

POLITICAL ECOLOGY
Program Description
Fall 1981

During the fall quarter the Political Ecology program explored the 19th century origins of contemporary American attitudes and practices regarding the environment. The effects of industrialization and the opening of the west on American perceptions and uses of nature was the primary focus. Texts included DeVoto, The Journals of Lewis and Clark; Warner, The Private City; Melville, Moby Dick; Fischer, Let Them Speak for Themselves: Women in the American West; Cather, O Pioneers!; Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks; and Muir, Yosemite. The texts were supplemented by a lecture series on the political and social history of the 19th century. Students participated in two weekly seminars and were required to write short weekly papers on the texts and a final essay examination.

The natural science portion of the program was designed to increase the students' own understanding of natural systems through three major activities: 1) There was a weekly series of lectures discussing the ecology and management of forests and salmon fisheries of the Pacific Northwest. 2) In weekly laboratory sessions or field trips, students observed some basic structural features and natural history of nonvascular and vascular plants and of marine animals, especially fishes; laboratory studies were usually supplemented with background lectures. 3) Students were expected to spend 2-3 hours weekly doing independent field observations and recording these observations in a formal natural history field journal. Texts included Kozloff, Plants and Animals of the Pacific Northwest; and Randall et al., Manual of Oregon Trees and Shrubs. Additionally recommended were Robbins et al., Birds of North America, and Wiedemann et al., Plants of the Oregon Coastal Dunes. An exam covering this material was given at the end of the quarter.

In addition to lectures, seminars, and labs, the weekly schedule included three other regular activities. Current events seminars, concentrating on the program themes, required a considerable amount of student initiative: students met in groups, sometimes without faculty present, to discuss current environmental issues. They had to learn to organize their groups, make their own assignments, and research problem areas in the library, in addition to following current events through regular newspaper and magazine reading. Orientation and methodology sessions, hour-long lectures and workshops by faculty and staff members, concentrated on diverse topics ranging from college survival skills to elementary statistics. Writing workshops, which met all afternoon once a week, offered students a chance to read and critique each others' papers, generally concentrating on a particular aspect of academic writing -- paragraph construction, outlining, designing a thesis, using the library, and the like -- following a talk on the subject by one of the program faculty or a librarian.

Faculty: Matthew E. Smith (Political Science); Susan Strasser (American History); Peter B. Taylor (Oceanography); Richard A. Cellarius (Biophysics and Plant Biology).

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Program Description Winter 1982

The Political Ecology program, continued from the fall quarter, considered contemporary perceptions of nature and political, economic and cultural aspects of environmental change, happening now and projected into the future. Two seminars weekly were based on the following texts: Leopold, A Sand County Almanac; Federov, Man and Nature; Kahn, The Next 200 Years; Worster, Nature's Economy; Murdoch, The Poverty of Nations; Ackerman and Hassler, Clean Coal/Dirty Air; Craven, I Heard the Owl Call My Name; and Berry, The Unsettling of America. Students were required to write brief essays on four of the texts. Weekly lectures amplified political concepts featured in the texts.

The natural science portion of the program continued during winter quarter as an introduction to ecology. Readings from Introduction to Ecology, by P. Colinvaux, were assigned weekly and students were expected to write responses to study questions about the reading. The study questions were reviewed and lectures were presented on selected topics of ecology each week. About two-thirds of the Colinvaux text was covered during the winter quarter. Five laboratory sessions featured a slide-tape presentation on western Washington biomes, field observations of birds in Olympia Harbor, a field tour of freshwater habitats, lab studies of freshwater benthic invertebrates, and lab studies of small marine invertebrates of plankton and benthos. Students were also expected to continue doing weekly field observations and write a natural-history field journal.

Individual research projects comprised a major activity. Each student was expected to identify a research topic about an environmental issue, conduct library research and interviews, and prepare a written report. Writing workshops each week supported the report-writing with sessions about research theses, outlines, organization and style.

Weekly student-directed seminars on current events continued this quarter. In these sessions students discussed environmental issues featured in current news media.

Faculty: Matthew E. Smith (Political Science); Susan Strasser (American History); Robert W. Paul (Ecology); Peter B. Taylor (Oceanography).

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Program Description

Spring 1982

The final quarter of Political Ecology featured a major research project and a consequent reduction in the scheduling of book seminars and lectures from the fall and winter quarters. The research project was designed as a comprehensive study of the Deschutes River basin of Thurston County (and Olympia), encompassing environmental and social-political assessments, and involving all program participants. Each student worked in one of six groups to accomplish research on a particular element of the study. Meetings were scheduled weekly for the research groups and for a coordinating group. All participants met in one group once every two weeks for purposes of overall coordination and synthesis. The study culminated with the production of a written report, illustrated with maps, photographs, tables and figures, assembled from the research-group contributions.

The seminars featured discussions of proposed futures, ways to resolve current and impending ecological crises, and cultural insights of humans and nature, based on the following books: McHarg, Design with Nature; Ophuls, Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity; Bookchin, Toward an Ecological Society; Casper and Wellstone, Powerline; Wellstone, How the Rural Poor Got Power; and Snyder, Earth House Hold. Students were required to write essays about two of the books. To support the seminars and reading, the film Multiply and Subdue the Earth and three lectures were presented to interpret the political philosophies represented in the books.

Readings from Introduction to Ecology by Colinvaux were continued for the final one-third of the text, and the students were assigned study questions for written responses. Four sessions were held for lectures about selected topics of ecology and for review of the text. Students were expected to continue doing weekly field observations and recording them in a natural history field journal.

Faculty: Matthew E. Smith, Ph.D. (Political Science)
Robert W. Paul, Ph.D. (Ecology)
Peter B. Taylor, Ph.D. (Oceanography)