Economy, Environment, and Society

Graduate Seminar - ENVS 293SP
Time: Thursdays, 2-5pm
Place: Bren Hall, Floor 4L, Rm 4316
Spring 2015

Prof. Simone Pulver         Office hours: Tuesdays, 2-4pm
Environmental Studies       Pulver@es.ucsb.edu
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Course Overview
This course uses a social science lens to examine economic structures, economic organizations and economic behavior, with a specific focus on economy-environment relations. We survey the four dominant sociological approaches to analyzing the economy—power, institutional, network, and cultural—and explore how these approaches have been applied to environmental concerns. For each perspective, we both review the theoretical foundations and discuss contemporary debates.

For much of the twentieth century, the study of the economy was viewed as the domain of economics. Not until the late 1980s did scholars in sociology, political science, and anthropology return their attention to the study of economic behavior, a core focus of foundational social science, including the work of Marx, Weber, Polanyi, etc. Present-day social science offers theories of the economy that challenge the atomistic, rational-actor models that dominate economics. They emphasize that economic action is structured by power relations, is governed by national and organizational institutions, is embedded in market networks, and is reflective and constitutive of cultural categories.

Course Requirements:
Participation (30% of grade)
Active, effective contribution to seminar discussions is the most important requirement of participation in the course. The basis of active, effective contribution is coming to class having struggled with the readings enough to understand the arguments that the authors are making and to have given thought to what about those arguments seems useful, what seems wrong, and what is unclear. Active, effective contribution to seminar discussions also means attentive listening to the comments of others.

Weekly critical reading commentaries (20% of grade)
In order to make the most of limited class time, it is valuable to start out each class with some ideas of what the members of the class found most interesting, perplexing or otherwise most worth discussion. To that end, you will be asked to submit critical reading commentaries (circa 500 words) on the Tuesday before each Thursday seminar. These reading commentaries should be analytical, not descriptive. In other words, they should critically engage the readings rather than summarizing them.
Seminar paper (50% of grade)
A final research paper is due at the end of the semester. The paper, in the range of 20-25 pages, may take several forms: use the course concepts/readings to critically analyze an empirical topic; critically engage a cluster of course readings or themes; link course themes to a student’s broader research project; a grant application or research proposal that has been substantially shaped by engagement with course readings and themes.

Final papers are due on June 11 at 4pm in my faculty mailbox in Bren Hall, Environmental Studies Program office. One-page abstracts are due in class on April 16. A first draft of the seminar paper is due on May 19 at 4pm, via email to Prof Pulver and other members of the class. We will dedicate the May 21 seminar to discussion of student papers. The particular format of the discussion will depend on class size.

Required readings
All readings are available via the course Gauchospace web page.

Week 1 (April 2): Introduction – Economics versus other social sciences

Week 2 (April 9): Power (I) – Political economy and the environment in theory


Week 3 (April 16): Power (II) – Political economy and the environment in application

April 16: Abstract for seminar paper due in class


Week 4 (April 23): Institutions (I) – Varieties of capitalism


Week 5 (April 30): Institutions (II) – Rationality and Organizations


Week 6 (May 7): Networks – Theoretical foundations and applications


**Week 7 (May 14): Culture (I) – Commodification**


**May 19, 4pm:** First draft of seminar papers due via email to Prof Pulver and other members of the class.

**Week 8 (May 21): Peer feedback on seminar paper drafts**

**Week 9 (May 28): Culture (II) – Performativity**


**Week 10 (June 4): A synthesis?**

Reading TBD

**June 11, 4pm:** Final Seminar papers due in Prof Pulver’s mailbox in Bren Hall Environmental Studies Program office.