**Course Description.** This is a course that is broadly concerned with the relationship between society and environment. It both traces evolving ideas about this relationship, particularly in developing world contexts, and explores how these ideas help us understand contemporary conservation and development issues. How do rural societies transform and adapt to their biophysical environments? How do broader political economic, cultural, and biophysical changes affect this interaction at a local level? A number of different analytical approaches have been used to study this complex relationship within a range of disciplines, most notably geography and anthropology. In this course we will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches by reading and discussing a combination of theoretical works and case studies. A strong emphasis of this course will be to trace out how these theories have shaped environment/development policy in the Third World, with material impacts on rural peoples. A number of broader themes, relevant to all society-environment contexts, will be explored. The succession of approaches and corresponding themes covered in this course include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches to Study Culture x Environment</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Determinism</td>
<td>Joint Production of Culture and Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Ecology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Systems Ecology</td>
<td>Material Basis of Environmental Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population-Induced Intensification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Property Theory</td>
<td>Political Economy, Institutions, and Environmental Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ecology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Narratives and History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Ecology and Questions of Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonequilibrium Ecology</td>
<td>Changing Views of Ecology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to understand how these approaches first developed. The ordering of these approaches corresponds roughly with when they have been introduced in the social sciences. Still, this course deviates strongly from a “history of ideas” course in that we will not attempt to exhaustively review society-nature thought. Instead, we only cover those approaches that have had an enduring influence on contemporary understandings. As a result, each week’s readings often will be a mix of old classics and more contemporary examples.

My goal as an instructor is to expose you to a mix of approaches for you to build an understanding of their relative strengths and weaknesses in different situations. This understanding will make you better consumers of environmental analyses (in popular media), critical thinkers about society-nature relations, and more effective policy-makers and practitioners. As a result, we will be reading and discussing a wide range of material from humanities, social sciences, to biophysical sciences. Depending on your background, you will have difficulty with some of the reading. PLEASE ask questions in class or come and see me in office hours.
There is a heavy emphasis on assigned reading in this course. “Required Readings (REQ) and “Recommended Readings” (REC) will be journal articles or book sections that are available through Learn@UW (directly -- https://learnuw.wisc.edu/ -- or through the Academics tab of your “My UW” account. Unless otherwise stated in class, required readings need to be read and thought about prior to our class meeting on the date on which they are assigned. Recommended readings are provided to: 1. provide the necessary background that you may lack; 2. present in more depth case material used in lecture; or 3. provide you readings that allow you to explore further certain topics. Our meetings will be composed of a combination of lecture, full group discussions and small group discussions. I reserve the right to change readings to respond to the needs and interests of the class – any changes will not significantly increase the amount of material to read.

This course emphasizes the development of your critical reasoning abilities in the realm of nature-society relations through individual and group work. A major vehicle for this development is writing. People-environment relations are complex. No matter what your life course will be, you will likely need to be able to make convincing arguments about complex relationships and situations. This is especially the case in the conservation, development and conservation-with-development fields. While this is not an English composition class, you will be expected to engage critically with the material and in so doing, make clear and concise arguments about complex relationships.

**Grading.** Grades will be determined on: 1. short responses to questions about weekly readings (graded on a check, check-, check+ basis) usually due on the Monday meeting of each week – 20% of grade; 2. a choice of three of four possible 4-5 page reaction papers corresponding to the four themes of the course due on October 4, October 25, November 15, and December 9 – 40% of grade; 3. a final 10-12 page paper on a topic of your choice – 25% of grade (due on December 16); and 4. your participation in discussions (including oral presentations) -- 15% of grade. Written assignments are expected to be turned in on time with 10% of the maximum score deducted from scores for every day the assignment is late. Final letter grades for graduate and undergraduate students will be determined using separate curves. The curve will never be harsher than the standard curve (>92% A; 88-92% AB; 82-88% B; 78-82% BC; 68-78% C; <68 D or F).

**Academic misconduct.** In the words of the UW-Madison Student Academic Misconduct Policy⁴, academic misconduct is an act in which a student:

- seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- assists other students in any of these acts.

Therefore, cutting and pasting text from the web without quotation marks and proper citation; paraphrasing from the web without crediting the source; and submitting assignments written by others all are academic misconduct. See Student Assistance and Judicial Affairs at http://students.wisc.edu/saja/index.html for more information, and if you’d like more clarification on proper citation and what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me.

---

**Additional information/resources.** I highly recommend the Writing Center’s services particularly for your final papers. They can assist you in all stages of writing from initial brainstorming to polishing. You can reach the Writing Center at 263-1992, or on the web at: [http://www.wisc.edu/writing](http://www.wisc.edu/writing).

**COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

4-September  **Introduction to the course**

**REC:** Williams, R. 1983. Culture.  pgs 87-91 In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.  

9-September  **Sustainable development. What questions remain?**


---

**JOINT PRODUCTION OF CULTURE AND NATURE**

16-September  **Environmental determinism and origins of cultural ecology**


23-September  Ecocosmologies and environmental regulation

OR


30-September  Where is the division between culture and environment?


MATERIAL BASIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONS

7-October  Human systems ecology: systems, energetics and carrying capacity


14-October Adding temporal depth to the adaptation framework: Demographic-technical change within rural communities


POLITICAL ECONOMY, INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE

21-October Territoriality and customary institutions: Is there a tragedy in the commons?


28-October Introduction to Political Ecology


Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.


4-November Political Ecologies (read three cases)


11-November Decentralization, participation, and privatization in development/conservation


Sundberg, J. Strategies for authenticity and space in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, Petén, Guatemala. pp. 50-69


### CHANGING VIEWS OF ECOLOGY

18-November  **Environmental history and development narratives (read Hughes + two)**

**REQ:** Hughes, J. D. 2006. Defining environmental history. pgs 1-17 In *What is Environmental History?*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.


25-November  **Implications of changing views of ecology for people-environment research**  
*(Please Note: no meeting on November 27th)*


2-December  **Different knowledge systems and environmental management**


9-December  **Catch-up and Summary**