

# GEOG 173 / ENVS 143: Political Ecology

Syllabus - Spring 2020 – 3 Credits  
MW 3:30 to 4:45 Lafayette L200

Harlan Morehouse  
Harlan.Morehouse@uvm.edu  
Office: 208 Old Mill

Office Hours: M/F 11:30am to 12:45pm; or by appointment

## Course Description:

This course explores how politics shape our understandings of and interactions with various forms and ideas of nature. By way of theoretical inquiry and case study analysis, the course offers insight into the complex relations between nature and society and introduces students to key concepts in the field of political ecology.

This course relies on an interdisciplinary approach to political and ecological issues, drawing primarily from geography, anthropology, and environmental theory. In recognizing the urgency of the contemporary political-ecological moment, this course aims to strike a balance between theory and application in order to not only think through immense environmental challenges, but also to craft interventions toward just and equitable ends. Course materials reflect the wide-range of political-ecological concerns as well as the diverse approaches to understanding them. The format of this course is a lecture-discussion hybrid.

## This course aims to:

- Introduce students to foundational concepts in political ecology.
- Introduce students to the 'nature-society relations' subfield of geography.
- Provide a global comparative framework for understanding political and environmental risks.
- Engage students in research and critical thinking methods.
- Improve student writing skills and develop critical geographic analysis skills.

## At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate how society and nature are inextricably linked through co-productive and co-evolutionary processes.
- Have an informed conversation about the multiple dimensions of political and/or environmental risks, and their complexities.
- Recognize and assess how political and/or environmental risks impact their lives.
- Explain *how* and *why* political and/or environmental crises unevenly affect different populations.
- Advocate for particular political and/or environmental policy choices using the skills and knowledge gained in this course.

## Course Website (Blackboard):

This course's website will be run through Blackboard, which you can access here: <https://bb.uvm.edu>. Blackboard will be primarily used for the following: Course announcements, basic course information including the syllabus, grades and assignments. All readings outside of the required text (see below) are available through Blackboard.

## Readings:

There is one required text for this course, which is available at the UVM Bookstore.

Voyles, Traci Brynne. (2015). *Wastelanding: Legacies of uranium mining in Navajo country*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

A recommended (but not required) text is:

Robbins, Paul. 2012. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Remaining readings will be posted in digital format on Blackboard. From time to time I will also post a question or set of topics I'd like you to focus on as you read. You are expected to take detailed notes on each of the readings and to keep these notes handy for the duration of the course.

**Assessment Guidelines** (Specific instructions and rubrics will be posted in Blackboard)

**Course Grading\***

A+: 97-100%; A: 93-96.9%; A-: 90-92.9; B+: 87-89.9; B: 83-86.9; B-: 80-82.9;

C+: 77-79.9%; C: 73-76.9%; C-: 70-72.9%; D+: 67-69.9; D: 63-66.9; D-: 60-62.9; F: below 60%

\**Warning letters:* Student earning a D+ or lower in class will receive a warning letter suggesting they seek out ways to improve their work or consider withdrawing from class. If you and your advisor receive one of these letters, please ask Prof. Morehouse for assistance in improving your work.

**Class Attendance & Participation**

**25 pts.**

You are expected to come to each class, to complete all readings and assignments before the start of class, and to participate in class discussions, activities and assignments. If you are ill or have an emergency situation that forces you to miss class, please contact me at once. Attendance will be noted at each class meeting. You will lose credit if you do not attend each class, or if you do not participate in class. Should you miss a class, it is your responsibility to ask for notes from a classmate and to make up any missed reading or work.

**Reading Reflections (3)**

**30 pts.**

Over the course of the term students will compose in-class or online reading reflections. A prompt will be provided to guide you through your reflections. Each reflection is worth up to 10 points.

**Journal Entries (3)**

**15 pts.**

Given the heavy (and sometimes depressing) nature of the topics we cover, each student will be expected to keep a personal journal. The primary aim for these entries is to unpack and process some of the emotional complexities that come with studying environmental crisis.

**Reflection Essays (2 of 3)**

**70 pts.**

There will be 3 short (4-6 page) essays due at the end of some thematic sections (see syllabus for due dates). You will be expected to submit 2 of the 3, meaning you can drop one of your choice. The purpose of these essays is to draw insights from course readings and class discussion and apply them to prompts centered on major course themes. More detail will be included on our course website. Essays are worth up to 35 points each.

**Group Project – Designing for Nuclear Futures**

**35 pts.**

Drawing on course content regarding WIPP, students will work in groups of five to design nuclear repositories, develop signs and semiotics, and develop a narrative to convey critical information to future generations. This project will be a multiple-stage project involving researching planning, research, a group presentation, and a final report. More detail will be included on our course website.

- A. Presentation 10 pts.
- B. Report (Group Grade) 15 pts.
- C. Report (Individual Grade) 10 pts.

**Group Project – Sensing the Environment**

**35 pts.**

Students will work in groups of five to examine local and/or regional issues around pollution, toxicity, and the body. This project will be a multiple-stage project involving researching planning, on-site (if applicable) research, a group presentation, and a final report. More detail will be included on our course website.

- A. Presentation 10 pts.
- B. Report (Group Grade) 15 pts.
- C. Report (Individual Grade) 10 pts.

**TOTAL:**

**210 pts.**

## General Course Policies and Resources

**Prerequisites for the course:** Geography students should have taken GEOG050, GEOG070, or ENV5001/2

**Late work:** All assignments are due on the day listed in the course schedule. In cases where students are working with their Dean of Students Office to coordinate documented illness or other serious matters requiring deadline leniency, please contact Prof. Morehouse as soon as possible.

**Academic Integrity:** All submitted work must be your own, except in the specific instances when an assignment calls for collaboration. You must distinguish your own words and ideas from those of others by utilizing proper citations and references. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Detailed style guides are in our course 'Learning Resources and Guides' folder. Please also refer to UVM's Code of Academic Integrity and the Academic Integrity Program in The Center for Student Ethics and Standards for further clarification.

**Fostering a Critical and Responsible Learning Environment:** Throughout the course, please feel free to express your ideas and enter into dialogue with your fellow students. Although I encourage you to express your views, I expect that you will be courteous to others, respect different views, and refrain from personal attacks—in class, outside of class and on-line. In this class we do not debate, we discuss. Failure to abide by these expectations will result in a reduced class engagement grade or disenrollment. During class, all phones must be turned off (no texting allowed). Laptops may be used for taking notes or engaging in class activities only and must not be connected to the Internet during class unless otherwise directed during specific activities. All assigned readings must be completed before class and all students must arrive on time.

**SAS (formerly ACCESS):** I encourage students with documented disabilities to contact me in the first two weeks of classes to discuss and arrange accommodations in co-ordination with the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) office. In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact SAS. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to faculty with recommended accommodations as early as possible each semester. Contact SAS: A170 Living/Learning Center; [802-656-7753](tel:802-656-7753); [access@uvm.edu](mailto:access@uvm.edu); or [www.uvm.edu/access](http://www.uvm.edu/access).

**Athletic and religious schedule accommodations** follow UVM policy, which can be viewed at <http://catalogue.uvm.edu/undergraduate/academicinfo/rightsandresponsibilities/>. Students participating in inter-collegiate athletics should plan their schedules with special care, recognizing the primary importance of all of their university academic responsibilities. Each semester, members of UVM varsity and junior varsity teams are responsible for documenting in writing any conflicts between their planned athletic schedule and the class schedule to their instructors by the end of the second full week of classes. Students and instructors should then discuss potential conflicts between course requirements and intercollegiate competitions. When an unavoidable conflict exists, the student and instructor should seek a resolution, which permits the student to address the course requirement and participate in the athletic competition. The instructor has final authority on this matter. Regarding religious holidays: Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Each semester students should submit in writing to their instructors by the end of the second full week of classes their documented religious holiday schedule for the semester. Faculty must permit students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance to make up this work.

**Recording and Transmission of Course Materials:** Consistent with the University's policy on intellectual property rights, teaching and curricular materials (including but not limited to classroom lectures, class notes, exams, handouts, and presentations) are the property of the instructor. Therefore, electronic recording and/or transmission of classes or class notes is prohibited without the express written permission or request of the instructor. Such permission is to be considered unique to the needs of an individual student (e.g. ADA compliance), and not a license for permanent retention or electronic dissemination to others.

### **Course Evaluation:**

All students are expected to complete an evaluation of the course at its conclusion. Your feedback is crucial as the information gained, including constructive criticisms, will be used to improve the course. Your evaluations will be anonymous and confidential.

GEOG 173 Course Schedule Spring 2020

NOTE: This is subject to change due to scheduling logistics and solicited student input.

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Assignment	Readings	
1	Mon	1/13	Introduction to the course		<i>No readings</i>	
	<b>THEME 1: FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY</b>					
	Wed	1/15	Foundations of Political Ecology I		Robbins (2012) 11-24	
2	Mon	1/20	<i>NO CLASS: MLK Holiday</i>			
	Wed	1/22	Foundations of Political Ecology II	<b>Journal Entry 1</b>	Robbins (2012) 49-81	
3	Mon	1/27	Foundations of Political Ecology III		Open discussion	
	<b>THEME 2: FACING CLIMATE CHANGE POLITICAL ECOLOGIES OF EXPOSURE &amp; ADAPTATION, ACTION &amp; INACTION</b>					
	Wed	1/29	Facing Climate Change: Denialism, Negation, and Disavowal		Eaton (2017); IPCC Special Report (2018); Fletcher (2018) [focus on 56-58].  Rec: Bradley (2019)	
4	Mon	2/3	Climate Change and Social Change: Mediation, Resilience, and Adaptation <i>Case Studies: Puerto Rico &amp; the Netherlands</i>		Adger and Brown (2009) 109-122; Caban (2017); Kimmelman (2017)	
	Wed	2/5	Climate Vulnerability & Climate Justice <i>Case Study: Inuit and the Arctic</i>		Johnson (2010)	
	Sun	2/9		<b>Short Essay #1</b>		
	<b>THEME 3: TECHNOLOGY &amp; THE PLANET</b>					
5	Mon	2/10	Political Ecology at the Grand Scale: Technological Optimism, Ecomodernism & Geoengineering		Asafu-Adjaye <i>et. al.</i> (2015); Revkin (2016); Bezos (2019)	
	Wed	2/13	The Limits of Technological Optimism	<b>Reading Reflection 1</b>	Svoboda, Buck, & Suarez (2018)  Swyngedouw (2015) [Video excerpt]  Rec: Hamilton (2014); Latour (2015)	
6	Mon	2/17	<i>NO CLASS: PRESIDENTS' DAY HOLIDAY</i>			
	<b>THEME 4: POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF WATER</b>					
	Wed	2/20	Water I: Water and Gender		Sultana (2018)	
7	Mon	2/24	Water II: Racial Capitalism & Flint Michigan		Pulido (2016)	
	<b>THEME 5: INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY AND ETHICS FOR THE FUTURE</b>					
	Wed	2/26	Ethics and the Future I: What is Intergenerational Equity?		Diprose <i>et. al.</i> (2019)	
8	Mon	3/2	Ethics and the Future II: WIPP		Sandia and DoE (1994) [Excerpts]; Gallison (2011)	
	Wed	3/4	In-class group work	<b>Journal Entry 2</b>	<i>No readings</i>	

9	Mon	3/9	<i>SPRING BREAK</i>		
	Wed	3/11			
10	Mon	3/16	WIPP Presentations		<i>No readings</i>
	<b>THEME 6: POLITICAL ECOLOGY, INDIGENEITY &amp; SETTLER COLONIALISM</b>				
	Wed	3/18	Uranium Mining & Navajo Territory I		Voyles 1-53
X	Sun	3/22		WIPP Group Project	
11	Mon	3/23	Uranium Mining & Navajo Territory II		Voyles 55-115
	Wed	3/25	Uranium Mining & Navajo Territory III	Reading Reflection 2	Voyles 117-184
12	Mon	3/30	Uranium Mining & Navajo Territory IV		Voyles 185-218
	Wed	4/1	Open Discussion		No Readings
X	Sun	4/5		Short Essay #2	
X	<b>THEME 7: FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY AND THE BODY</b>				
13	Mon	4/6	Toxic Ecologies and the Body		Liboiron (2018); Liboiron et. al. (2018); Shapiro (2015)
	Wed	4/8	Methods in Sensing: The Body as Monitor	Reading Reflection 3	Req: Scott (2016) Rec: Myers (2018), Tsing et. al. (2017)
14	Mon	4/13	In-class group work		<i>No readings</i>
	Wed	4/15	Sensing the Environment Presentations		
X	Sun	4/19		Sensing Projects	
X	<b>THEME 8: RESISTANCE &amp; BUILDING THE FUTURE</b>				
15	Mon	4/20	Resistance for the Future		Estes 2019 [Excerpts]; Invisible Committee (2008)
	Wed	4/22			
16	Mon	4/27	Toward Dystopia, Utopia, or somewhere in-between?		Davis & Todd (2017); Robinson (2018)
	Wed	4/29	Course Conclusion Discussion	Journal Entry 3	
X	Sun	5/3		Short Essay #3	

### Course Bibliography

- Adger, W Neil, and Katrina Brown. 2009. *Vulnerability and resilience to environmental change: ecological and social perspectives*: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, UK.
- Asafu-Adjaye, John, L Blomquist, Stewart Brand, BW Brook, Ruth DeFries, Erle Ellis, Christopher Foreman, D Keith, M Lewis, and M Lynas. 2015. "An ecomodernist manifesto."
- Bradley, James. 2019. "Unearthed." *Meanjin* (Spring 2019).
- Caban, Pedro. 2017. "Catastrophe and Colonialism." *Jacobin*.
- Davis, Heather, and Zoe Todd. 2017. "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16 (4):761-780.
- Diprose, Kristina, Chen Liu, Gill Valentine, Robert M Vanderbeck, and Katie McQuaid. 2019. "Caring for the future: Climate change and intergenerational responsibility in China and the UK." *Geoforum*.
- Eaton, Marie. 2016. "Navigating Anger, Fear, Grief, and Despair." In *Contemplative Approaches to Sustainability in Higher Education: Theory and Practice*, edited by Marie Eaton, Holly J. Hughes and Jean MacGregor, 40-54. New York: Routledge.
- Fletcher, Robert. 2018. "Beyond the End of the World: Breaking Attachment to a Dying Planet." In *Psychoanalysis and the Global*, edited by Ilan Kapoor, 48-69. Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press.
- Galison, Peter. 2014. *Waste-Wilderness: A Conversation between Peter Galison and Smudge Studio*. edited by Jamie Kruse.

- Hamilton, Clive. 2014. "The delusion of the 'good Anthropocene': Reply to Andrew Revkin." *Clive Hamilton*.
- Johnson, Leigh. 2010. "The fearful symmetry of Arctic climate change: accumulation by degradation." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (5):828-847.
- Kimmelman, Michael. 2017. "The Dutch Have Solutions to Rising Seas. The World Is Watching." *The New York Times*, June 15, 2017.
- Latour, Bruno. 2015. "Fifty shades of green." *Environmental Humanities* 7 (1):219-225.
- Liboiron, Max. 2018. "How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism." *Teen Vogue*.
- Liboiron, Max, Manuel Tironi, and Nerea Calvillo. 2018. "Toxic politics: Acting in a permanently polluted world." *Social studies of science* 48 (3):331-349.
- Myers, Natasha. 2017. "Becoming sensor in sentient worlds: A more-than-natural history of a black oak savannah." *Between Matter and Method: Encounters In Anthropology and Art*:73.
- Revkin, Andrew. 2014. "Paths to the 'Good' Anthropocene." *Dot Earth*.
- Robbins, Paul. 2012. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Robinson, Kim Stanley. 2018. "Dystopias Now." *COmmune*.
- Scott, Dayna Nadine. 2016. "'We Are the Monitors Now' Experiential Knowledge, Transcorporeality and Environmental Justice." *Social & Legal Studies* 25 (3):261-287.
- Shapiro, Nicholas. 2015. "Attuning to the chemosphere: Domestic formaldehyde, bodily reasoning, and the chemical sublime." *Cultural Anthropology* 30 (3):368-393.
- Svoboda, Toby, Holly Jean Buck, and Pablo Suarez. 2019. "Climate engineering and human rights." *Environmental Politics* 28 (3):397-416. doi: 10.1080/09644016.2018.1448575.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2015. *Anthropocenic Promises*.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Voyles, Traci Brynne. 2015. *Wastelanding: Legacies of uranium mining in Navajo country*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.