ENVIRONMENT, SOCIETY AND POLITICS (25033)

1. Course details

Course: Environment, Society and Politics
Course code: 25033
Study programme: Bachelors Programme in Political and Administration Sciences (Grau en Ciències Polítiques i de l’Administració)
Credits: 4 ECTS credits (100 hores de dedicació)
Trimester: 1st
Teaching language: English
Course tutor: Christos Zografos, PhD
Office hours: Thursdays 15:00-16:00 (between: 5 October – 30 November 2017)

2. Course presentation

The course explores ways in which power relations shape environmental change and governance from a critical environmental social science perspective. In this course, we will discuss how the environments in which we live have been produced by major forces such as capitalism, colonialism and empire, but also consider the limits posed to those projects by nature itself and by alternative, counter-hegemonic projects. We will also look at how race, class, and gender are relevant categories for analysing environmental change and conflict, and consider how those categories intersect.

The classes draw on knowledge from the interdisciplinary fields of political ecology, environmental history, and ecological economics, which use varied conceptual devices and methodological tools to study how environmental change is produced and what are its social implications.

The aim of the course is to help students develop a critical understanding of environmental change and of the relevance of power and politics for producing or shaping nature. After the end of the course, students should be in a position to mobilise specific concepts and analytical tools presented in the class in order to analyse environmental transformation, and embark on mini-projects (e.g. for their final year dissertations) in the area of environmental social science.

3. Associated skills

This course is part of the optional courses itinerary “citizenship and government” that together, develops the following competencies:

BASIC SKILLS:
CB2. That students can apply their knowledge to their work or vocation in a professional manner and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.
CB3. That students have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical.
CB4. That students can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.
CB5. That students have developed those skills needed to undertake further studies with a high degree of autonomy.

GENERAL SKILLS:
CG1. Capacity for analysis and synthesis.
CG4. Basic computer skills.
CG6. Interpersonal skills.
CG7. Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team.
CG10. Research skills.
CG12. Ability to generate new ideas (creativity).
CG13. Leadership.
CG15. Project design and management.

TRANSVERSAL SKILLS:
CT1. Identify and analyze critically gender inequality and its intersection with other axes of inequality.

SPECIFIC SKILLS:
CE2. Analyze the structure and functioning of political systems.
CE6. Identify citizen behavior and democratic values.
CE7. Analyze the functioning of electoral processes.
CE17. Apply the methods and techniques of political and social research.
CE18. Analyze quantitative and qualitative data.
CE19. Examine the techniques of political communication.
CE20. Categorize information and communication technologies (ICT) and analyze their impact on the political system.

4. Contents

Section 1: Introduction: Linking environment, society and politics
• Environmental governance
• Politics and power
• Political ecology, ecological economics and environmental history
• Political economy and environmental change

Section 2: Capitalist natures
• Capital accumulation and environmental degradation
• Commodity frontiers

Section 3: Colonial and imperial natures
• Environmental justice and environmental racism
• Empire and environmental degradation
• Colonialism: othering, coloniality and nature
Section 4: Constructed and hybrid natures
• The power of discourse, or how discourses produce nature
• Disciplining communities, disciplining nature
• Hybridity: incomplete dominations and unfinished natures

Section 5: Environmental subjects
• The power from within: subject-making
• Governmentality and the environment
• Desire and power

Section 6: Feminist natures
• Gender and nature
• Feminism and nature
• The role of emotions in environmental transformation and conflict
• Intersectionality

Section 7: The materiality of nature
• Nature as an uncooperative commodity
• The agency of nature
• Vital materiality

Section 8: Valuing nature
• The monetary valuation of nature, and the power to reduce complexity
• Environmental externalities vs. cost-shifting
• Monetisation and commodifying nature
• Rationality and environmental decision-making
• Democracy and sustainability decision-making

5. Seminars

This course includes two seminars, which will be used to conduct ongoing student evaluation.

The first seminar (10% of final mark) will involve the screening of the 1984 movie ‘Where Green Ants Dream’ by German director Werner Herzog (in English, with English subtitles). Students are required to do a set of readings before that seminar. After the screening, students will get into groups (of 2-5 students, depending on the size of the class) to answer a set of questions, which they will then present in the class, and the presentations will be followed by a class discussion. Student performance will be evaluated by how well students bring knowledge imparted during the course in their answers to the questions, and by their participation in the discussion.

The second seminar (30% of final mark) will have two elements. The first element involves the presentation of a poster which will be prepared before the class by students into groups (of 2-5 students, depending on the size of the class), and will be presented briefly (6-10 minutes, depending on the size of the class) to the rest of the class; after each presentation, other students (and the tutor) will be able to ask questions on the
This part of the class will essentially follow the format of a scientific conference ‘poster session’, where posters are hanged on the wall, and scientists go around into groups listening to poster presentations and asking questions about them. **By Week 3 of the course**, students must form groups and decide on poster topics from a list of topics that will be provided by the tutor. The groups will then prepare the poster, through doing a set of readings and answering a set of questions that will be provided by the tutor. The second part of the seminar will involve a discussion facilitated by the tutor, which will be structured around questions related to the content of course classes. Student performance will be evaluated on the basis of how well students bring knowledge from the course in their posters and in their participation in the discussion.

6. **Assessment**

Students will be evaluated via three *types* of evaluation tools:
- Participation and performance in the classroom; this is directly connected with having done the readings that will be provided for each class and answering the question related to those readings
- Performance on two seminars
- Performance on a final course essay

In order to get a mark for this course, students **must participate in the two seminars and write the final short essay** (see below).

The following table outlines the contribution of each evaluation to student final mark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation tool</th>
<th>% of final mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in classroom and readings</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar 1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar 2</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>40%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Classroom participation**

Class 1 is an introductory class; students are not required to do any readings prior to that class. Classes 2-7, and Class 9 are lecture-based classes. Students are required to read one academic article and answer a question related to that article before the class. Those readings will be made available in the Aula Global university intranet. Students will bring their answer in the class (e.g. in the form of bullet points) where some of them will be asked to present their answers. This will be followed by class discussion on the question, the topics it touches upon and the issues it raises, which will be based on student answers to the question. Performance will be evaluated individually via student participation in those discussions, and specifically by how well students bring into their participation knowledge from the readings.

**Seminars**

This course includes two seminars. The seminars will be used to conduct ongoing student evaluation. Attendance to seminar sessions is compulsory. Students failing to attend a seminar without providing a (written) proof of serious (e.g. medical) reasons why they did not show up, will get a ‘0’ (zero) mark for that seminar, and will be
automatically suspended from the course, i.e. will get a ‘fail’ mark for the whole of the course, without the possibility to take a resit exam (retest).

For both seminars, as students will form groups, an overall mark will be given for performance to the whole of the group, and the same mark will be assigned as seminar performance to each student individually.

For details on the content of each seminar, and the criteria for evaluating student performance in them, please see Section 5 of this syllabus.

Final course essay
Students will write a take-home essay. This will involve developing an answer to a question that will be provided by the course tutor, in an essay-style text of a maximum of 1,000 words. Student performance will be evaluated by the ability to bring into the answer relevant knowledge taught during the course, express this in the student’s own words (but using scholarly language to the extend that this is possible), and provide examples to demonstrate and support the points made in the essay.

Students failing to hand in the essay by the deadline without providing a (written) proof of serious (e.g. medical) reasons why they did not keep with the deadline, will be given a ‘0’ (zero) mark for that essay, and will be automatically suspended from the course, i.e. will get a ‘fail’ mark for the whole of the course without the possibility to take a resit exam (retest).

Retest
Those failing the course will be given a second chance to pass the course by taking a resit exam (retest). Only those who have attended both seminars and have handed in a final essay will be able to resit to pass the course.

7. Methodology

This course combines lectures with seminars. There will be eight lecture classes, and two seminar ones.

For the lecture-based classes, students are required to read one academic article and answer a question related to that article before the class, and then discuss their answers in the class. The class will also combine a more ‘traditional’ lecture format in which the tutor will explain further points related to the topic, as well as classroom activities (e.g. based on watching short videos or reading a short text in the class and answering questions related to it), and conclude with a summary of the main points raised with the class. Student participation is highly encouraged and will be sought through questions and discussions with the students.

The two seminars will be used for student performance evaluation purposes. For details about seminar content and evaluation, please see Section 5 of this document.
8. Bibliography and other resources

Key readings

Recommended readings (alphabetic order)


Rodó-de-Zárate, Maria. 2014. Developing Geographies of Intersectionality with Relief Maps: Reflections from Youth Research in Manresa, Catalonia. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 21(8), 925-944


**Other resources**

ENTITLE blog – A collaborative writing project in Political Ecology. [https://entitleblog.org/](https://entitleblog.org/)

CNS Web: an online community of red-green activists. http://www.cnsjournal.org/
Uneven Earth. Website seeking to provide clear and thoughtful discussions about environmental and social justice conflicts. http://www.unevenearth.org

9. Weekly schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>In-class activities</th>
<th>Out-of-class activities</th>
<th>In class hours</th>
<th>Out-of-class hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Read assigned texts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Read assigned texts,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>prepare seminars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Read assigned texts,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>prepare seminars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Read assigned texts,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>prepare seminars</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>prepare seminars</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Seminar 1</td>
<td>Read assigned texts,</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Seminar 2</td>
<td>Read assigned texts,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study hours for final exam</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total hours</td>
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<td>100</td>
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