCright and Dunlap (2003) "Defeating Kyoto: The Conservative
(R) Movement's Impact on U.S. Climate Change Policy." *Social Problems*
50(3): 348-73.

Thurs. 11/6: The Politics of "Thinking Globally"

(Syndicate Presentation)

Reading: 1. Taylor, Peter and Frederick Buttel. (1992) "How Do We Know We Have Global
(R) Environmental Problems?: Science and the Globalization of Environmental
Discourse." *Geoforum* 23(3): 405-16.
(R) 2. Agarwal and Narain, 'Global Warming in an Unequal World.'

Part III

The Culture and Politics of Saving Nature

Tues. 11/11: The Politics of Saving Nature

Film: The Rhino War

Reading: 1. Chapters 1-3, *Environmentalism: A Global History*.

Thurs. 11/13: Culture and Environmentalism

Reading: 1. Grove-White, R. "Environmentalism: A New Moral Discourse for
(R) Technological Society?" In Milton, *Environmentalism: The View from
Anthropology*, pp. 18-30.

Focus Paper #4 due 11/13 in class.

Tues. 11/18: The Wilderness Myth

(Syndicate Presentation)

Reading: 1. Chapter 4 and Afterword to Part 1, *Environmentalism: A Global History*.

Thurs. 11/20: Diversifying Environmentalism

Reading: 1. Chapter 6-8, *Environmentalism: A Global History*
2. Chapter 7-10, *Breakfast of Biodiversity*.
(Recommended): Chapter 10, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*.

Tues. 11/25-Thurs. 11/27: Thanksgiving Break (no class)

Part IV
Constructing Socio-Ecological Alternatives: Focus on Our Food System

Tues. 12/2: The Opportunities and Costs of an Industrial Agricultural System

Film: "Deconstructing Supper"

Reading: 1. Pretty, Jules (2002) "Food for All" In *Agri-Culture: Reconnecting People, Land, and Nature*. Earthscan, pp. 78-101.

Focus Paper #5 due 12/2 in class.

Thurs. 12/4: Considering the Alternatives: Solving for Pattern

(Syndicate Presentation)

Reading: 1. Berry, Wendell. "Solving for Pattern." *Good News of the Twentieth Century*, pp.

(R) 154-63.

2. McWilliams, J. "Food that Travels Well." *The New York Times* 8/6/07. (R)

Tues. 12/9: Workshop on activism prospectus

No reading

Thurs. 12/11: Course Conclusions

No reading

Focus Paper #6 due 12/11 in class.

Activism Prospectus Presentations, during finals week: place and time TBA.

Focus Questions

Focus Question #1 (due 9/18): *From your perspective as you enter this course, what are some of the major environmental problems of our day, and what are their causes? Explain the "culture" concept and how it might or might not be useful to explain these environmental problems.*

Focus Question #2 (due 10/9): *How are the demands of First World consumers and capitalists related to the destruction of Costa Rica's rain forests? Who are the different actors in the chain of relationships, and how are they each promoting the conversion of rain forest into pastures or bananas?*

Focus Question #3 (due 10/28): *How have indigenous people that we have studied so far (Guaraní, Cree) been impacted by economic development pressures and associated ecological change? How have their societies responded to these pressures?*

Focus Question #4 (due 11/13): *Discussions about two environmental issues we have studied – water and climate change – are often dominated by technical and scientific perspectives. What are some concerns and issues social scientific and cultural perspectives bring to these debates? Do you think there is something to be gained by analyzing critically the production of scientific knowledge about these problems? Why or why not?*

Focus Question #5 (due 12/2): *Have international nature conservation efforts reflected Western attitudes toward nature? Why or why not? Is a non-elite, non-Western environmentalism possible? Why or why not? Justify your answers using examples from our readings.*

Focus Question #6 (due 12/11): *Explain how this course has affected how you think about global environmental problems. Discuss using specific examples from our course topics and readings.*