

GEOG300 - HUMAN ECOLOGY

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Course Outline

Human, or cultural, ecology is an important conceptual paradigm for analyzing and understanding human environmental relations. Although its social roots are in 19th century environmentalism, cultural ecology's dynamism springs from an integration of ecology and social science that is systemic, essentialist, and broadly explanatory. In very general terms, it is the study of the adaptive processes by which the nature of society is affected by these responsive adjustments to utilize a given environment.

GEOG-300 has several objectives. The first is to provide broad exposure to the epistemological origins and historical evolution of this research perspective. From its positivist origins in geography, sociology and anthropology, human ecology has developed through several schools of thought into a general theory of society and the natural world. In this examination, the emphasis will be on the key concepts and methodologies in terms of their application to the study of the complex interactions that occur between people in different ecological settings.

A second objective is to provide opportunities to explore alternative qualitative and (mildly) quantitative approaches to human environmental/ecological phenomena. Drawing on contributions from geography and anthropology, economics, bioenergetics, general systems, human behavioural ecology and linear programming and political ecology, various case exercises will be used to better understand human adaptive strategies in relation to ecological efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

Finally, through the case exercises and discussion, critiques of these various methods and approaches will be developed. Here the focus will be on scale, rigor and explanatory value in the context of different human ecological parameters.

Course Structure

Human Ecology is principally a lecture course. It will meet from 4:00 to 5:30 each Tuesday and Thursday as per the university calendar. There is no course text as such. The

necessary readings are found in a coursepack available at the university bookstore. This consists of sixteen articles divided among the six major sections of the course. At times, handouts will be distributed as supplements to these readings. Neither the readings nor the handouts will be placed on library reserve. Also, note the list of general references attached to your syllabus. You may use these as useful background as the term develops.

Each course section will be covered in three to four class sessions (Sections One & Two, Introduction & Early Practice and Its Critique, will essentially be conjoint). Note that I will not hold office hours as such; rather, appointments may be arranged by e-mail and a meeting anticipated within 24 hours.

Evaluation and Grading

The course will be evaluated through several means. As mentioned, there will be four take-home assignments, each valued as 10% of the final grade (4TH=40%). The approximate dates (received/submitted) of these assignments will be January 21/23, February 11/13, February 27/March 4 and April 1/3. There will also be a research paper (40% of final grade), to be submitted no later than our last class date (presently April 10). In association with the paper, each person will submit an outline of her/his final paper research topic (10%) no later than March 14th. Finally, 10% of your final grade will be based on five in-class quizzes pertinent to the readings current at the time. These will be administered randomly through the term and must be completed during the first 20 minutes of the class. There is no final examination nor in-class tests and there will not be “make-up” exercises in substitution of any of the above assignments.

Late submission of any assignment will be penalized one full grade for every day tardy. Submission of an assignment should be considered “extended” unless permission has been requested in advance by e-mail and acknowledged by me. If an assignment is otherwise delayed, a medical note or other evidence for cause of delay should accompany the submission.

Academic Integrity

No student shall, with intent to deceive, represent the work of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment

submitted in a course or program of study. Or represent as his or her own an entire essay or work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted. If you have doubts about this or what may constitute other kinds of academic offences, refer to (<http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/studentguide>).

Other Notes

1. Assignments may be submitted in either French or English.
2. As to reference and citation style for the research outline and final paper, no particular type is preferred over another. APA, scientific style, foot notes and end noting are all acceptable. The key is to be consistent and complete.

USEFUL GENERAL REFERENCES

Churchman, C.W.

1968 The Systems Approach. New York: Dell.

Ellen, Roy

1982 Environment, Subsistence and Society: The Ecology of Small-Scale Social Formations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lee, R. and I. DeVore

1968 Man the Hunter. Chicago: Aldine.

Moran, E.

1979 Human Adaptability: An Introduction to Ecological Anthropology. North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press.

Netting, Robert M.

1986 Cultural Ecology. Boulder: Waveland Press.

Odum, E.

1971 Fundamentals of Ecology. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.

Odum, H.

1971 Environment, Power and Society. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Steward, J.

1955 Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution.

Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Winterhalder, B. and E. Smith

1981 Hunter-Gatherer Foraging Strategies: Ethnographic and Archaeological Analysis. Chicago: Aldine.

There are also a number of journals that you should be aware of. These include HUMAN ECOLOGY, ECOLOGY AND SOCIETY, CONSERVATION BIOLOGY, GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE and THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY. As well, there are disciplinary-specific journals that will be useful depending on the topical FOCUS (for instance, CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY and THE ANNALS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS.

On Reserve: A binder containing a sample of papers written for GEOG-300 in previous years can be perused to gain an idea about appropriate topics and also to see how the instructor evaluated past course papers.