POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF NORTH AMERICA

Geography 3376: Syllabus
Fall 2009
Mon & Wed 4–5:15 pm
Blegen 260
3 Credits; No prerequisites

Instructor: Valentine Cadieux

514 Social Sciences Tower
Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 5:15-5:45
Please use email to arrange appointments and/or to notify me if you will be absent from class. I will respond to substantive emails on Monday before class. If you need to discuss an urgent matter, please talk to me before or after class.

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an interdisciplinary course devoted to understanding the interconnections of society and environment in the North American context. In the class you will develop ways to think critically about the relation of ecological processes to social, cultural, political, and economic processes, as well as to place, space, and scale. You will learn to see human environments in terms of the biophysical processes that shape and sustain them, and physical environments in terms of the social, political, economic, and legal practices that determine their material form. You will also learn how and why the environment has been politicized in the ways it has, and why environmental change occurs how and where it does in an age of neoliberal capitalism. The course is structured around a series of readings, modules on environmental topics and approaches to them, and case studies taken from different sites across North America, from the movement for alternative agroecologies to the regulation of environmental impacts from changing land uses along the transportation corridor between the Twin Cities and St. Cloud. It will challenge you to develop a thorough understanding of the ecological processes underlying environmental problems, the relation between capital, state, and nature, to understand the different ways that environmental movements have emerged to contest and shape environmental change, and to critically examine the intersections of race, gender, and environment in particular environmental conflicts. The course meets CLE requirements for the Environment theme.

II. Liberal Education ENVIRONMENT Theme Course

This course also meets Lib Ed req of Citizenship/Public Ethics Theme
More information about liberal education requirements and how this course meets them in the course manual

III. COURSE EXPECTATIONS, LEARNING OUTCOMES & GRADING PRACTICES

In this course, you will be expected to:	Evaluation methods by which grades will be determined described below	out of 100%
Attend regularly. Read all assigned texts (approximately 30-50 pages per week), comment on the texts and on your learning process outside class in your research portfolio (described below), participate in class discussions, and help to lead one class.	Class participation & facilitating one class discussion	20%
	Research portfolio	20%
Participate in one field trip exercise		15%
Write three brief in-class essays, assisted by your research portfolio		45%

More information on these components of the course, learning outcomes, and course mechanics in course manual that follows

IV. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS (detailed schedule)

Module 1: ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS; POLITICIZING NATURE

Weeks 1–2. **INTRODUCTION**
In the first three meetings of the course, we will survey contemporary environmental issues and controversies, and identify the ecological processes related to environmental problems in the news. In these first few weeks we will begin to explore different strategies being used to address and to represent pressing environmental issues, and we will consider academic approaches that help evaluate these strategies. The first assignment, a summary of several different approaches to an environmental issue, will be related to this survey of environmental problems and introduction to the basic premises and history of political ecology.
Week 1: **Introduction, overview of course and expectations**
Week 2: **Political ecology and environmental problems in the news**

Weeks 3–5: **WHAT IS NATURE? WHOSE NATURE IS NATURAL? HOW IS NATURE POLITICAL? FROM WILDERNESS PRESERVATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**
In the three weeks after the introduction, we will concentrate on questions that are central to political ecology about the relationship between ideology, power, and nature. In this module, we will focus particularly on different ways of learning about and knowing the processes of nature, such as through scientific study, practical work, or leisure activity.
Week 3: **Nature**
Week 4: **Grappling with nature and naturalization**
Week 5: **Whose nature?** *Essay #1 (in class)*

Module 2: URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Weeks 6–10. **Case study 1: Political ecologies of urbanization, studied via different perspectives on land use management changes being made along the NorthStar / Upper Mississippi River Corridor**
In the next four weeks of the term, we will consider the implications of urban land uses and land use changes associated with urbanization. Through field trips, films, readings, and in-class dialogues, we will explore different perspectives crucial to understanding how environmental decisions are made and the implications of decision making about processes underlying cities and suburbs that we take for granted, such as the ecology of the lawn, sewers, and highways. The NorthStar transportation corridor will come into service during this semester, so this case study will allow us to study real decisions about land uses changes as they are being considered and made.
Week 6: **Urban Political Ecologies**
Week 7: **Cities as natural spaces?** *Research portfolio midterm review*
Week 8: **Urban metabolism** *Virtual field trips presentations*
Week 9: **Dialogues in urban ecologies** *Virtual field trips presentations*

THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RISK & THE ENVIRONMENTS OF POLITICS: RACE, CLASS, TOXICITY (Connecting urban and food modules)
In the two weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, we will consider questions of environmental equity and justice, building on the cases and topics we have already explored to understand further how politics is central to the way that environmental problems are experienced in the material lives of bodies. The second assignment, a position essay on an environmental issue, will be related to modules 3 and 4, building on their survey of diverse philosophical, cultural, and political approaches to environmental problems.
Week 10: **Risk** *Essay #2 (in class)*
Week 11: **Political ecology issues in food and agriculture**

Module 3: POLITICAL ECOLOGIES OF FOOD

Weeks 12-15. Case study 2: **CONTEMPORARY SHIFTS IN AGROECOLOGICAL PROCESSES**
In the last three weeks of class, each student will use materials about the alternative food movement to prepare an essay about the changes in political ecology that are involved when agri-food practices are shifted in specific ways.
Week 12: **Environmental issues, the food movement, & agri-food political ecology controversies**
Week 13: **Field to table / seed to fork: Following food chains** *Essay #3 (in class)*
Week 14: **Agroecological shifts in alternative food networks**
Week 15: **The ecology of commodities** *Research portfolio final review*

II. Liberal Education ENVIRONMENT Theme Course

This course also meets Lib Ed req of Citizenship/Public Ethics Theme

What does a course that meets a Liberal Education Theme requirement do?

Liberal Education Theme courses foster your critical reflection on important, contemporary challenges facing our society and/or the world, challenges that call for your response and participation. These courses especially focus your attention on developing a sense of responsibility for engaging with issues of contemporary relevance, as well as on the realization of the stakes involved: Communities sustain themselves in so far as they meet effectively the challenges that face them. The Liberal Education Theme courses emphasize that critical reflection on, and engagement with, these matters requires that they be understood from different perspectives. Important issues are typically controversial ones. Effective critical reflection requires also building a knowledge base regarding critical issues facing society and understanding the process of trial and error involved in deploying that knowledge. A hoped-for result is that a Theme course will enhance your own sense of creative involvement and independent thinking.

What does a course that meets the Environment Theme requirement do in particular?

Environmental issues—from global climate change and air, soil, and water degradation to energy security and loss of biological diversity—are today a major preoccupation. Addressing such issues requires you to be at once engaged and informed. Environment Theme courses will inform your understanding of the interrelationships between the non-human environment and human society. This may include attention to the often changing boundary between nature and society and the ways that each are dynamically changing. Such courses also introduce you to important underlying scientific principles at stake in selected environmental issues and the possibilities and limitations of various technologies, scientific practices, and public policies aimed at mitigating detrimental environmental impacts. An essential element of becoming informed, however, is your engagement with environmental matters, whether through discussion with each other, writing, case study analysis, or some other relevant vehicle. These courses will prepare you to evaluate a myriad of potential solutions, tradeoffs, and questions of intergenerational equity that surround environmental issues.

How Political Ecology of North America approaches the Liberal Education Environment Theme

Political ecology is the study of how political, economic, and social factors interact with environmental issues. Political ecology studies the influence that society, state, corporate, and transnational powers have on environmental problems and on influencing environmental policy. Political ecologists are also interested in understanding the complex and dynamic ways in which biophysical environments affect their political, economic, and social contexts. In this course, students will consider pressing North American environmental issues and explore ways that local land uses have effects that extend across and beyond the region. We will use two case studies – about land use change and alternative agro-ecologies in the Upper Mississippi River Corridor– and three topic modules to consider the ways that global environmental problems show up in local environments and politics. The modules will be on: political ecology as a mode of study and ideals and materials of nature; urban political ecologies (relating particularly to land use change); and environmental equity and justice and agro-ecologies.

Focusing on two case studies to explore these topics will provide students with a sustained opportunity to engage in difficult debates around environmental problems related to their everyday lives that are regularly in the news, such as impairment of air and water from urban land uses, or soil and degradation from agricultural practices. Cases will include detailed examination of the ecological processes at the heart of environmental controversies, and will explore subtle differences made in coupled human-natural systems by shifts in land use and agricultural practices. Students will approach the two case studies from several different – and competing – perspectives while we explore the interrelationships between the natural environment and human society that are implicated in everything from procuring food and consumer goods to regulating industry and attempting to address climate change. Examples of the perspectives on the local

case studies that students will take include the scientific methods used to understand soil erosion or to model hydrology, the political methods used to build political will to support best planning practices to respond to the new development pressures and attendant environmental impact generated by the NorthStar transportation corridor, and the rhetorical methods used by environmentalists to attempt to translate scientific data and regulatory frameworks into popular action.

By comparing these approaches, and by developing the skills to take and defend positions on environmental issues through dialogues and discussions in class, students will learn about the scientific principles and technologies involved in significant environmental issues, about the limitations of technologies and the constraints of science on the public policy issues being considered, and about how critical understanding can be used to identify and evaluate credible information concerning the environment – and to translate this evaluation and understanding into responsible political engagement with environmental issues.

In addition to exploring the material and biophysical processes involved in environmental issues and introducing students to a range of modes of inquiry into those issues, this course will consider diverse philosophical, cultural, and political approaches to environmental problems, giving particular attention to the contexts of globalization and North American liberal democracy as these affect environmental decision-making regimes. Reflecting the course's status as meeting the requirements of the LE Environment Theme, students will follow political ecology's emphasis on the way particular voices and power relations are given status in environmental decision-making, and on the challenges posed by dissonance between North American environmental ideals and the environmental problems related to North American lifestyles.

III. COURSE EXPECTATIONS, LEARNING OUTCOMES & GRADING PRACTICES

Course Evaluation & Learning outcomes

The overall goal of this course is to familiarize you with significant environmental processes and problems and to help you critically connect knowledge about environmental issues to environmental practices and decision-making.

Assessment in this course will be related to the University of Minnesota's 7 core learning objectives, as laid out here. *In the University's language (in italics here), the course is designed to enable you to*:

1. *identify, understand, and be able to research environmental processes and problems as they are encountered in the everyday environment and in popular, scholarly, and political discussion*

Course exercises will evaluate progress in identifying, defining, and solving environmental problems; the written assignments will involve library and field research on the biophysical and socio-political mechanisms of environmental issues, and will be assessed on the quality of the research, analysis, and argumentation.

2. *understand strategies being used to address pressing environmental issues, and evaluate such strategies*

The research portfolio and assignments will concentrate on building skills for locating, critically evaluating, and effectively organizing information. In particular, writing assignments will build on in-class dialogue exercises to teach (a.) how information is produced and organized via the ways in which the scientific method works and how methods of argumentation work in the natural and social sciences and (b.) how to use this understanding to comprehend strategies being used to address pressing environmental issues – and to evaluate and engage with such strategies.

3. *explore and discuss the dynamic interrelationships between the natural environment and human society*

The three modules of the class – political ecology as a mode of study (particularly about natural ideals and materials); urban political ecologies (relating particularly to land use change); and agro-ecologies (including their relation to environmental equity and justice) – have been designed to focus on using political ecology as a mode of inquiry to explore the dynamic interrelationships between the natural environment and human society. Mastery of these interrelationships – and particularly understanding of the processes by which biophysical and political/social processes influence and, in fact, produce each – will be evaluated through participation in class discussion and through handling of research topics in the writing and oral assignments.

4. *consider diverse philosophical, cultural, and political approaches to environmental problems, and to understand the contexts of globalization and North American liberal democracy as these affect environmental decision-making regimes*

In a series of in-class dialogue exercises (and then in the written exercise building on these), students will develop position arguments about environmental issues, taking, in turn, several different perspectives on each issue. Development of the skills to consider diverse philosophical, cultural, and political approaches to environmental problems will be evaluated by both instructor and peers. A sample rubric for in-class oral presentation of position is included below.[1] Field trips and course lectures will emphasize multiple positions on the course topics.

5. *develop well-supported positions on environmental issues and effectively communicate these positions and your support for them*

Dialogue exercises and written assignments will be evaluated based on their demonstration of effective communication. In addition to introducing basic skills for researching environmental processes and their social contexts, this course will consider in some detail how to develop a well-supported position on environmental issues, how to effectively communicate this position (with appropriate support), and how to connect knowledge about environmental issues to environmental practices and decision-making. (Draft rubrics for the written assignments are included with the assignment descriptions below, showing the breakdown of categories for evaluating these.)

6. *appreciate the value of diverse and creative approaches to environmental issues, and develop skill in multiple modes of communicative expression about these environmental issues*

This course will explore a broad range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary writings, and will consider the issue of how to write for different audiences – in addition to how to speak across existing communicative divides, a skill emphasized in the dialogue exercises. We will read texts written for scientific, political, and wide public audiences, as well as view films and create field trips and visual data representations, to consider the value of diverse and creative approaches to environmental issues. Oral and written position pieces will provide a chance to be evaluated on competency in expressing ideas in multiple modes.

7. *understand:*
- *that ecology and politics are intertwined*
- *that everyday activities and decision making have dynamic ethical as well as material effects*
- *and that addressing environmental problems requires engaging social relations*

The writing and oral assignments and research portfolio will provide opportunities to build and assess skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning. The take home messages from this course above have been built into all section of the course, and should have significant effects on your future action as scholars and as citizens, as you better understand the implications of activities for the environment and also better understand both the mechanisms that constitute the environment itself and the mechanisms we use to respond to the environment.

[1] Sample rubric for in-class oral presentation:

Speaker name:	**Presentation was coherent.**	**Position is clear.**	**Position is convincing to audience.**	**Argument accounts for counter-argument**	**Evidence presented is appropriate for audience**	**Explanations and reasons given for conclusions**.
Criteria score:						
Question or Comment:						

Basis for Course Evaluation

1. Class participation and preparing and leading one class discussion (20 percent)
To do well in this course you will need to attend each class. You are expected to have read each assigned reading before coming to class, and to be prepared to discuss the readings. (The research portfolio described below is designed to help prepare you to discuss the readings and your thoughts about them.) A schedule of readings is included at the end of this course manual; this reading list will be discussed weekly as the discussion leaders for each week decide which readings to prioritize.

Facilitating class discussion
This class is a seminar, and will be based around weekly discussion of readings and concepts, as well as group work and writing exercises. During the first two weeks of class, students will have a chance to sign up to help facilitate the discussion for one course meeting. For each week below, you will see a core set of readings (in black) and then a suggested set of readings (in grey). It will be the responsibility of each class meeting's facilitator(s) (in consultation with me) to decide on the suggested readings for discussion, and on the format of a part of the course meeting (~20-30 minutes). Pairs of students will also lead a short (fun, and hopefully involving food) learning activity about the ecologies of particular commodities during the last two meetings of the course.

Evaluation will be based on:

- level of preparation for class discussions in general (we will discuss tools to meet this goal)
- level of preparation when consulting with me (consultation at least 1 week before discussion required for each group of weekly facilitators)
- creative engagement of readings, topics, and class in leading discussion and in facilitating a meaningful learning experience

Please note:
This will be a very interactive class, which means that your participation in class will be central to the success of the course (and also to how much you learn). The interactive nature of the course implies several things: I will ask frequent questions of you; you will be expected to present material to classes (both formally and in less formal class discussions); I will expect you to ask frequent questions of me; and, I will expect you to engage with each others' ideas. The last point is central – the class is not meant to be a conversation between 'me' and 'you', but between all of us. To succeed in this class you will need to critically evaluate the ideas presented in lecture, course readings, and by your peers; you will need to question them, dispute them, or make them your own. The objective is for you to learn to develop defendable positions – not just 'opinions' – on what is happening in the complex socio-ecological worlds you inhabit, and what coherent ethical/political responses might be.

Topics of discussion will emerge from material in lectures as well as the assigned readings. This means that you must have read critically the assigned texts prior to class. By 'reading critically' I mean more than just reading for 'content', but also questioning the articles and books you read. No author simply presents 'facts' or the 'truth.' Rather, they present a set of more or less logical, more or less coherent, and more or less persuasive arguments about the topic they are addressing. Your task as a reader is not simply to absorb those ideas, but to understand how the arguments are made, how they are (or are not) supported, and why they are (or are not) persuasive. If you find them unpersuasive, can you find more persuasive ways of discussing the topics discussed? Can you help strengthen the argument, or suggest alternatives?

Readings will be on (or linked from) the course webvista site:
https://www2.webvista.umn.edu/webct/logon/771639154121

2. Research portfolio (20 percent)
You will be required to submit a "research portfolio" with weekly entries that summarize what you have learned from the readings, lectures and class discussions.

Evaluation: 2 points each for full entries on 10 weeks' reading, evaluated at midterm and end of term.

Criteria: A full entry on a week's readings and topics is a thoughtful and well-organized summary of and response to the main themes in each reading, with notes on what seemed most significant (particularly to your interests and the pieces you are likely to write over the course of the semester), and notes about your questions or comments on the reading. In addition, each week's entry (minimum of 2-3 pages – not of "finished" text, but organized in a usable manner) should connect the reading in some way to your experience outside the classroom, whether this be to your own research for the class, observations you've made, or other things you've read.

This portfolio is designed to help support your participation in the course by connecting your thoughts while reading to your thoughts in class, both for the purposes of informed discussion and also for reference during in-class writing exercises. Therefore, although the portfolio is not designed to be a polished, "finished" product, it should be very readable and easy to use. We will discuss this assignment during the second class.

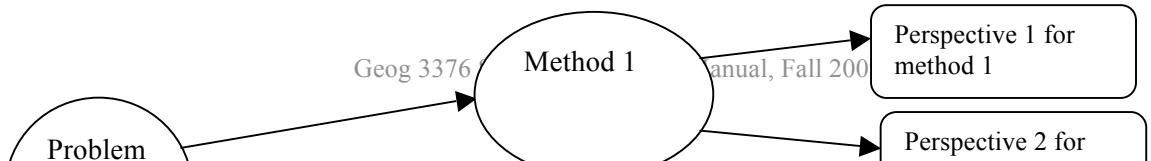
3. Short assignments (10, 15 and 20 percent) = 45 percent (there is also an option to have each count for 15 %, with the same total of 45%; you can decide this at the time of the first essay)
At three points in the class (noted in the weekly schedule below) I will ask you to prepare and then write short essays (1-2 pages) related to course readings, lectures and other materials. These assignments will give you the chance to survey a specific environmental problem and a range of methods being used to address it; to write reviews of current management regimes highlighting use of science; and to identify and explore ways that different agro-ecological management regimes affect and are affected by people in different groups, places, and power relations. These three assignments will also give you the chance to experiment with different modes of research and communication, from brief exploratory writing to the development of a position paper to more sustained research writing – considering different parameters for writing, particularly different audiences, including scientific, general academic, and general public audiences.

Learning how to use writing to explore, develop, and communicate your thoughts is a central part of this course (and others); however, this is not a writing intensive course, so these will be very brief writing exercises. They will be completed in class, relying on the notes you have prepared from readings in your research portfolio.

The first two assignments will be peer reviewed using some version of the rubrics below (which we may refine), and then I will evaluate them. With these two assignments, you will have a chance to rewrite the essays in response to your and your peers' critique of the essay after it is written.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS
i. Brief survey of a specific environmental problem and a range of methods being used to address it
This essay will be written in class, critiqued in peer review, then revised at home.

- Clearly describe an environmental problem, explaining why it is a problem.
- Identify the different 'actors' involved in this problem. For each group of actors, explain how they relate to the problem. For example, are they causing the problem, affected by the problem, trying to fix the problem? Are they characterized by a particular stance in relation to the problem? With whom do they see themselves working? Who do they see themselves working against? Diagram this relationship. (Note interesting questions about relationships that you discover while writing and diagramming.)
- Describe at least two central methods used to address your problem. Describe how the methods help fix the problem, and how the methods relate to the key actors you've identified.
- Identify at least two different perspectives associated with different actors for each problem-solving method; for at least one of the problem-solving methods, describe how the two different perspectives relate to each other.



Rubric for assessment:
2 pts: Environmental problem is described clearly: the problem and its environmental implications are understandable.
2 pts: The actors related to the problem (both human and non-human) should be clearly identified.
2 pts: It should be clear what characterizes each set of actors and how key actors relate to each other.
2 pts: At least two methods being used to address problem are presented; reader should easily be able to understand how the methods help fix the problems.
2 pts: At least two different perspectives associated with different actors for each problem-solving method are presented, and the relationship between different perspectives should be described for at least one of those pairs.

ii. Brief position piece on an environmental problem, explicitly taking into account scientific and political parameters of the problem, supporting the position taken with credible evidence, and addressing two central critiques of the position
This essay will be written in class, critiqued in peer review, with an option to revise at home.

- Briefly identify an environmental problem, explaining why it is a problem using both scientific and political justifications.
- Pick a central position in relation to your problem. What arguments are made to support this position? What arguments are made against it? What are the methods used to gather and present the evidence that support these arguments?

Rubric for assessment:
6 pts: Problem is clearly identified and explained (3 points for scientific and 3 points for political parameters of problem)
3 pts: Central position is clearly stated and justified.
3 pts: At least one counter argument to position is considered in a way that ends up supporting the central position.
3 pts: Methods used to support arguments for and against position are explained in a relevant way.

iii. Proposal for a research paper on ways a particular kind of alternativeness in the alternative food moment changes agro-ecologies
This essay will be written in class, with no option to revise.

Rubric for assessment:
5 pts: Central question or problem is clearly identified.
5 pts: Plan for addressing central question or problem is explained in a way that makes the reader understand why the methods to be used are appropriate.
5 pts: Clear relevance to an appropriate audience of proposed research is demonstrated.
5 pts: Promise of creative approach to competing perspectives is demonstrated.

4. Field trip (group project) 15 percent
Different groups in the class will create virtual field trips representing different positions in relation to the land use changes expected to accompany the new rail corridor between Minneapolis and St. Cloud. We will use this exercise to explore urban political ecology – as well as the implications of urban land uses and land use changes associated with urbanization.

Rubric for assessment (to be assessed in light of group field trip production, but to be individually assigned – in other words, a project that doesn't quite live up to expectations doesn't necessarily mean a bad grade for group members, and a stellar project doesn't guarantee a great grade for slacker group members):
3 pts: Central theme and perspective of field trip are identifiable.
3 pts: Clear understanding of different positions is demonstrated.
3 pts: Ways different positions encounter each other are addressed.
3 pts: Worked well with others (communicating plan / goals / process with group).
3 pts: High quality presentation: take-home message was understandable.

GRADING STANDARDS

90-100% A -- achievement is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
80-89% B -- achievement is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
70-79% C -- achievement meets the course requirements in every respect.
60-69% D -- achievement is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
S -- achievement is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better.
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below 60% F (or N) – achievement is inadequate and no credit will be given for the course.
I -- (Incomplete) Assigned due to extraordinary circumstances, e.g., hospitalization, which prevent the completion of work on time. Requires a written agreement between you and me!

Workload: This is a three-credit course. You should expect to spend nine hours per week on this course (three hours in class; six hours outside the classroom). This includes all lectures, readings and assignments.

MISSED OR LATE WORK

Late assignments will not be accepted without prior approval; assignments with valid reasons for being late will lose 5% of their value for each day the deadline has been extended unless other arrangements have been made.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY or MISCONDUCT

Academic Integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty, and to follow the University Student Conduct Code. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be grounds for awarding a grade of F or N for the entire course. **All work you submit must be your own.** When you use other peoples' ideas in your assignments, you must acknowledge the source. For instance, much of this syllabus has been adapted from Bruce Braun's syllabus for the same course; and part of the statement on 'class participation' in this syllabus is adapted from his similar statement that he adapted from Don Mitchell (a professor of geography at Syracuse University). To not acknowledge this would be plagiarism: passing off their work as my own! We will discuss how to properly reference the work of others when we discuss the research portfolio.

STATEMENT ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you know of any factors in your life that may hinder your abilities to learn up to your potential in this course (including your ability to use the course webvista site), please notify me during the first week of class so that your needs can be accommodated. Accommodations cannot be made retroactively; protect your legal rights by contacting me before any graded assignments are turned in. You may also wish to contact the Office of Disability Services (McNamara Center Suite 180: 626-1333, http://ds.umn.edu/).

IV. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS

Readings will be available on course webvista page:
https://www2.webvista.umn.edu/webct/logon/771639154121

This course is organized around three five-week topic modules:

(1) an introduction to political ecology,

and then case study explorations of

(2) urban political ecologies and

(3) political ecologies of food.

These modules use case studies to link everyday environmental experiences of the class to political processes and particularly to natural processes at multiple scales. Using the two case studies of urban and agricultural land use changes across the Mississippi River watershed will allow us to apply political ecology's theoretical tools to specific local cases that exemplify current environmental controversy across North America. These cases will help us consider how our everyday environmental decision making is connected to broader social and environmental scales, and will provide us with examples for considering different, competing perspectives on what nature is, what it is for, and who gets to decide what happens with it.

The required readings, writing assignments, and class discussion will complement these topic modules in presenting the course from the perspective of the Liberal Education Environment Theme. Through discussion, oral presentation, staged dialogue exercises about current environmental issues, and writing both in and outside of class, you will gain a better understanding of the dialogue that takes place between competing perspectives both in addressing and studying environmental issues. The following weekly topics and readings will structure the way that we will consider the processes that underlie central contemporary environmental issues, and the ways that environmental impacts and changed are understood and managed.

Module 1: ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS; POLITICIZING NATURE

Weeks 1–2. **INTRODUCTION**

In the first three meetings of the course, we will survey contemporary environmental issues and controversies, and identify the ecological processes related to environmental problems in the news. In these first few weeks we will begin to explore different strategies being used to address and to represent pressing environmental issues, and we will consider academic approaches that help evaluate these strategies. The first assignment, a summary of several different approaches to an environmental issue, will be related to this survey of environmental problems and introduction to the basic premises and history of political ecology.

Week 1:	**Introduction(s), overview of course and expectations**
Sep 9	What is political ecology? I: Nature and society; Environments and power

Week 2: **Political ecology and environmental problems in the news**

Acquire appropriate portfolio; note at least three environmental problems with related political ecology issues

Please complete a very brief (15-20 minute) survey on logistics, skills, and expectations you may have here: http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dFV3dmJXOVZCamFSdTlFTlhKdjI3MkE6MA..
(We'll use this mostly to organize class exercises like the field trip.)

Havel, V. (2007) Op-Ed: Our Moral Footprint. September 27, *New York Times*. Downloaded Sep 2008 from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/opinion/27havel.html?pagewanted=all

Hardin, Garrett (1968) "The Tragedy of the Commons," Science, 162:1243-1248 http://dieoff.org/page95.htm
Club of Rome (1972) "The Limits to Growth" http://www.clubofrome.org/docs/limits.rtf

Rosling, H. (2006) Debunking third-world myths with the best stats you've ever seen. Ted Lectures. View online at http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/hans_rosling_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen.html Also see Worldmapper (proportional cartograms) http://www.worldmapper.org

McDonough, W. & Braungart, M. (1998) The Next Industrial Revolution. *The Atlantic Monthly*. http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/199810/environment

Dean, C. (2007) Harnessing Methane, Cutting Waste, Recycling Tiles. May 22, *New York Times*. Downloaded September 2008 from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/22/science/earth/22interf.html?pagewanted=all

Sep 14 **Pessimism, optimism, and the political nature of everything**
Sep 16 **What is political ecology? II: Access and enclosure; Management, scale, ecopolitics**

Weeks 3–5: **WHAT IS NATURE? WHOSE NATURE IS NATURAL? HOW IS NATURE POLITICAL? FROM WILDERNESS PRESERVATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

In the three weeks after the introduction, we will concentrate on questions that are central to political ecology about the relationship between ideology, power, and nature. In this module, we will focus particularly on different ways of learning about and knowing the processes of nature, such as through scientific study, practical work, or leisure activity.

Week 3: **Nature**

Castree, Noel. 2000. "Nature" In R. J. Johnson, D. Gregory, G. Pratt and M. Watts, eds. *Dictionary of Human Geography, 4th Edition*. Oxford: Blackwell Press, pp. 537-540

Cronon, William, 1995. "The trouble with wilderness; or, getting back to the wrong nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, edited by William Cronon, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 69-90

Thoreau essays and commentary to consider: Walking (Study text by Margaret M. Brulatour)
http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/thoreau/walking/
and Bean Field (Study text by Ken Kifer) http://www.kenkifer.com/Thoreau/bean_f.htm

Cronon, William, 2003. 'The Riddle of the Apostle Islands.' *Orion* May/June.

Reviews of *Liberation Ecologies* (1996, eds. Richard Peet and Michael Watts)
Batterbury, Simon. 1997. in Cultural Ecology Newsletter: http://www.cwu.edu/~geograph/cen30.html)
Corbridge, Stuart. 1997. Journal of Development Studies, 33(6): 875-878.

Sep 21 **Introduction to Romanticism and wilderness**
Sep 23 **Bell Museum visit: Natural History**

Week 4: **Grappling with nature and naturalization**

O'Driscoll, Patrick. 2000. "Ted Turner Builds the Ultimate Preserve" *USA Today*. July 17, pp. 1A-3A.

Katz, Cindi, 1998. 'Whose nature, whose culture? Private productions of space and the preservation of nature.' In B. Braun and N. Castree, eds. *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium.* Routledge, 46-63.

Harden, B. (1990) "Good Intentions." *Africa*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. pp.177-211.

Sep 28 **The Trouble with Wilderness; Wilderness as 'forgetting' or 'hiding'**
Sep 30 **Action, contemplation, science: knowing the processes of nature through work, study, adventure and risk**

Week 5: **Whose nature?**

White, Richard, 1995. 'Are you an environmentalist or do you work for a living'? In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 171-185.

Shiva, V. (1990) '*Biodiversity, biotechnology and profit: the need for a People's Plan to protect biological diversity*', The Ecologist, 20(2): 44–7.

Braun, Bruce. 2003. "'On the raggedy edge of risk': articulations of race and nature after biology." In *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*, eds. Donald Moore, Jake Kosek and Anand Pandian. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 175-203

Cloke, P. and Perkins, H. C., 1998, "Cracking the Canyon with the awesome foursome": representations of adventure tourism in New Zealand, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 16:185-218.

potential film for discussion: *Grizzly Man*

Oct 5 **Natural economic development; Nature as appropriation; 'Natural' development trajectories; Preservation as privatization; traditional & modern forms of enclosure (Bioprospecting & GM organisms); politics of conservation (state vs. community)**

Oct 7 Essay #1 (in class): Survey of a specific environmental problem & a range of methods being used to address it

Module 2: URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Weeks 6–9. **Case study 1: Political ecologies of urbanization, studied via different perspectives on land use management changes being made along the NorthStar / Upper Mississippi River Corridor**
In the next four weeks of the term, we will consider the implications of urban land uses and land use changes associated with urbanization. Through field trips, films, readings, and in-class dialogues, we will explore different perspectives crucial to understanding how environmental decisions are made and the implications of decision making about processes underlying cities and suburbs that we take for granted, such as the ecology of the lawn, sewers, and highways. The NorthStar transportation corridor will come into service during this semester, so this case study will allow us to study real decisions about land uses changes as they are being considered and made.

Week 6: **Urban Political Ecologies**

Cronon, William, 1991. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, pp. 5-19.

Hough, Michael 1995. Selections from *Cities and Natural Process.* New York: Routledge.

Manson, Steve and Bauer, Marvin, 2006. Changing Landscapes in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. CURA Reporter, fall: 3-11.

Wainwright, Joel and Morgan Robertson, 2003. "Territorialization, science and the colonial state: the case of Highway 55 in Minnesota." *Cultural Geographies*, 10: 196-217.

Oct 12 **GeoWall demo: What are the ecological processes of urban places?**
Oct 14 **Who manages urban ecologies? How do we read the ecological processes of the city?**

Week 7: **Cities as natural spaces?**

Robbins, Paul and Julie Sharp, 2006. "Turfgrass subjects: the political economy of urban monoculture" In N. Heynen, M. Kaika and E. Swyngendouw, eds., *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*. London: Routledge, pp. 110-128.

Hayden, D., & Wark, J. (2004). *A Field Guide to Sprawl*. New York: W.W. Norton. Introduction: Decoding Everyday American Landscapes, pp. 7-16. vocabulary list: http://www.doloreshayden.com/work1.htm

Oct 19 **Is the city the antithesis to nature? Where does the city end? Sprawl & urban change**
Oct 21 **Suburban nature: the political economy of the lawn**
Research portfolio midterm review

Week 8: **Urban metabolism**

Merchant, Carolyn, ed. 1993. "Fredrick Law Olmsted on the Value of Parks, 1865" *Major Problems in American Environmental History*. Lexington, MA: Heath Publishers, pp. 384-385.

Kaika, Maria. 2005. *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City*. New York: Routledge. Introduction, pp. 2–10, especially pp. 3–6.

Ross, Andrew, 1999. "The social claim on urban ecology" In M. Bennett and d. Teague, eds. *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 15-30.

Oct 26 **The politics of sewers and city parks**
Oct 28 ***Virtual field trips presentations***

Week 9: **Dialogues in urban ecologies; *Virtual field trips presentations***

Davis, Mike. 2006. Introduction to *Planet of Slums http://newleftreview.org/A2496*

Head, Leslie and Muir, Pat. 2007. Selections from: *Backyard: Nature and culture in suburban Australia*. Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press with Halstead Press.

Griffiths, Huw, Ingrid Poulter and David Sibley, 2000. "Feral cats in the city." In C. Philo and C. Wilbert, eds. *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations*. London: Routledge, pp. 56-70.

Nov 2 ***Virtual field trips presentations***

Nov 4 **Binaries and uncanny encounters: native/alien; domestic/wild; sprawl vs. slums**

Weeks 10–11. **THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RISK & THE ENVIRONMENTS OF POLITICS: RACE, CLASS, TOXICITY (Connecting urban and food modules)**

In the two weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, we will consider questions of environmental equity and justice, building on the cases and topics we have already explored to understand further how politics is central to the way that environmental problems are experienced in the material lives of bodies. The second assignment, a position essay on an environmental issue, will be related to modules 3 and 4, building on their survey of diverse philosophical, cultural, and political approaches to environmental problems.

Week 10: **Risk**

Davis, M. (1996) The political ecology of famine: The origins of the Third World. Chapter 2, pp.48-63 in Peet & Watts (eds.) *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. New York: Routledge

Kosek, Jake, 2006. *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, Smokey Bear is a White Racist Pig pp. 183-227.

Di Chiro, Giovanna, 1995. "Nature as community: the convergence of environment and social justice" In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 298-320.

Di Chiro, Giovanna, 2003. "Beyond ecoliberal 'common futures': environmental justice, toxic touring, and a transcommunal politics of place." In D. Moore, J. Kosek, and A. Pandian, eds. *Race, Nature and the Politics of Difference*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 204-230

Kovel, Joel. 2002 *The Enemy of Nature*. New York: Zed Books. Capital, pp. 28-50.

O'Connor, James, 1998. *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 71-93.

Nov 9 **Risk society: What drives environmental change/risk?**

Essay #2 (in class): Position piece on an environmental problem

Nov 11 **Environmental risk and social inequality**

Module 3: POLITICAL ECOLOGIES OF FOOD

Week 11: **Political ecology issues in food and agriculture**

Perfecto, Ivette, 1992. 'Pesticide exposure of farm workers and the international connection'. In *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, Edited by B. Bryant and P. Mohai. Westview Press, pp. 177-203.

Boal, Ian, 2001. "Damaging crops: sabotage, social memory, and the new genetic enclosures." In N. Peluso and M. Watts, eds. *Violent Environments*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 146-154.

film: Dying for a Living

Nov 16 Smokey Bear is a White Racist Pig

Nov 18 Health politics and the environmental justice movement

Weeks 12-15. Case study 2: **CONTEMPORARY SHIFTS IN AGROECOLOGICAL PROCESSES**

In the last three weeks of class, each student will use materials about the alternative food movement to prepare an essay about the changes in political ecology that are involved when agri-food practices are shifted in specific ways.

Week 12: **Environmental issues, the food movement, & agri-food political ecology controversies**

Menzel, Peter and D'Aluisio, Faith. 2005. *Hungry planet: What the world eats*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press. Introduction.

Schlosser, Eric, 2002. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. New York: Perennial Press, selections.

film: King Corn

Pollan, Michael, 2006. Introduction (&?) (pp. 15-99) *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York, Penguin.

Prasad, I. & Mittal, A. (2008) *The Blame Game: Who is Behind the World Food Price Crisis?* Oakland Institute Policy Brief.

Tushie-Lessard, C. (2008) Leaked food price report pushes ethanol debate. July 18, *Minnesota Daily* http://www.mndaily.com/2008/07/16/leaked-food-price-report-pushes-ethanol-debate

Mamerto Pérez, M., Schlesinger, S. and Wise, T.A., with the Working Group on Development and Environment in the Americas (2008) *The Promise and the Perils of Agricultural Trade Liberalization: Lessons from Latin America*.

Nov 23 **Ecologies of ethanol, hunger, and commodity support programs**

Nov 25 ***(Thanksgiving, no class)***

Week 13: **Field to table / seed to fork: Following food chains**

Slocum, Rachel. (2006) "Anti-racist practice and the work of community food organizations." *Antipode*, 38, 2: 327-349.

Guthman, Julie. (2008) Bringing good food to others: investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies* 15: 431–447.

Hedin, J. (2008) Op-Ed: My Forbidden Fruits (and Vegetables). March 1, *New York Times*. Downloaded Sep 2008 from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/01/opinion/01hedin.html?pagewanted=all

Donahue, Brian, 2003. The Resettling of America. In *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, ed. Norman Wirzba. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, pp. 34-51. (Selections from Reclaiming the Commons?)

12 myths about hunger (2006) Institute for Food and Development Policy Backgrounder. http://www.foodfirst.org/pubs/backgrdrs/1998/s98v5n3.html

Nov 30 **Understanding the environmental processes of commodity chains**

Dec 2 **Bodies and food: meeting at the Bell Museum to see *Hungry Planet***

Week 14:	**Agroecological shifts in alternative food networks**

Guthman, Julie. 2004. *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 110-140 & selections.

Lotti, Ariane, in press. The Commoditization of Products and Taste: Slow Food and the Conservation of Agrobiodiversity. *Agriculture and Human Values*.

Johnston, Joseé and Lauren Baker, 2005. "Eating outside the box: FoodShare's good food box and the challenge of scale." *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22: 313-325.

Dec 7	**The organics industry; Slow food, green cities? Ecologies of 'sustainable consumerism'**
Dec 9	**Alternative food networks: Scope and scale** ***Essay #3 (in class): Proposal for a research paper on ways that a particular kind of alternativeness in the alternative food moment changes agro-ecologies***

Week 15:	**The ecology of commodities**
Dec 14	**The ecology of commodities activities**
Dec 16	**Summary class; The ecology of commodities activities** ***Research portfolio final review***