
**POLITICAL ECOLOGIES OF
FOOD, FARMING AND CAPITALISM
SPRING 2017**

THURSDAY, 6:00 PM - 7:50 PM, 63 FIFTH AVENUE, ROOM 520

INSTRUCTOR: CHRISTOPHER LONDON; CHRISLONDON@NEWSCHOOL.EDU;
PHONE: 212-206-3524 X3909

OFFICE: 72 5TH AVE, ROOM 715; OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY, 5-7PM OR
BY APPOINTMENT

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the intersections of states, humans and nature through the political ecologies of food and farming inside and outside of capitalism. It is “ecologies” because an underlying premise is that there is no singular ecology, rather there are innumerable ecological processes within which we’re enmeshed and with which we must contend if we are to address the environmental challenges that confront us. Course readings deploy critical social theory, case studies and ecological science to examine the historical processes, both natural and social, through which relations between humans and environments are formed and sustained. The course is divided into four moments. “Food, Farming and Capitalism” sets the groundwork for understanding farming as an eco-political problem. “Reconfiguring the Global” deepens our understanding of the historical production and global structuring of capitalist agro-food systems while also examining the formation of alternative systems. Having established an empirical context, in “Ontologies and Knowledges” we’ll step back and explore social and ecological theories for conceptualizing the relations between humans and nature. With these foundations we’ll move into “Agroecological Design” where we explore the aesthetic dispositions, social organizations and power relations that must be addressed in the design and realization of alternatives to capitalist agriculture. Finally in “Reconfiguring the Future” we’ll discuss some ways of rethinking agrarian citizenship and the challenges of systemic transformation. The class will end with a poster session in which students present their research projects.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is for students to become versed in the central concepts of political ecology, agricultural development and agroecological design so that they may become better analysts and practitioners in the fields of policy analysis, development planning, community design practice, and advocacy campaigns. Through the sustained application of

rigorous theory and creative design to specific cases the expectation is that students will be prepared to work across the theory/practice divide within specific situations.

RESEARCH PROJECT: ASSIGNMENTS, SCORING AND FORMATS

PROJECT DETAILS

Student research projects will explore the concepts and debates covered in readings and class discussions through case studies that apply a political ecological analysis to particular crops, animals, locations, cultures and/or technologies. Cases must address a significant socio-ecological problem such as land degradation, food deserts, human health, ecosystem resilience, etc. While the expectation is that you will do your case study on an agricultural problem, it is possible after consultation with the professor to choose a non-agricultural topic (e.g., mining, protected areas, biodiversity conservation, or other land use intensive activities).

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS AND DUE DATES

Assignments are iterative, that is, each assignment lays the foundation for subsequent ones leading to a final project report that you have worked intensively over the course of the semester.

- **Topic, February 13 (750 words + references + concept map; if case study is focused on a specific place, provide a spatial map; include any other supporting materials as necessary):** Prepare a 3-page paper in which you discuss the what, who, and where of the problem you will address in your case study. What makes the issue an ecological “problem”? Does identifying it as a problem challenge any basic assumptions about nature, economics, society, etc., i.e., what “ideas of nature” are at play? What are the key cultural, biological and spatial characteristics of the actors (human and non-human) that shape how the problem manifests? To aid in presenting your topic you must prepare a concept map. Concept mapping is visualization exercise where you diagram the causes and consequences of problems, associate actors with these, and identify points of intervention. Visualization of the problem is often an efficient means for thinking through its many moving parts. You will be provided instructions on how to prepare a concept map and you will be expected to continually revise the map as your project evolves.
- **History, March 18 (1000 words + references, revised concept map and any other supporting materials as necessary):** Cases are cases because they represent iterations of long run historical processes. Prepare an historical narrative that provides context – institutions, science, social factors, economics, etc. – for your case. What has been the relationship of the problem to state structures, policies and practices? How is the problem produced by and productive of global capitalism? How has power been exercised in and through the problem? What are its potential long-term consequences?
- **Designs, May 2 (1250 words + references, revised concept map and any other supporting materials as necessary):** From your first concept map draft you should be thinking about how to intervene in the problem you have been analyzing. Basing yourself within

conceptual and historical context of the course readings, your prior assignments as well as the tools you have coming from your disciplinary training, design a strategy for intervening in the problem. Who can you mobilize, how and to do what? Discuss knowledge systems, social organization, cultural factors, etc. that influence how people understand and address the problem. Does your intervention operate at a specific scale or does it cut across hierarchies? Why? You must also remember that you too are an actor so your discussion must include a reflexive element.

- **Final Report, May 15 (4500 words + references, revised concept map and supporting materials):** The final report will compile your previous work and add your reflections on the significance of your ideas in the global context of food, farming and capitalism. Your compilation of preceding work **must not** be merely cut and paste but a **substantial** revision, integration and reorganization of your work. Your concluding reflection must address how your analysis and the actions you propose will disrupt the structural and historical logic of the problem such that a lasting change is possible. You must include a final revised version of your concept map.
- **Poster Session, May 11:** Prepare a poster that illustrates your research project which you present to and discuss with classmates and possible visitors. Guidelines will be provided.
- **Session Leader and Check-In:** In addition to your research project you will lead discussion of a given days readings. You must meet with the professor prior to this session to discuss your strategy. You must draft a handout that synthesizes the day’s readings and prepare a breakout session in which smaller groups explore given themes or engage in exercises. You will also present your concept map at the beginning of a class session.

SCORING

Assignment	Value (%)
<i>Topic</i>	10
<i>History</i>	15
<i>Design</i>	20
<i>Final</i>	40
<i>Poster Session</i>	10
<i>Session Leader</i>	5
<i>Total</i>	100

ITERATION

Each paper must be a standalone work with its own title and thesis-argument-evidence-conclusion structure. You may however reference future or past papers as you develop your argument. That is, it may happen that you need to mention a factor that influences your argument but will only be fully elaborated in a future paper. In that case you may indicate, in a footnote for example, that the given point will be developed at a later date. You of course may reference your previous papers, it is not necessary to fully restate previous arguments. Assume that the reader is informed.

FORMATS:

Paper length is specified in terms of word counts; 250 words is roughly one page double spaced but not if there are tables, images or other non-textual elements. So count your words accordingly. The expectation is that you should write much more than the assigned amount and through judicious editing, tightening of arguments and removal of extraneous information submit a paper at or under the word count.

- Use the following protocol for all assignment file names: LastName-AssignmentName, i.e., Topic, History, Design, Final.
- You must use ASA or similar format and citation style. [Purdue](#) and [Cornell](#) have good online guides.
- Your papers must have a title, appropriate headings and subheadings and page numbers.
- You must include a reference list; the reference list is not included in your word count.
- You must use 12 point type size and a conventional font such as Times New Roman, Helvetica, Garamond, etc.
- Tables, charts, images, etc. must all be captioned and appropriately referenced.
- Footnotes (do not use endnotes) are to be used sparingly and only to elaborate a tangential argument that nevertheless deepens your core argument, or to clarify your use of a source, or for any other purpose that directly contributes to strengthening your argument. It is not where you dump text that otherwise didn't fit within the word count parameters.

EXTENSION REQUESTS AND PENALTIES:

All papers must be submitted electronically by 6PM the day they are due. If you have reason to believe that you cannot finish your paper in time, you must request an extension a minimum 3 days before the due date. Extensions will not be automatically approved. If a request is made after that deadline only certified medical excuses, accommodation requests or other formal procedures will be considered in determining whether an extension will be allowed. Scores for late papers will be reduced by 20% and another 20% for every 24 hours they are not submitted.

GRADING CRITERIA FOR PAPERS:

Criterion	Approximate Weight (%)
<i>Formatting</i> : appropriate and consistent use of headings; consistent and thorough citation; complete and properly formatted bibliography; properly captioned figures, tables and/graphs	10
<i>Quality of prose</i> : clear, grammatical sentences; correct use of terms and concepts; clear and compelling use of qualitative examples, illustrations, images and/or quantitative data. Note: Writing style should be authentic. Do not feel compelled to write like an “academic”; instead use your own voice, including writing in the first person when appropriate though without sacrificing analytical rigor.	35
<i>Breadth of research</i> : incisive use of an extensive academic, institutional and/or cultural literature; identification and use of appropriate data sources; identification and use of comparative cases. However, all essays must also reference readings from the course, i.e., outside reading must not be done in lieu of course reading, but in addition to it.	40
<i>Creativity</i> : drawing of interesting and unusual, but apposite, associations or comparisons; nuanced interpretation of facts, events, theories, policies, etc.	15

RESOURCES:

The university provides many resources to help students achieve academic and artistic excellence. These resources include:

- The University (and associated) Libraries: <http://library.newschool.edu>. You can also use library services at NYU’s Bobst Library. Do not presume that you can do the assigned work for this course without ever setting foot in the library.
- The University Learning Center: <http://www.newschool.edu/learning-center>. If you have challenges organizing your time, conducting research, writing, and/or working with deadlines you should avail yourself of the resources available through the learning center. If I detect that you are in need of such services I will instruct you to do so.
- University Disabilities Service: www.newschool.edu/student-disability-services/ In keeping with the university’s policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with me privately. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to contact Student Disability Service (SDS). SDS will conduct an intake and, if appropriate, the Director will provide an academic accommodation notification letter for you to bring to me. At that point, I will review the letter with you and discuss these accommodations in relation to this course.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university.

Students are responsible for understanding the University's policy on academic honesty and integrity and must make use of proper citations of sources for writing papers, creating, presenting, and performing their work, taking examinations, and doing research. It is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others. The full text of the policy, including adjudication procedures, is found at

<http://www.newschool.edu/leadership/provost/policies/>

Plagiarism is wrong, unoriginal, and very annoying. Don't do it. Resources regarding what plagiarism is and how to avoid it can be found on the Learning Center's website:

<http://www.newschool.edu/learning-center/virtual-handout-drawer/>

READINGS

FOOD, FARMING AND CAPITALISM

JANUARY 26: WHAT IS NATURE?

- Williams: Ideas of Nature

FEBRUARY 2: FARMING AND LANDSCAPES

- Brassley and Soffe: Agriculture, Chapters 1, 2 and 4
- Perfecto, et al.: The ecological argument

FEBRUARY 9: FARMING, TRADE AND MODERNIZATION

- Brassley and Soffe: Agriculture, Chapter 3, 5-6
- Lyson: Civic Agriculture, Chapters 1-4
- Jackson: Who "designs" the agricultural landscape?

RECONFIGURING THE GLOBAL

FEBRUARY 16: FOOD REGIMES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

- Friedmann: From colonialism to green capitalism: Social movements and emergence of food regimes
- Schneider and McMichael: Deepening, and repairing, the metabolic rift

FEBRUARY 23: CIVIC AGRICULTURE

- Lyson: 5-7
- Imbruce: Intro 1-2

MARCH 2: "ALTERNATIVE" GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS?

- Imbruce: 3-Conclusions

ONTOLOGIES AND KNOWLEDGES

MARCH 9: HIERARCHY AND ENCOMPASSMENT

- Allen et al.: Interlevel relations in ecological research and management
- Gray: Work, technology and the experience of class relations on Scottish hill sheep farms

MARCH 16: SOCIAL RELATIONS OF KNOWING

- Ingold: Culture and the perception of the environment
- Nazarea: Local knowledge and memory in biodiversity conservation.

MARCH 21: SPRING BREAK

AGROECOLOGICAL DESIGN

MARCH 30: DESIGNING AGROECOLOGY

- Nassauer and Opdam: Design in science: extending the landscape ecology paradigm
- Gliessman: Agroecology and Agroecosystems
- Altieri: Agroecology and the design of climate change-resilient farming systems

APRIL 6: FARM AESTHETICS

- Gobster et al.: The shared landscape: what does aesthetics have to do with ecology?
- Nassauer: The aesthetics of horticulture: neatness as a form of care
- Duram: Agents' perceptions of structure: How Illinois organic farmers view political, economic, social, and ecological factors

APRIL 13: FARMERS AND RESEARCH

- Stuiver et al.: The power of experience: farmers' knowledge and sustainable innovations in agriculture
- Altieri: Linking ecologists and traditional farmers in the search for sustainable agriculture
- Bezner Kerr: Building resilience in African smallholder farming communities through farmer-led agroecological methods

APRIL 20: LANDSCAPE PLANNING

- Benoit et al.: Landscape agronomy: a new field for addressing agricultural landscape dynamics
- Berthet et al.: Analyzing the Design Process of Farming Practices Ensuring Little Bustard Conservation: Lessons for Collective Landscape Management
- Valencia et al.: Participatory landscape planning and sustainable community development: Methodological observations from a case study in rural Mexico

RECONFIGURING THE FUTURE

APRIL 27: CITIZEN PRACTICES

- Demos: The Post-natural Condition
- Da Via: Seed Diversity, farmers' rights, and the politics of repeasantization
- Fitzgerald et al.: Not your grandmother's agrarianism

MAY 4: TRANSITIONS LARGE AND SMALL

- Godfray et al.: Food security: the challenge of feeding 9 billion people
- Haberl et al.: A socio-metabolic transition towards sustainability? Challenges for another Great Transformation
- Altieri and Toledo: The agroecological revolution in Latin America: rescuing nature, ensuring food sovereignty and empowering peasants

MAY 11: POSTER SESSION
