REM 663
Special Topics in Environment & Development

Course Outline

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Course Description

This course recognises that in developing countries natural resources are intricately linked with the everyday life of households. Thus, the issues and concerns are somewhat different from the management of natural resources and the environment in developed countries. Sustainability is a much more immediate concept, since it must take account of pressing concerns such as basic subsistence and even survival. Drawing on the instructor’s experience in international environment and development work, the course covers a range of topics including models of development, environmental concerns in development, integrated conservation and development projects, community-based resource management, global and ecological economics perspectives and field techniques. The course is part seminar and part field trip. The latter will be a one-week visit to Baja, Mexico, including visits to La Paz, Loreto and Magdalena Bay.

Student Evaluation

Assignments (40%) - students will complete two short assignments (20% each). These consist of (i) a structured book review, to be completed before the course commences, and (ii) a selective literature review that will be presented during the field trip portion of the course.

Term Project (50%) - students will be asked to prepare a major paper on a topic to be selected from a list provided by the instructor (exceptions will be considered). Students will be assessed primarily on the written paper, which is due on June 30 (40%). They must first submit a 1-2 page outline in early May (10%).

Participation (10%) – students are encouraged to participate actively in class discussions and field activities. To this end, students will be assessed on their participation in class and during the field trip, and will lead a discussion session during the classroom portion of the course.

Course Texts

Dedina, S. Saving the Gray Whale – People, Politics and Conservation in Baja, California, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. [available in bookstore and on Reserve]

Course Topics and Reading List – Week at SFU

Most journal article readings will be made available in electronic form on the REM server under "REM 663" and on a course website [http://www.rem.sfu.ca/downloads/REM-663/]. These readings are indicated as (*). Additional readings shown in the syllabus but not available electronically are being provided separately as printed courseware. Discussion Leaders are also indicated. If you have
Day 1: Background Topics in Environment and Development

a) Topic: Introduction to Economic Development and the Environment
- what is development and what makes a ‘developing’ country
- basic development theory: poverty, inequality and population
  [VIDEO: “Ending Global Poverty: Are We Meeting the UN Millennium Goals?”]

Readings: Millennium Development Goals, United Nations website; available online at: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ [Familiarize yourself with the MDG before class]

b) Topic: Environmental Issues in Developing Countries: An Overview
- market and policy failures, poverty-environment trap and cumulative causation
- cross-cutting themes & more complex arguments: population & poverty
- political ecology & ecological distribution conflicts


Discussion: Are rural households responsible for their own environmental problems?

Does the history of copper mining illustrate the environment and development problem?

Day 2: Household Perspectives on Natural Resource Management

a) Topic: Rural Households and Natural Resource Management (NRM)
- household decision-making and NRM
- property rights and NRM
- traditional natural resource management systems

b) Topic: Agricultural Change and the Environment

- Green Revolutions and agricultural transformation
- agroecosystems and sustainable agriculture
- opportunistic management in pastoral systems


Discussion: Are traditional societies good resource managers?


Are Green Revolutions good or bad for development and the environment?


Day 3: Community Perspectives on Natural Resource Management

a) Topic: Community-based Resource Management, Social Capital and the Environment

- prospects for community-based resource management
- social capital and the environment
- decentralization and NRM


b) Topic: Protected Areas & Parks-People Conflicts

- developing country perspectives on conservation
- integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) vs. direct payments
- protected area policies and local communities: parks-people conflicts


Day 4: National Perspectives

a) Topic: Economics of Environment and Development Projects

- valuation of environmental resources in developing countries
- economic analysis of development projects with environmental impacts
- Case Study: Hadejia-Nguru wetlands, Nigeria


b) Topic: Environment and the Economy

- natural resource endowments and development
- the Environmental Kuznets Curve
- linking development and tropical deforestation


Day 5: International Perspectives & Pre-trip Planning for Field Trip

a) Topic: International Trade & Policy Perspectives

- the environment and agricultural trade liberalization
- the “pollution haven” hypothesis
- biodiversity conservation and debt-for-nature swaps
- multilateral institutions and environmental learning

[see also http://www.scidev.net/en/news/costa-rica-and-us-swap-debt-for-nature.html]

b) Topic: Preparation for Field Trip to Mexico

- an introduction to doing field work in a project setting: the six biases
- brief overview of the field trip region and resource management issues
- pre-trip planning and awareness
  [VIDEO: “Questions of Difference: PRA, Gender and Environment”]

Discussion: Do developing countries serve as so-called ‘pollution havens’? Should they?  

How do multilateral institutions 'learn' in making environmental policy?  

Field Trip Portion (Baja): Reading List

It is worth reading all of the Dedina text but the following suggestions should be your first priorities. You will benefit most if you review these background readings before developing your Assignment 2 literature presentation related to your term paper topic.


- Regional description, Chapters 1 & 3
- Institutions, Chapter 5
- Fishing communities, Chapter 7


Also see the following website for a useful study on development prospects for the Loreto region, carried out by several academics from Havard:

http://www.futurosalternativosloreto.org/index.htm [click on the "Final Report"]