

GEOG-300 - HUMAN ECOLOGY (WINTER 2016)

COURSE OUTLINE

Prof. G.W. Wenzel

Classroom: Burnside Hall/Rm.306, 11:35-12:55 Tuesday-Thursday

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Course Overview: Human Ecology is a conceptual paradigm for analyzing and understanding human-environment interaction. In very general terms, it is the study of the mutual influence that social and natural processes together exert in creating what is typically termed “the environment”.

While human ecology’s roots can be traced to late 19th Century environmentalism, the approach’s strengths lie in its integration of natural and social science ideas drawn over time from evolutionary biology, ecology, anthropology, general systems theory, economics and other disciplines to form an approach that is intellectually dynamic, systematic and broadly explanatory. In point of fact, human ecology is an umbrella descriptor for an analytic approach that has evolved along several paths and gone through a variety of iterations since its modern formulation as Cultural Ecology (Steward 1955). Among its key concepts are: ecosystem, adaptation, evolution, culture, efficiency, landscape and history.

There are a number of course objectives. The first is to provide broad intellectual exposure to the epistemological origins and historical development of human/cultural ecology as a research perspective. Thus, throughout the course the emphasis will be on key concepts and associated analytical methods in terms of their application to understanding the complex interaction that occur between people in different ecological and environmental settings.

A second is to provide opportunities to apply various qualitative and quantitative approaches to human environmental-ecological phenomena. These may include methods drawn from classic cultural ecology, bioenergetics, behavioral ecology, linear program modeling and historical ecology and their application in case scenarios to better understand human adaptive strategies in relation to ecological efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

Last, through the case exercises, lectures and discussion, critiques of these various methods and approaches will be explored. Here the focus will be on scale, rigor, and explanatory capacity in the context of human ecological dynamics.

Course Structure: GEOG-300 is principally a lecture course. It should be noted that readings in the coursepack and that are noted during lecture supplement the lecture material rather than the opposite. Most essential readings will be in the coursepack, available for purchase through the McGill Bookstore. On occasion, handouts will be distributed as further supplement to the lecture material. (Note that a list of useful reference materials is appended to the syllabus. No reference works have been placed on course reserve.

However, a loose-leaf binder containing examples of papers submitted in earlier years will be placed on reserve in the Social Sciences and Humanities Library.)

The course material is divided into six sections, each consisting of three to five class sessions. The first two will serve as an introduction to cultural ecology and to its early formulation and practice. The following section will examine “second generation” developments. The fourth and fifth sections will focus on systems and behavioral ecological developments and methodologies. Recent developments in human ecological thinking, generally framed as political ecology and historical ecology, will cap the course.

Assignments and Grading: There are no in-class tests or final examination. Rather assignments will be of three kinds: four take-home assignments based on an evolving ecological scenario; a final research paper (with preliminary outline); five brief in-class quizzes. Each take-home assignment will be valued as 10% of the course grade (4th=40%), the research paper and its associated outline will form 40% of the final course grade (Paper=35%/outline= 5%). The remaining 20% of the course grade will be based on 5 random occurring quizzes on readings relevant to the lecture section (each quiz=4%).

The following schedule of assignments is, for the moment, tentative:

Pre-Test: January 12-14 (ungraded)

TH#1: January 26-28 (10%)

TH#2: February 16-18 (10%)

TH#3: March 1-3 (10%)

Research Paper Outline: March 10 (15%)

TH#4: March 15-17 (10%)

Research Paper: Due Last GEOG-300 Class (45%)

Delayed submission of take-home or research papers assignments without valid reason will be penalized 20% for each day late. On occasion, permission to late submit or miss an assignment may be arranged in advance of the assignment’s distribution date. If an assignment is delayed or missed for reasons of illness, a medical note must be provided. Where an assignment is missed for a valid reason, the value of the missed assignment will be added to the next assignment (i.e., in the case of a validly missed take-home, the next assignment will be valued as 20% of the overall grade).

Additional Information

1) While the course information will be delivered through lecture, you are encouraged to participate by interjecting questions or observations relevant to the material at hand.

2) Note that there are no formal office hours held. Rather, appointments can be arranged by e-mail <wenzel@geog.mcgill.ca> any time during the term. Whenever possible, please give a brief explanation for requesting the appointment (for instance, to discuss a possible research topic). Questions about material presented in lectures or clarification of course readings should be raised in class.

3) Regarding final papers, note that any reference or citation style (in-text, footnote, end note) is acceptable provided that it includes full reference information (authorship, date of publication, journal or book title, in the case of journals volume and number, editorship of a book if relevant, publisher, relevant page number for quotations or particular ideas, page length of journal articles) and is applied consistently. As there is a wide range of reference and citation styles, it is often best to adopt the style used by a major professional journal.

4) Academic integrity is paramount. No student shall deceive, represent the work of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research paper, project or assignment submitted in a course or program of study. Nor shall a student represent as his or her own an entire essay or other works of another person, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the submitted work. If you have doubts about what may be an offence, either contact me directly or refer to <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/studentguide>. Finally, be aware that submission of an assignment originally developed for another course also constitutes an academic offence.

5) All formal assignments for GEOG300, to include take-home tests, quizzes and the final paper and outline, may be submitted in either French or English.

6) It is expected that all assignments will be word processed and presented in a legible and literate form. Electronic submissions will not be accepted unless permission has been requested (and received). All assignments should be formatted as double-spaced and in 12pt typeface.

Useful References (these are not on reserve)

Steward, Julian (1955), *THEORY OF CULTURE CHANGE: THE METHODOLOGY OF MULTILINEAR EVOLUTION*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois

Kelly, Robert (1995), *THE FORAGING SPECTRUM*. Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution.

Moran, Emilio (1979), *HUMAN ADAPTABILITY*. North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press.

Robbins, Paul (2004), *POLITICAL ECOLOGY*. New York: Blackwell.

Kormandy, Edward and Daniel Brown (1998), *FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMAN ECOLOGY*. New York: Prentice-Hall.