



Ansel Adams. Tetons and Snake River, 1942.

## Environmental Anthropology

ANTH 350-001

M/Th: 12:55-2:10

Watkins 114

Prof. C. Anne Claus

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Anthropology Department, Hamilton 306

Office Hours: M 2:20-4:40 or by appointment

**Course Description:** This is an undergraduate seminar on the anthropological study of the environment. It is an introduction to the persistent themes, key theories, and ethnographic practice of environmental anthropology. We read classic and contemporary readings that explore themes of social nature, disasters and degradation, waste, the politics of indigenous and local knowledge, and the management of nature. No prerequisites.

### Course Objectives

This course has two main objectives: to introduce students to environmental anthropology, and to apply our course readings to understand environmental issues

at American University and in our lives in Washington DC. Students who take this course will:

- Understand the way anthropologists have approached environmental issues across space and time
- Demonstrate understanding of how environmental problems and solutions are framed
- Analyze and explore ongoing topics in anthropology of the environment, including the issues outlined above
- Reflect on their own understandings of these themes through the lens of a semester-long lab and their own (personal and regional) histories
- Critically engage public debates about the ethics and efficacy of environmental movements in the US and abroad

### Required Readings

All course readings will be available on Blackboard or in class.

### Grading

Major assignments and their percentage of student grades are as follows:

Class preparation/participation/attendance	30%
BB posts (due each Monday by 8:30 a.m.)	
Assignments	50%
Final Essay Exam	20%

A: Superior, original, thoughtful work in completion of all requirements;

B: Very good work in completion of course requirements;

C: Satisfactory work in completion of course requirements;

D: Unsatisfactory or incomplete work in course requirements and/or a failure to meet minimum attendance requirements;

F: Failure to meet minimum course standards for assignments, participation, and attendance.

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE
BB postings on readings	<b>Every Monday (w/2 passes)</b>
Journal 1	9/12
Journal 2	9/19
Journal 3	9/25
PSA abstract	9/30
Journal 4	10/2
Storyboard for PSA	10/17
Journal 5	10/24
Finished PSA due	11/13
Journal 6 + PSA reflection due	11/14
Journal 7 ( <i>optional</i> )	12/2
Low Waste Lab reflections	12/5
Essay Exam	12/12 11:20-1:50

## CLASS SCHEDULE

*Readings:* All assigned films, readings, and assignments are due the day they are listed in the syllabus. You are expected to have completed the readings/assignments before class. Do not come to class unless you have completed them.

### Week 1 (8/26): Course Introduction

**M:** Introductory lecture

- NO READINGS DUE

**Th:** Film screening in class: Plastic China

### Week 2 (9/2):

**M: NO CLASS MONDAY THE 2<sup>nd</sup> (LABOR DAY).**

**Th:**

- Douglas, Mary. [1991] 1966. "Introduction" and "Secular Defilement." In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge:1-6, 30-41.
- 99% Invisible, "National Sword" #341. Podcast. Available at: <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/national-sword/>

**\*Discussion of Journal #1, due next Thursday**

### Week 3 (9/9): Nature Concepts

**M:**

- Cronon, William. "The Problem with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature", in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York & London: W.W. Norton Company, 1996): 69-90.
- (optional) Haraway, Donna. "The Bio-politics of a Multicultural Field," in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. Routledge: 1989: pp 244-258.

**Th:**

- Millar, Kathleen. Ch 1 "Arriving Beyond Abjection" from *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio's Garbage Dump*. Duke University Press, 2018, pp 35-66.

**\*Journal #1 due.**

### Week 4 (9/16): Global Dimensions of Environmentalism

**M:**

- Tsing, Anna. Ch 7, "The Forest of Collaborations." In *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Pp 245-268.

**Th: Class visit from AU Waste Management Guru**

**\*Journal #2 due.**

### **Week 5 (9/23): Translating for Nature**

#### **M:**

- Satsuka, Shiho. 2015. Ch 5, "The Interpretation of Nature" in *Nature in Translation*. Durham: Duke University Press.

#### **Th: Anthropological Fieldwork**

- Shah, Alpa. 2017. "Ethnography? Participant observation, a potentially revolutionary praxis." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7.  
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.14318/hau7.1.008>
- (optional) Foote Whyte, William. "On the Evolution of Street Corner Society." Appendix, in *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. University of Chicago Press, 1960. (Please read pp 279-309, and 356-358).

**\*Journal #3 due.**

**\*In-class exercise: drafting abstract for PSA. How will you integrate ethnographic fieldwork into your project?**

### **Week 6 (9/30): Politics of local and indigenous knowledge**

#### **M:**

- Conklin, B.A. & L.R. Graham. 1995. "The Shifting Middle Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-Politics." *American Anthropologist* 97(4): 695-710.
- (optional) Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. "In the footsteps of Nanabozho: Becoming Indigenous to Place." In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions. Pp. 205-215.
- (optional) Hathaway, Michael. The Emergence of Indigeneity: Public Intellectuals and Indigenous Space in Southwest China. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25:2, 2010. Pp. 301-333.

**\*\*\*PSA abstract due in class.**

#### **Th:**

- *PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION EXERCISES / CAMPUS SURVEY DISPERSAL*
- **\*Journal #4 due.**

### **Week 7 (10/7): International Environmental Politics**

#### **M:**

- Neves-Graca, Katja. 2005. "Chasing whales with Bateson and Daniel". *Australian Humanities Review*. Issue 35, June 2005. Available at:  
<http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2005/06/01/chasing-whales-with-bateson-and-daniel/>
- (optional) Kalland, Arne. 2011. "The Creation of the Superwhale." Ch 1 in *Unveiling the Whale*. New York: Berghahan Books.

#### **Th:**

- *PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION EXERCISES (compost interns or waste audit, TBD)*

## **Week 8 (10/14): Local Dimensions of Environmentalism**

### **M:**

- Readings TBD.

### **Th:**

- In-class film: Wasted! A Story of Food Waste.

**\*\*\*Storyboard/outline for PSA due in class.** (*Prof Claus will forward these to the Video Art class today so they can review them on Monday.*)

## **Week 9 (10/21): Extractive Practices**

### **M: Guest speaker**

- Davies, Thom. 2018. Toxic Space and Time: Slow Violence, Necropolitics, and Petrochemical Pollution. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108 (6): 1537-1553.
- Farmer, Paul. 1996. On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below. *Daedalus* 125 (1): 261-283.

### **Th:**

- Film (to stream on your own before class): Abloni. 51 min.
- Journal #5 due.

**\*\*\*Meet with Video Art class to discuss projects.** *Video art class will already have reviewed your storyboards, and we will meet in the art department to discuss your projects.*

## **Week 10 (10/28): Managing nature: conservation and national parks**

### **M:**

- West, Paige. 2006. Ch 2, Making Crater Mountain in *Conservation is Our Government Now*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Dowie, Mark. "Conservation Refugees." *Orion* 24, no. 6 (2005): 16-27.

### **Th: PSA SHOOTING DAY**

## **Week 11 (11/4): Disasters and Social Marginalization**

### **M:**

- Sternsdorff-Cisterna, Nicolas. 2015. "Food after Fukushima: Risk and Scientific Citizenship in Japan." *American Anthropologist*. Volume 117: 3. Pp 455-467.
- Film: The Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom.
- (optional) Smith, Neil. 2006. "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster." <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Smith/>

### **Th:**

- **EDITING DAY, group work with Video Art Studio**

### **Week 12 (11/11): Identity, environment, and space**

#### **M:**

- Basso, Keith. 1996. "Speaking With Names." Ch 3 in *Wisdom Sits in Places*, New Mexico Press, pp 71-104.

**\*\*\*PSAs are due to Google Drive folder on Wednesday at 4:30.**

#### **Th:**

- **VIEWING OF PSA PROJECTS, Location TBD.**

**\*\*\*Journal #6 and PSA reflection due.**

### **Week 13 (11/18): Degradation, scarcity, and "saving"**

#### **M:**

- Barnes, Jessica. "The Nile's Nadir: The Production of Scarcity," in *Cultivating the Nile: The Everyday Politics of Water in Egypt*. Duke University Press, 2014. Pp 35-71.
- (optional) Fairhead, J, and M Leach. "False Forest History, Complicit Social Analysis: Rethinking Some West African Environmental Narratives." *World Development* 23, no. 6 (1995): 1023-1035.

#### **Th:**

- In-class film screening at the library: Waste Land.
- (optional): Stream film, The Gleaners and I.

### **Week 14 (11/25):**

**M/TH: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING.**

### **Week 15 (12/2): Global issues, global solutions?**

#### **M:**

- Lahsen, Myanna. Transnational Locals: Brazilian Experiences of the Climate Regime. In *Earthly Politics: Local and Global in Environmental Governance*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004.
- (optional) Hobson, John. Discovering the Oriental West. In *The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader*, Sandra Harding, ed. Duke University Press: 2011. pp 39-60.

**\*\*\*If you're submitting optional Journal 7, it is due today.**

#### **Th:**

- **Discussion of low waste lab, journals, final exam preparation, class evaluations. (No readings due.)**

**\*\*\*Low waste lab analysis due in class.**

### **Week 16 (12/9): EXAM WEEK**

**\*\*\*Final essay exam.**

## **Course Requirements**

There are three main requirements for the course.

First, attendance and participation in class discussions will count for 30% of your final grade. Part of this grade comes from being present and contributing to class discussions, and part of it comes from the reading responses you will post to the class blackboard site. These posts are due each Monday we have class by 8:30 a.m. (you get two 'passes' per semester).

The reading materials that will provide the basis for our class discussions have been thoughtfully chosen. For each reading, you should seek to understand 1) the main argument or thesis (the author's goal); 2) the evidence the author provides to support that argument, and the methods used to collect evidence; 3) whether you are convinced by the author's argument (and if not, why not); and 4) the significance of the reading. After considering these things, what questions does the reading raise for you? What ideas does it generate? Reading actively will leave you with questions about the readings, their relationship to one another and to current events, and to class themes. You should bring multiple questions about the readings to every single class. Formulating these questions requires you to reflect on what you have read, and is one of the best ways to increase your understanding of the readings and prepare you for class discussions.

Your BB posts should be around a paragraph long and could include: (1) a statement of the theoretical point or issue that you believe is the most significant in each required reading (try for one sentence per reading) and/or in the set of required readings as a whole; (2) how the readings are relevant to environmental politics and processes or—if there are a series of articles—a comparison and contrast of the authors' views on the subject of the class session; (3) how the required readings fit into your own experience and views, what you agree/disagree with and why; and (4) what you might see differently and how as a result of these readings. These BB posts will greatly aid you in both participating in class and completing the essay exam at the end of the semester.

Second, you will be asked to complete two projects for this class. One is to reflect on your experiences in the low waste lab. This will consist of examining your practices and also keeping a journal in which you log your waste producing practices and reflect on them. Throughout the semester I will give you journaling assignments. These assignments are designed to prompt reflection. This journal and all associated assignments are worth 20% of your grade.

You will also produce a series of assignments that will culminate in a collaborative project to produce PSAs about waste on campus. This project will involve ethnographic data collection, planning a story board and PSA outline, and co-directing a collaboratively produced PSA that will (potentially) be screened on campus tvs. This project is worth 30% of your grade.

Third, you will complete a final exam for this class. It will consist of essays. This exam is worth 20% of your grade.

### **Course Policies:**

#### *Attendance and participation*

Attendance and participation are important in this class. Readings and lectures complement one another but are not repetitive. Skip either and you will miss out on great opportunities to learn.

Each day's readings should be completed before coming to class. Please bring electronic or paper copies of the relevant readings and your notes to class for reference. Come prepared to raise questions and discuss ideas with the class. Active and thoughtful participation is expected of every student.

If you anticipate the need to miss class for religious holidays, approved participation in University activities, or other reasonable outside commitments you should inform me during the first two weeks of class. Since I learned that the health center charges you for appointments, I will no longer accept doctor's notes. Many students have legitimate reasons to miss one or two classes over the course of the semester. If you miss more than that you will be participating less, missing important lecture content, and your grade will likely suffer. If you do miss class, get notes from a classmate and then come and speak with me about any questions you may have.

#### *Writing Submissions*

Written assignments must be single spaced, 12 pt font, with 1 inch margins on all sides. All assignments must comply with the generally accepted rules of academic writing, style, and citation (for guidance see the MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing <http://thewritesource.com/mla.htm> or the American Anthropological Association style guide: [http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style\\_guide.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.htm)). Presentation and clarity are important; I recommend spending 80% of your effort writing and 20% on editing your assignments before turning them in.

Discussion commentary assignments must be uploaded to Blackboard by 8:30 a.m. each Monday that we meet.

#### *Respectful engagement*

You may disagree with statements made by others in class or things you encounter in the readings. Understanding different interpretations is part of what anthropology is about, and respectful disagreement can be a productive way of thinking through difficult issues. This class is a safe space for sharing diverse viewpoints. Don't be afraid to talk, and always be respectful of others.

#### *Tech policy*

This class has an offline/old-school tech policy. No phones, laptops, tablets, etc. unless you opt-in with a very good reason discussed with me during office hours at



the start of the semester. This policy is designed to enable you to learn the materials while minimizing distractions. Various studies<sup>1</sup> suggest that taking notes with pen and paper results in better recall and retention than note taking with a laptop or tablet. Audio or video recording of the class is not allowed without the express permission of the instructor.

#### *Late Work*

Timely completion of the assignments is important. Unexcused late work will be marked down by half a letter grade for every day it is late. Excuses will be granted for emergency situations only.

#### *Contacting me*

I am happy to discuss course readings, lectures, and assignments with you, please come to office hours or make an appointment! You can also get in touch with me via phone or email, though please note that I generally do not respond to phone messages or emails received after 5:00 p.m. until the following work day.

#### *Course Content*

I reserve the right to change the content and schedule of this course syllabus during the semester.

### **Important Information**

#### *Disabilities*

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify the instructor with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center (885-3360, [www.american.edu/ocl/asac/](http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/)) as soon as possible so that we can make the proper arrangements.

#### *Academic Integrity*

American University holds its students to the highest academic standards, and violations to academic integrity like plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, dishonesty in examinations or assignments, using your own previously submitted work, and fabrication of data are unacceptable. By enrolling at AU and registering for class you have acknowledged your commitment to the Academic Integrity Code found here: <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm> I am required to report violations of academic integrity to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, whose policy it is to fail students for the course. Please talk to the instructor, your TA, or a reference librarian if you are unsure of what plagiarism is.

#### *Resources*

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<sup>1</sup> Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking. *Psychological Science* June 2014 vol. 25 no. 6 1159-1168.  
Carrie B. Fried, In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning, *Computers & Education*, Volume 50, Issue 3, April 2008, Pages 906-914.  
Yamamoto, Kevin, Banning Laptops in the Classroom: Is it Worth the Hassles? *Journal of Legal Education*, Vol. 57, 2008.

AU has many resources designed to help students with their specific academic and personal circumstances. Academic Support Services include time management, reading, note taking, and test-taking strategies, among other things. AU also has resources to help with difficult personal situations and in 2013 over 7,000 students used AU counseling services. These resources can generally be found at the Office of Campus Life's Academic Support and Access Center ([www.american.edu/ocl/asac](http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac)). Additional resources may be helpful if you're new to college or a first-generation college student; Michelle Obama's YouTube series is one example. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egLfd8sa7xM> Please come and see the instructor if you are having trouble locating any of these resources.

### *Emergency Preparedness*

In the event of a weather or health related event, please note that AU policies state that "Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard...students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies."