PEOPLE, POVERTY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN CENTRAL AMERICA

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** During the 1980s Central America received considerable international attention and financial assistance from the United States as the region remained embroiled in political conflict and widespread violence. With media attention and public concern focused elsewhere in the world after “peace” was proclaimed at the presidential conference in San Salvador in 1989 and the Cold War ended, it took Hurricane Mitch in 1998, a catastrophe of "biblical proportions," to refocus international attention on the region. But international concern was short lived and Central America once again has fallen below the horizon in the minds of most people who live outside the region. Those of us with long term and lasting interest in Central America realize that the "peace" proclaimed in 1989 was largely illusionary. What the region's presidents could not decree was that the interrelated social, economic and environmental conditions that precipitated class struggles and interventions in the region had been resolved. In the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch those root causes have in fact been exacerbated. This is true especially in Honduras, the hardest hit of the countries devastated by Hurricane Mitch. Some observers described a country close to anarchy as little of the promised disaster and financial aid materialized, almost no reconstruction took place, the economy remained in shambles, poverty and disease increased significantly, violent crime accelerated, and notable political instability was apparent. Elsewhere in the region, conditions are better than in Honduras, but Central America remains enmeshed in various social, economic, and environmental crises of long duration. Despite recent diversification of Central American economies, including a growing dependence on international tourism, the countries of the region remain extremely vulnerable to economic downturns, the current world food crises, climate change, and environmental destruction. Throughout the region, people, communities, and countries have grown ever more reliant on international migration and “remittances” – money sent back home by the regions’ people increasingly unable to make a living in the countries of their birth. In this class we will examine the causes of the persistent and interrelated crises in Central America. We begin with an overview of the region's environment, demography, and human conditions. We examine elements of the region's prehistory and history that have important implications for understanding current conditions. We go on to understand the complex linkages between social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors that affect the present situation and the future as well. Next, we try to understand the political ecology of contemporary Central America by examining the human and environmental repercussions of the major avenues of economic development that have been promoted in the region - bananas, coffee, cattle, cotton, logging, so called non-traditional exports (such as broccoli, snow peas, melons, and farmed shrimp), maquilas (most involved in the international garment industry), and tourism. We then evaluate one of the major aspects of environmental policy in the region - the establishment of protected areas such as public and private parks and reserves. In this formidable and declining social, economic, and environmental context, the peoples of Central America have shown outstanding courage and have begun a number of initiatives to respond to the continued threats to their material and cultural survival. In the last part of the course we will focus on these strategies to survive and thrive.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:** There are three principal textbooks for this course that are on reserve at the Davidson Library: *Global Studies: Latin America, 12th edition*, by Paul Goodwin; *Endangered Peoples of Latin America: Struggles to Survive and Thrive*, edited by Susan Stonich, 2001; *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother*, by Sonia Nazario, 2006. I may put a few other books on reserve through the UCSB Reserve Book System (RBR) and several articles will be available through “MOODLE” one of the UCSB course management software systems. I will also make class presentations available through MOODLE. In addition, I will provide you with the URLs of many Internet sites which you can access for further and more up-to-date information. These should be considered “required reading.” There also may be several additional recommended readings.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Your grade in this course will be determined by:

1) **TWO EXAMS** [a midterm (20%) and a final (30%)]  
2) **A CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW** (instructions provided)  
3) **Attendance and participation in discussion section**  

The two in-class exams will likely consist of multiple choice questions but may also contain some short answers, short essays, definitions, and/or identifications as well. The first exam (midterm) will include a map quiz.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:  
I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus.

I. Introduction
SEP 25 - OCT 7 Central America: Land, people, and issues

**Required Reading:** Global Studies (pp. 16-51); Stonich (2001), Preface and Introduction.

OCT 9  
**Exam 1 (INCLUDES MAP QUIZ)**

II. The Political Ecology of Central American Economic Development: The Root Causes of Social and Environmental Vulnerability
OCT 14  
**Film:** The (Maya) Collapse

16  
Bananas

21  
Bananas - continued  
**Required Reading:** Begin reading Nazario

23  
Agricultural Development: 1500 ~ 1900

28  
Agricultural Development: 1950 ~ 1980 (Cotton, Sugar, Cattle)

30  
Agricultural Development: 1980 ~ present (Non-traditional agricultural exports NTAEs)  
**Required Reading:** Chapt 9 and 11 in Global Studies; Stonich and de la Torre on MOODLE; Varela, Cissna, and Stonich in Stonich (2001).

NOV 4  
**Film:** Buyer Be Fair

6  
**CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW DUE!!!!!!! NO LATE REVIEWS ACCEPTED!!**

11  
International Tourism and Protected Areas in Central America  
**Required Reading:** Bray, Howe in Stonich (2001)

13  
**Film:** The Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve  
**Required Reading:** Dodds, Herlihy in Stonich (2001)

18  
Tourism and Conservation in the Bay Islands  
**Required Reading:** Stonich (Chapter 5) in Stonich (2001)

III. Current and Ongoing Crises in Central America
NOV 20  
**From Vulnerability to Resilience: Helping People and Communities Cope with Crises**  
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration NOAA (Introduction to Dr. Alexander and Dr. Stonich’s Research Project in the Mesoamerican Reef System)  
**Required Reading:** Alexander and Stonich (2008) on Moodle;

25  
The Paradox: Climate Change and International Tourism  
**Required Reading:** Stonich and Alexander (2008) on Moodle

27  
**THANKSGIVING! NO CLASS**

DEC 2  
Volunteer Tourism  
**Required Reading:** Haas (2008) on Moodle; Stonich (2008) on Moodle.

4  
**Endangered Peoples of Latin America: Struggles to Survive and Thrive**  
**Required Reading:** Bort and Young, Loucky in Stonich (2001)

DEC 9  
**FINAL EXAM! 12-3PM HSSB 1174**
INSTRUCTIONS FOR CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

DUE DATE: 12:30pm, THURSDAY, NOV 6. DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS!!! I WILL NOT ACCEPT LATE REVIEWS! NO EXCUSES. NO EXCEPTIONS, NO EXTENSIONS! MAKE SURE YOU DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENT AND PRINT THE REVIEW. HAVING TROUBLE PRINTING THE FINAL REVIEW IS NO EXCUSE!

THERE ARE 30 TOTAL POINTS ON THIS BOOK REVIEW. THE BOOK REVIEW MUST USE THE FOLLOWING TEMPLATE WHICH IS BASED ON PROFESSIONAL BOOK REVIEWS. BE SURE TO INCLUDE EACH AND EVERY SECTION IN YOUR REVIEW. MAKE SURE THAT YOU INDICATE WITH SECTION (BY NUMBER AND NAME) THAT YOU ARE ANSWERING. YOU MUST INCLUDE/PRINT THE NUMBER OF WORDS IN THE DOCUMENT!

WORD LENGTH: MAXIMUM OF 600 WORDS – WE WILL STOP READING YOUR BOOK REVIEW WHEN 600 WORDS ARE REACHED. YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE ANY ADDITIONAL CREDIT ONCE THE MAXIMUM OF 600 WORDS IS REACHED.

BASIC FORMAT: DOUBLE SPACE ALL SECTIONS OF THE REVIEW AND FOLLOW THE TEMPLATE EXACTLY.

ORGANIZATION:
1. Citation: A full bibliographic citation of the book including the author, title, date, publisher, place of publication, and number of pages. (1 point)
2. Author: Who is the author? What is the author’s perspective and possible biases? (~100 words) (5 points)
3. Scope, Theme, & Audience: State the topical and chronological limits of the book. What did the author write about and when did it happen historically? Also, who is the intended audience of the book? (~100 words). (5 points)
4. Questions and Thesis: This is the most important part of a book review! If you are not able to determine the author's questions or thesis, then you cannot evaluate whether or not the author has answered the question(s) or proven the thesis. Simply put, the question(s) is(are) whatever the author set out to find out about the scope and theme. The thesis is the answer, that is, the argument, or assertion, or conclusion that the author is trying to prove to the reader. It is not the same as the scope and the theme. A good way to determine the thesis is to read the introductory and concluding chapters first, to see exactly what the author wrote about and what arguments the author made about the chosen topic. (~100 words) (5 points)
5. Summary of Arguments and Use of Evidence: Explain the various points as well as the kinds of evidence cited or described by the author in support of the thesis. Because of the limited amount of space to cover this section, you should focus on the main points used by the author to support/prove the thesis. If you use direct quotes from the author, you should enclose them in quotation marks, and provide the page number (in parentheses) where the quote appears in the text. (~150 words) (7 points)
6. Evaluation: Give your overall assessment of the book. Evaluate the book from your own experience with the subject. Was it clearly written and easy to understand? Was it unclear or vague? Did the author prove his or her thesis? Were maps, graphs, or glossaries provided to help in your understanding of the book? Whatever you contend in your evaluation you should cite specific examples. (~150 words) (7 points)

DO: Use standard, straightforward style and organization.
DON'T: 1. Obscure the content of the book by engaging in unsubstantiated personal opinion. The book itself must remain central to the content of the review. 2. Submit unsupported generalizations. Don’t just say the book is valuable; show where the value lies. Don’t say the book has a particular weakness; cite evidence of that weakness. 3. Judge the book by events subsequent to the time it was written. But it may be appropriate to mention post-publication developments.