

Environmental Change Institute
2010 Course Development and Enhancement Competition

Geog 130
Social Science Approaches to Environment-Society Relations

Instructor: Professor Tom Bassett, Department of Geography, bassett@illinois.edu

Semester: Spring semester 2011

Focus area: Environmental Change

Funding Request: \$5000

This is a proposal for a new course to be developed for the Earth, Society, and Environment (ESE) major in the School of Earth, Society, and Environment (SESE). The course will be a core course that all majors must take. It will be cross-listed between Geography and SESE. The course aims to introduce social science approaches (theories, methods) on nature-society relations to ESE majors. No such course exists at this time.

Geography 130 is designed for undergraduate students who seek to have one foot firmly planted in the social sciences and the other in the natural sciences. But how do you walk forward with these twin perspectives? Can one separate society from the environment in this way? Nature and society are so intertwined it is difficult to separate them as the examples of transgenic crops and global warming illustrate.

Clarence Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* demonstrated that multiple interpretations of nature-society relationships existed among the ancients. This class focuses on contemporary perspectives and interpretations of nature-society relations. The dominant views examined in this course include:

- 1) the not-so-obvious relationship between population and resources;
- 2) the recourse to markets to address resource scarcity;
- 3) the role of institutions in governing resource access, control, and management;
- 4) ethics-based approaches to the environment;
- 5) hazards and risk approaches;
- 6) political economy interpretations;
- 7) social constructivist perspectives.

Lectures, readings, and videos will explore the multi-faceted sides of these social science perspectives on environment-society relations. The course text for this part of the course will be P. Robbins, J. Hintz and S. Moore (2010) *Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell).

The second part of the course will apply these social theoretical frameworks to an examination of contemporary human-environmental issues. A short list of potential topics includes:

- 1) Climate change debates, including "Climategate"
- 2) Market environmentalism and environmental governance (CO₂, water)
- 3) Agri-food systems and hunger vulnerability
- 4) The Green economy
- 5) Biopolitics: genes, transgenes, and genomics
- 6) Globalization and conservation geographies
- 7) Rethinking resilience and socio-ecological systems: the Everglades

The texts for this part of the course will be R. Peet, P. Robbins, M. Watts (2010) *Global Political Ecology* (NY: Routledge) and T. Bassett and A. Winter-Nelson (2010) *The Atlas of World Hunger* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press).

The third part of the course will focus on environmental narratives with a case study of forest loss and conservation in northern Thailand. The perspectives and analytical frameworks developed in the first two parts of the course will be used to analyze the framing of this conflict over the management of forest resources. The course texts for this part of the course will be T. Forsyth and A. Walker, *Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers: The politics of environmental knowledge in northern Thailand* (Seattle: U. of Washington Press).

The course will provide ESE and Geography majors with the basic social theoretical tools to assess how human-environmental problems are framed within epistemic communities. Key concepts like environmental narratives, problem closure, and discourse coalitions will be introduced and evaluated. Students will be able to answer the following questions by the end of the course. How do we know that we have environmental problems? What are the policy implications of divergent framings of environment-society problems?

The course will be the 100-level entry course to a suite of offerings that impart the social science perspective to environment-society relations in the Geography and ESE majors. It will link up with Geog 210 (Contemporary Social and Environmental Problems); Geog 314 (Conservation and Natural Resources); Geog 410 (Geography of Development and Underdevelopment); and Geog 466 (Environmental Policy). It is critical that students be exposed to the social science perspective on environment-society relations at the introductory level. Geography 130 provides this core course.

Budget

A graduate student in Geography will be employed to help develop this course over the 2010 summer months. S/he will work with Prof. Bassett in selecting lecture topics, locating appropriate readings, and developing lectures. The Research Assistant will be employed half-time at the rate of \$1537.78 per month for the period May 15-August 15, 2010. The balance of the grant (\$386.66) will be spent on photocopying and instructional media (e.g. videos).

Course Texts:

- T. Bassett and A. Winter-Nelson (2010) *The Atlas of World Hunger* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press).
- T. Forsyth and A. Walker (2008) *Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers: The politics of environmental knowledge in Thailand* (Seattle: U. of Washington Press)
- R. Peet, P. Robbins, and M. Watts (2010) *Global Political Ecology* (NY: Routledge).
- P. Robbins, J. Hintz and S. Moore (2010) *Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction* (NY: Blackwell).

General Course Outline**Part I Approaches and Perspectives**

- Week 1 Population and Scarcity
 Week 2 Markets and Commodities
 Week 3 Institutions and the Commons
 Week 4 Environmental Ethics
 Week 5 Risks and Hazards
 Week 6 Political Economy
 Week 7 Social Construction of Nature

Part II Environment-Society Issues

- Week 8 Climate change and Climategate
 Week 9 Market environmentalism and environmental governance
 Week 10 Agri-food systems and hunger vulnerability
 Week 11 The Green economy
 Week 12 Biopolitics: genes, transgenes, and genomics

Part III The Politics of Environmental Knowledge

- Week 13 Framing environmental problems
 Week 14 Environmental narratives and policies
 Week 15 Summary

Course requirements

Midterm Exam	30%
Final Exam	30%
Term paper	30%
Participation	10%

Letters of support

- Date: Fri 12 Mar 13:57:44 CST 2010
- From: "Rhoads, Bruce L" <brhoads@illinois.edu>
- Subject: RE: New Course Proposal
- To: "Bassett, Thomas J" <bassett@illinois.edu>
- Cc: "Tomkin, Jonathan H" <tomkin@illinois.edu>

Dear Tom

I write in support of your proposal for the new 100-level course "Social Science Approaches to Environment-Society Relations" in Geography and the School of Earth, Society and Environment. Geog/SESE 130 will address a critical need in the department, in SESE, and at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Exposing students to human dimensions of environmental problems is vital given the importance of social, political and economic factors in environmental debates, as illustrated by the recent controversy surrounding the science of climate change. Your new course will be foundational for accomplishing this important task for Geography majors and for students in the Earth, Society and Environment interdisciplinary major. As a general education course, it will also serve as a vehicle for students from across the campus to become familiar with human dimensions of environmental debates - a topic no other introductory course in LAS currently addresses.

I strongly endorse your proposal and wish you success in obtaining support for it.

Sincerely,

Bruce

Professor Bruce L. Rhoads, Head
Department of Geography
<http://www.geog.uiuc.edu>
University of Illinois
607 S. Mathews Ave.
Urbana, IL 61801
217-333-1881
217-244-1785 (FAX)
brhoads@illinois.edu

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- Date: Fri 12 Mar 14:34:11 CST 2010
- From: Jonathan Tomkin <tomkin@illinois.edu>
- Subject: Re: New Course Proposal
- To: bassett@illinois.edu
- Cc: "Rhoads, Bruce L" <brhoads@illinois.edu>

I am writing this letter, in my capacity as the Chair of the School of Earth, Society and Environment curriculum committee, to support Prof. Tom Bassett's proposal to develop the new course, GEOG 130. When developed, this course will become a foundation course for undergraduate majors in the Earth Systems, Environment and Society degree, and will address a critical need in introducing these students to essential concepts and ways of thinking in social studies of the environment. I strongly support this proposal and endorse its success.

Regards,
Jonathan Tomkin

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Dr. Jonathan Tomkin
Associate Director of Academic Affairs
Research Assistant Professor
School of Earth, Society, and Environment
University of Illinois
246 Natural History Bldg.
1301 W. Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801
Phone: (217) 244-2928
Fax: (217) 244-6323

One-Page CV

Thomas J. Bassett

University of Illinois, Department of Geography, Urbana, IL 61801;
bassett@illinois.edu

Education

1976	B.A. English	Tufts University
1979	M.A. Geography	University of California, Berkeley
1984	Ph.D Geography	University of California, Berkeley

Appointments

1984-85	Visiting Assistant Professor, Geography, University of Illinois
1985-91	Assistant Professor, University of Illinois
1991-2002	Associate Professor, University of Illinois
1992-93, 1994-95	Acting Director, Center for African Studies, U. of Illinois
1995-96	Directeur de Recherches Associé (<i>sabbatical</i>) Centre d'Etudes Africaines, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France
2002-	Professor, University of Illinois
2010	Affiliate, Beckman Center, University of Illinois

Publications (from 7 books, 24 book chapters, 24 journal articles)

- Bassett, T. and A. Winter-Nelson. 2010. *The Atlas of World Hunger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bassett, T. 2010. Slim pickings: Fairtrade cotton in West Africa *Geoforum* 41(1): 44-55.
- Bassett, T. 2009. Mobile pastoralism on the brink of land privatization in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. *Geoforum* (2009) 40 (5): 756-766.
- Bassett, T. 2008. Producing Poverty: Price Formation and Power Relations in West African Cotton Commodity Chains. In W. Moseley & L. Gray (eds.) *Hanging by a Thread: Cotton, Globalization and Poverty in Africa*, Athens and Uppsala: Ohio University Press and The Nordic Africa Institute, pp. 35-64.
- Bassett, T. and M. Koné. 2008. Shifting Ground: Land Competition and Agricultural Change in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. In A. Millington and W. Jepson (eds.) *Land Change Science in the Tropics*, New York: Springer US, pp. 143-164.
- Bassett, T. and D. Crummey (eds). 2003. *African Savannas: Global Narratives and Local Knowledge of Environmental Change in Africa* (Oxford & Portsmouth, NH: James Currey Publishers & Heinemann).
- K. Zimmerer and T. Bassett 2003. (eds.) *Political Ecology: An Integrative Approach to Geography and Environment—Development Studies* New York: Guilford Press.
- Bassett, T. 2001. *The Peasant Cotton Revolution in West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, 1880-1995)*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Bassett, T. and Z. Koli Bi. 2000. Environmental discourses and the Ivorian savanna. *Annals of the Association of American Geographer* 90(1): 67-95.
- Bassett, T. 1988. The Political Ecology of Peasant-Herder Conflicts in Northern Ivory Coast. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 78 (3): 453-472.