ENVS 200
Foundations and Practice of Socio-Environmental Research

Time: Tuesdays, 2-5pm
Place: Bren 4316
Winter 2017

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Course Overview
ENVS 200 serves as the required core seminar for the Interdepartmental PhD Emphasis in Environment and Society. This year the focus of the seminar is on the foundations and practice of socio-environmental research. Over the past two decades, research on socio-environmental systems (SE systems) has progressed through the development of numerous frameworks for analyzing the complex, non-linear interdependencies that characterize the linkages between biophysical and social arenas. These frameworks vary in their disciplinary origins, in their conceptualizations of the components and connections that constitute SE systems, and in the purposes for which the frameworks were developed. Yet, as a whole, they constitute the emergent theoretical core of SE research. In this seminar, we interrogate these frameworks, examining their early philosophical origins and their differing conceptualizations of the components, connections, dynamics and contexts of SE systems. The theoretical readings are supplemented by conversations with USCB faculty currently engaged in SE research. The focus of these conversations will be on the challenges and actual practice of SE research.
Course Requirements:

Readings
All readings are available via the course Gauchospace web page. Doing the reading in advance of class is the foundation for everything else you do in this course. Each of the readings has been carefully selected.

Participation (40% of grade)
Active, effective contributions to seminar discussions are 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 Sunday before each Tuesday seminar. These reading commentaries should be analytical, not descriptive. In other words, no summaries but critical engagement with the readings!

Leading a seminar discussion (10% of grade)
Working in groups of two or three, each of you will be responsible for leading one seminar discussion. You may structure the discussion as you choose but make sure to integrate the readings and promote discussion.

Seminar paper (30% of grade)
A final seminar paper is due at the end of the quarter. The paper, in the range of 10 pages (double-spaced, 12pt, Times New Roman), can take many forms. For example, it may serve as the first draft of a field exam essay, a section of a dissertation prospectus, or simply a stand-alone comparative analysis across the range of SE frameworks. A one-page abstract describing the kind of seminar paper you intend to write is due in class on January 31. Final papers are to be handed in by 3pm, Friday, March 17 in my faculty mailbox in the Environmental Studies Program Office in Bren Hall.
Week 1 (January 10): Introduction – Socio-Environmental Research


Week 2 (January 17): Early Foundations and Lineages of SE Research


Week 3 (January 24): The Ostrom Social-Ecological Systems (SES) Framework


**DUE in class: One-page abstracts for seminar paper.**

Week 5 (February 7): Resilience and Political Ecology


Week 6 (February 14): SE Research in Practice – Peter Alagona and Kevin Brown, “Ecological Change in Western Rangelands” and Jeff Hoelle, “Culture in SE systems”


Additional readings TBA
Week 7 (February 21): The Turner Vulnerability Framework and the Coupled Human and Natural Systems (CHANS) Framework


Week 8 (February 28): John Kramer – SESYNC and the Practice of Interdisciplinary Science

Readings TBA

Week 9 (March 7): Industrial Metabolism and Urban Ecological Systems


Week 10 (March 14): Frontiers of SE Research

Pulver, S. et al. (in preparation) “Frontiers of SE Research”


Friday, March 17, 3pm: Seminar papers due in Prof Pulver’s faculty mailbox in Environmental Studies Program office, Bren Hall.