

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Program Description

Fall, Winter and Spring Quarters, 1983-84

The general theme of this program is the global interdependence of human and non-human life and the possible attitudes and actions people can take in response to this partly desirable, partly tyrannical interdependence. All program activities served two purposes: illuminating important aspects of interdependence, such as the key role of conflict in human and animal behavior and the need for environmental awareness, and developing important basic skills, such as writing, critical reasoning, and group discussion.

During the fall and winter quarters, the program's 65 students attended: whole-group lectures (7 hours per week); seminar discussions in group of 10 or 20 (3-5 hours per week); classes in critical reasoning (fall quarter, 2 hours per week); brief biweekly individual conferences on writing; and field natural history exercises (2-6 hours per week). They also wrote weekly essays, exercises in descriptive writing, and field natural history journals and project reports; each quarter ended with an essay examination.

During the spring quarter, the program's 45 students attended lectures on "The American West" (3 hours per week); lectures about seminar books (1 hour per week); and seminars (2 hours per week). Field projects were given major emphasis, and, depending on optional specialties, each student attended lectures on natural history (3 hours per week), social history (2 hours per week), or media (4 hours per week).

Content

Lecture and reading topics for the fall and winter quarters included: introduction to ecological concepts; history and key issues of oil production, food, and nuclear war; environmental impacts; political and economic theory and policy analysis; functions of conflict in nature and human society; interpretation of poetry and fiction; topics in natural history. During the spring quarter, lectures on "The American West" were presented by Dr. Thomas Rainey and Mr. Thomas Bowen. This series was about the history of European colonization of eastern North America and the movement of the frontier westward. The settlement of the Pacific Northwest was featured. Emphasis was placed on the interactions of the frontiersmen and pioneers with the land and with the Native Americans. Assigned readings were:

Fall Quarter: Sampson, The Seven Sisters; American Enterprise Institute, Offshore Oil: Costs and Benefits; Plato, Republic; McPhee, Encounters with The Archdruid; Wright, Native Son; Zamiatin, We; Lorenz, On Aggression, Sahlins, Tribesmen; Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks.

Winter Quarter: Orwell, 1984; Allison, Essence of Decision; Camus, The Plague; Carson, The Edge of the Sea; Rubenstein, The Cunning of History; Tucker, ed., The Marx-Engels Reader (excerpts); LeGuin, The Dispossessed; Blake, Songs of Innocence and Experience and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell; Frye, Fearful Symmetry; Leopold, A Sand County Almanac.

Spring Quarter: Neckman, Island in the Sound; Thoreau, Walden; Goethe, Faust; Carson, Silent Spring; Guthrie, The Big Sky; Billington and Ridge, Westward Expansion; Billington, America's Frontier Heritage; Taylor, The Turner Thesis; Johansen and Cates, The Empire of the Columbia.

Seminars

Seminar discussions in groups of 10 or 20 were a central part of each week's activity. These clarified the themes and reasoning of each week's readings, showed their relations to the overall themes of the program, and gave students important practice in presenting their own ideas and in exploring cooperatively

the complex issues raised by the program. In winter quarter, 2 hours per week were devoted to "topic seminars" on the issues of global food supply and of the nuclear arms race. In these, each student in turn presented two reports on assigned background reading and led discussion.

Field Work

Fall quarter work on plant and animal identification and practice in natural history observation, including maintenance of a field journal, was followed in winter quarter by a field study project, in which small student teams mapped, sampled, and observed plant distributions and animal habitats in a number of one-acre sites in the Olympia area.

Field projects were given increased prominence during the spring quarter. Student teams were organized to study five local-community sites which represent a mixture of natural history and human activities. The students optionally elected to concentrate on natural history, social history, or to document through mixed media (still photography and audio-recording) themes based on the natural history and social history. The products of the studies were individual and group reports--written and oral--and the media (slide-tape) presentations.

Skill Development

The fall quarter Critical Reasoning class covered topics in constructing and critiquing deductive arguments, including standard deductive forms and common fallacies. The text was Cederblom and Paulsen, Critical Reasoning.

Work on writing included weekly essays on assigned topics dealing with the seminar readings and lecture material, a fall quarter set of exercises in descriptive writing, the field journal, and the winter quarter field project report. Each student met biweekly with his or her faculty seminar leader for a brief one-to-one conference, primarily for critique and suggestions about the weekly essays.

Winter quarter field work was supplemented by lectures on mapping, population sampling, and descriptive statistics.

Winter quarter also contained a weekly half-hour group exercise in poetry interpretation.

Evaluation

Each student wrote a narrative self-evaluation of the quarter's work and received a narrative evaluation from his or her faculty seminar leader, based on all written work and on class participation. Drafts of these were discussed in a one-to-one conference before they took final form.

Faculty

Robert H. Knapp, Jr., Ph.D.	(Fall-Winter)
Robert Sluss, Ph.D.	(Fall-Winter-Spring)
Thad Curtz, Ph.D.	(Fall-Winter)
Peter Taylor, Ph.D.	(Winter-Spring)