

ANTH 134: Making the Natural World: An Introduction to Political Ecology

**University of Pennsylvania
M. Lycett**

**Autumn 2021
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What are the limits of nature? When do natural systems become human or socio-natural systems? In this course, we examine the human construction of nature both conceptually, through ideas about environment, ecosystem, organism, and ecology; and materially, through trajectories of direct action in and on the landscape. Beginning with a consideration of foundational concepts in human ecology, we will discuss current problems and approaches, centering on political ecology. We will also consider topics including a) the relationship between indigenous and technocratic knowledge and resource governance, b) environmental movements themselves as objects of ethnographic study; c) justice and sustainability as environmental goals; d) inequality, displacement and violence as environmental problems; and e) fair trade and food security or sovereignty.

Office Hours

My office hours are **Monday 9:30-11** or by appointment. *I will hold office hours in my LAB, Museum 415.* My office phone number is (215)746-8898. My email address is mlycett@sas.upenn.edu.

Assignments

1) First, you will be asked to complete **three short (5 page) essays** dealing with major themes of the course. Essay questions and guidelines will be posted on Canvas at least two weeks prior to their due date. The first essay will cover material introduced in the first five weeks of the semester and will be due at the end of the sixth week. The second essay will cover the next third and be due at the end of 12th week. Your final essay will reflect upon one of the major themes of the course in relation to one of the discussion topics. (60%) ***YOUR FINAL ESSAY IS DUE December 17.***

2) During the semester, you will be required to submit a **response paper to three of the nine designated in-class discussions**. You may choose any three of the class periods labeled “discussion,” below. For each, you should identify no more than three points for future discussion. These points may 1) identify the major issues raised by one or more readings, 2) consider the points of contrast or tension between readings, or 3) raise questions for future discussion based on your experience of the topic. For each point of discussion, you should provide no more than one paragraph of context that indicates why you find this point of interest for followup discussion. The format for response papers is open and quite informal. You may complete the assignment as a narrative, a numbered list, or an outline. Keep in mind that you should provide enough context to help the reader understand the importance of each discussion point. Your response paper should be no more than 2 pages in length. There is no minimum length. ***RESPONSE PAPERS ARE DUE ON THE DATE OF THE IN-CLASS DISCUSSION as designated on the syllabus.*** (30%)

3) Finally, you will be evaluated on the basis of your contribution to class discussions. Each of you will be responsible for **participating in class discussions** on a day to day basis. On any given day, you should be prepared to introduce up to three questions based on the readings for that day. I will give every participant in the class the opportunity to frame our discussion of at least one of the articles. (10%)

All assignments for this class should be submitted as an email attachment. References should be cited using social science conventions, i.e. listing author's last name and date of publication in parentheses within the text, and the full citation for all referenced articles should appear at the end of your text.

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Academic Integrity

All students are expected to be familiar with the [Code of Academic Integrity](#). See tips for avoiding plagiarism on the [Library's website](#).

Support Resources for Students:

Please read the Canvas Student Resources page for this course for more information on educational and support resources including:

Penn COVID FAQs

Support for Academic Skills

Wellness Resources

Disabilities and accommodations

Fairness in Course Administration policies

Reading

There are no assigned books for this course. Readings including journal articles or book chapters will be posted on Canvas as PDF files. Readings are assigned by week in the course outline, below. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.

Course Outline

The following list includes the topics we expect to cover this Semester and the readings most relevant to in-class discussion. Readings supplement but are not identical to class discussions. Most readings cross-cut topics. A few additions, deletions, and other changes will be announced throughout the Semester.

Introduction: Nature and Ecology in the Social Sciences

8/31 **NO CLASS** [optional background Reading: *Biersack 1999, Scoones 1999, Berglund 2006*].

9/2. **Introduction.** Readings: Mühlhäuser and Peace 2006 , Lewontin and Levins 2007a

9/7. **Discussion: *What kind of an object is Nature?*** Lewontin and Levins 2007b,c.; Walter, et al. 2008 **Putting a Price on The Real Value of Nature** (link on Canvas), **What's Wrong with Putting a Price on Nature?** (link on Canvas)

9/9. **Discussion: *Is Nature an empirical, instrumental, or historical problem?*** Arnold 2000, Cronon 1995.

Nature's Economy: Historical Development of the Ecosystem Concept.

9/14. **Readings:** Worster pp.1-25.

9/16. **Readings:** Worster pp.26-55.

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9/21 **Readings:** Worster pp. 189-253. [optional pp. 113-188].

9/23. **Readings :** Worster pp. 256-315.

9/28. **Readings :** Worster pp. 316- 433.

After Balance I: Biodiversity

9/30. Farnham 2007, pp.1-40.; Maclaurin and Sterelny 2008, pp.1-27.

After Balance II: Climate Change

10/5. Howe 2014. pp. 147-169; Oreskes 2015; Roscoe 2016

Political Ecology

10/7. **Readings:** Watts and Peet 2004;Blaike and Brookfield 1987; Biersack 2006a

Why Structure Matters: Power, System, and Underdevelopment.

10/12. **Readings:** Roberts and Park 2009; Sassen 2014, Introduction

Why History Matters: The Conditions of Ecological Poverty and Ecological Debt.

10/19. **Readings:** Davis 2002; Warlenius, Pierce, and Ramasar 2015

Population, Resources, and Climate Displacement

10/21. **Readings:** Sherbinin et al. 2007.; Sherbinin et al. 2011, Warner 2009.

Global Capital and Local Agency

10/26. **Readings** (Feb 8): Hecht 2004; Biersack 2006b

10/28. **Discussion. Three Encounters,** Wilk 2006, Hvalkof 2006, Brosius 2006; **LINK:** <http://africasacountry.com/2015/11/the-land-grabs-in-africa-you-dont-hear-about/>

Governance and Stewardship

11/2. **Readings:** Greenberg 2006, Goldman 2001; [optional: Escobar 1999].

11/4 **Discussion: Wilderness as a Policy and Contingent Object,** Nash 1976, Neumann 2004; Thomas 2010

Community and Governance

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11/9. **Readings:** Rangan 2004; Charnley and Poe 2007; Agrawal 2005.

11/11. **Discussion: Governance and Misrecognition:**

Erikson 2014; Fairhead and Leach 1995; Morrison and Lycett 2014; Neumann 2014

11/16. **Discussion: Community, commodity and (Fair) Trade,**

Fisher 2007; Moberg and Lyon 2010, Doane 2010,

11/18. **Discussion: Community, Food Security and Food Sovereignty,**

[Death 2016 \(link\)](#) Wittman 2010; McMichael 2014.

11/23. **General Discussion/ Review.**

Environmental Justice I: Toxic Geographies

11/30. **Readings:** Pellow 2007, excerpts; Grey et al. 2013; Sze 2005. OPTIONAL: Szasz and Meuser 1997

Environmental Justice II: Dispossession and Extractive Regimes

12/2. **Readings:** Sassen 2014, excerpts, Li 2010.

12/4. **Discussion: Environmentality of the Poor**

Nixon 2011; Martinez-Alier 2002; Guha 2006, excerpts.

12/9. **Discussion: Whose Anthropocene?**

Chakrabarty 2008; Albritton Jonsson 2015; Morrison 2015; Bauer 2017.