Latin America: Cultures, Environment and Development

GRG 395D / LAS 388
Unique Numbers 37285 and 39975
Fall 2018
Meets in CLA 2.606, Monday 7-10 pm

Professor Gregory Knapp
Office: CLA 3.712, Mondays 1-2 and by appointment
gwk@utexas.edu, 512-232-1588 (forwards to email)

Course Description:

This seminar is designed to help Latin Americanist students perform academic research on human-environment relationships, as well as to work for and to critique development agencies, businesses and non-governmental organizations. The class explores the ideas and methods of a number of disciplines and interdisciplinary fields including cultural and political ecology, feminist political ecology, ecological anthropology, environmental history, development and post-development studies, sustainability studies, and cultural geography. The course will address a range of issues including definitions and theories of modernization and development; methods of cultural and political ecology; concepts of householders, livelihoods, and buen vivir; participatory development and theater of the oppressed; identity, territory, and mapping; population and resources; neoliberalism, conservation, and resource extraction; food and agriculture; and the roles of NGOs and academics in understanding discourses and solving problems. Topics and readings are developed in part on the basis of input from students, who typically come from multiple backgrounds and programs across campus.

Prerequisites:

Graduate standing and some knowledge of rural Latin America or the Caribbean. Knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese is desirable but not necessary.

Course Characteristics:

Each class will consist of (1) short lecture(s) by the instructor; (2) proctored discussions of the week's readings, co-chaired by two students who have, in consultation with the instructor, prepared a strategy for addressing the readings and student essays (which may include splitting into smaller groups); and (3) a food break providing for more informal discussion of the topics.

Reading Assignments

There is no textbook. Course readings and other materials will be posted on Canvas.
Summary of Grading:

Grades will be assigned on the plus and minus scale (A-, B+, and so forth), as follows:

- 93-100 A
- 90-92.99 A-
- 87-89.99 B+
- 83-86.99 B
- 80-82.99 B-
- 77-79.99 C+ and so forth.

Weekly written commentaries, attendance, and participation 37%. Most weeks, a topic will be assigned for a written commentary or short presentation. Keep within the assigned word count lengths (200 to 300 words). These must be posted on Canvas by 5 pm Sunday prior to the class; use formats as provided in class. These may be shared with the weekly proctor(s) and other students. 2-4 points per week for 11 weeks.

Proctoring 20%. Each student will normally co-proctor one or two classes during the semester. The two proctors should join in a brief presentation giving an overview of the readings as a whole in relation to the topic and the in relation to previous readings and discussions. Plan for 10 minutes (5 minutes each). Write out notes for your presentation unless you have outstanding presentation skills. Proctors will then develop activities for about two hours of discussion (including a break for food halfway through the class). Get advance permission for any videos. Proctors will develop a strategy to involve students with wrestling with the questions of the week. Strategies must include some peer reviews of discussion papers. Proctoring should strive to be innovative and challenge "models" of routine involvement; to this end, at the end of every class students will asked to evaluate the classroom experience of both the professor and proctors. The professor will begin and end each seminar with lectures on the topic.

Paper 1, due October 22 15%. Three pages (900 words). In this paper you will be discussing issues of agency, identity, and participation in a particular development context in Latin America. This may be your project site, or you may choose a case example from the readings. The paper should be framed in terms of one or two guiding questions from this course. You may use the questions provided for our class to guide your paper, or come up with your own questions.

Paper Presentations October 22 and November 19 8%. You will discuss your paper topics in class with brief powerpoints (5-10 minutes); the score is for the presentation and attendance.

Paper 2, due December 10 20%. Six to ten pages (1800 - 3000 words). In this paper you will be exploring a particular trajectory of development or conservation in a local setting in Latin America. Again, you may use your own project or take a case example from the readings. The paper should again be framed in terms of one or two guiding questions.

Citation Style

Please use a consistent citation style, such as the APA parenthetical citation style and
bibliography format.

Classroom Policies

Online course materials may not be copied or distributed without prior permission. Students are expected to arrive on time to class exactly at 7 pm as a courtesy to others. No matter how interesting the discussion, classes will terminate by 10 pm in courtesy to those who need to catch a bus.

Accommodations for Special Needs

The University makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/.

Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

Call 512-232-5050 or visit http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal.

Academic Integrity

Everyone is expected to show respect toward others. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work. Using other person’s work without appropriate citation is plagiarism.
Schedule of Topics

(Tentative; Subject to Change with extensive student input as to topics and readings). Reading assignments will be provided as the semester proceeds, including "classics," recent theoretical debates, and case examples. All readings will be placed on Canvas.

Week 1 September 10 Introduction

No readings; we get to know each other. Brief lecture on definitions and theories of development and modernization.

Week 2 September 17 Development: Alternative Definitions and Theories; Modernization; Capitalism; Post Development

Questions for essay: Did Smith and Godwin have alternative visions of human nature that are relevant to our policy and politics today? What are some alternative ideologies or definitions of development and modernization and who determines the prevailing definition? How has development or its absence been explained? Is development (in the sense of modernization) even desirable?

In this and future essays, keep your answers under 300 words, and bear in mind that your essays will be shared with other students in class.

Readings for this essay:


De Soto, Hernando. 1990. The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World. New York: Perennial Library (translated from the Spanish), selections from the introduction by Mario Vargas Llosa (pp. xiv-xv, xvii-xx) and the main text (pp. 243-244).


OPTIONAL (for more recent Escobar)
Week 3 Sept 24 Cultural and Political Ecology.

Questions: what methods and theories and stances might be appropriate to study and understand complex human-environment interactions in the real world, given the existence of multiple voices, political conflict, and multiple possible causalities? What can specialists or activists respectively realistically offer to help solve real world problems?

Readings for this and future weeks will be provided on Canvas as the course proceeds.

Week 4 October 1 Householders, Livelihoods, Buen Vivir

Questions: What is "smallholder" farming and what are the organizational advantages of smallholder/householder units over other forms of agricultural organization? How well do such concepts as livelihood, empowerment, and 'kawsay' (buen vivir) provide guidelines for understanding and facilitating local development at the micro scale?

Week 5 Oct 8 Identity and Territory

What "traits" or markers, locations or behaviors have been important in defining identity groups in Latin America? What information exists about these markers and can they be mapped? What uses or abuses might such maps be subject to? What role might ethnic, racial and/or gender territoriality play in economic development? In maintaining group access to resources?

Week 6 Oct 15 Local Groups and Participatory Development, Theater of the Oppressed

Questions: What are some techniques of participatory development and rapid rural appraisal, and what relationship if any do these have with infrapolitics or the politics of scale? How might the theater of development or international education support community development? Details of class will be provided by proctors, including possibly participating in class by performing, singing, dancing, or presenting a piece of art based off of the readings.

Week 7 Oct 22 Issues of Agency and Participation (First Paper Due)

No readings; students present papers; provide Greg with one or two pictures for projection during each six minute talk.

Week 8 Oct 29 Neoliberalism and Forest Conservation

Questions: How has neoliberalism affected the environment, and what new research is needed? Compare market based and state approaches to conservation. Who benefits and how from the new paradigms of conservation and the commodification of nature?

Week 9 Nov 5 Commodity Chains, Plantations, and New Ruralities

Questions: To what extent are smallholding strategies still relevant in the context of the
changing scale of global agriculture? What challenges are created by ranching, plantation crops, nontraditional export crops, commodity chains, GMOS?

Week 10 Nov 12 Extractive Industries

*Questions: Extractive industries by definition are not sustainable, but to what extent can the benefits be maximized and the harm to local people and environments be minimized? What can we learn from recent experiences and policy initiatives? To what extent are post-neoliberal policies helpful for local populations and environments?*

Week 11 Nov 19 Issues of Development (Oral Discussions related to final paper)

Week 12 Nov 26 What can NGOs do?

*Question to consider: What can NGOs do to promote human rights, environmental protection, poverty reduction, and cultural survival?*

Week 13 Dec 3 What can Professionals Do?

*Questions to consider: What can professionals do in academic and research settings to promote sustainability?*

Week 14 Dec 10 Conclusions; Second Paper Due (No readings)