

Environmental Justice and Activism

ENVI 3010 (3 credits)

International Honors Program (IHP) Climate Change Study Away USA – Puerto Rico

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This course studies the logics and practices of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and development – the root causes of environmental injustices – while centering the social resistance movements that generate alternative futures around food, water, land, and energy justice. The course introduces environmental justice as a social movement centered in community-based political organizing, examining the historical context that produces relations of injustice, and then considers counter-hegemonic knowledge and practices – other ways of knowing and being. The course focuses on the relations between capital, labor and nature, which include issues of private property, decision-making, conflict and resistance, racism, sexism, and environmental degradation. It looks at how power relations of capitalist accumulation strategies have historically relied, and currently rely, on dispossessing people of their access to natural resources and externalizing the true costs of economic growth onto particular people and places, and the earth at large. It probes into how these forms of dispossession and externalization intersect with culturally and geographically specific modes of racism, hetero-patriarchy, and social differentiation.

The course examines community resistance and resilience through the lenses of environmental justice, indigenous political ecology, queer feminism, anarchist, and prefigurative politics. Students build their activism and organizing toolkit to look beyond capitalism, hierarchy, and ecological disaster by learning the theoretical underpinnings and practical strategies of socio-environmental justice movements. Students engage with concrete utopias that are already being built to understand other worlds that are already possible. What are alternative ways of organizing socio-environmental relations which are more equitable, just, and sustainable? What are post-capitalist futures, both existing alternatives and possibilities for social change? Students interrogate notions of power and social differentiation through spaces of encounter with social scientists, environmental activists, and community leaders, paired with case studies on energy, mining, agroecology and food sovereignty, and autonomy and mutual aid.

The program is distinctive in its emphasis on:

- Activist research of concrete utopias

- Global social movements
- Issues of colonialism, globalization, development
- Anarchist and feminist theoretical perspectives
- Political ecology
- Integration of activism and scholarship: developing research skills in activist research, intercultural translation, and emancipatory thinking

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course the students should be able to:

- Demonstrate critical insight and knowledge of the political and economic theories covered in the course and their historical context.
- Critically relate and apply historical knowledge and interpretation toward the analysis of current events, and to understand connections between capital accumulation, social and economic policies, and the current environmental crises of degradation, over-exploitation, and climate change.
- Appreciate how the people we meet deepen our understanding of political economy and reflect on how we can reciprocate.
- Appreciate how the socio-environmental lines that divide and connect us also shape what we know, what we think we know, and what forms of knowledge are valued.
- Thoughtfully consider your own situatedness within political economic and socio-spatial relations.
- Think, dream and imagine alternatives to capitalist development and toward climate justice.

Course Schedule

Course Schedule and Readings

Class I – What is Environmental Justice?

Required Reading:

1. Bullard, Robert D. 'Equity, Unnatural Disasters and Race: Why Environmental Justice Matters'. *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy* (RSPPP) Special Issue on Equity and the Environment, 15 (Winter 2008): 51-85.
2. Atilés-Osoria, Jose M. 2014. 'Environmental Colonialism, Criminalization and Resistance: Puerto Rican Mobilizations for Environmental Justice in the 21st Century'. RCCS Annual Review. A Selection from the Portuguese Journal *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, (6).
3. García-López, Gustavo A. 2018. 'The Multiple Layers of Environmental Injustice in Contexts of (Un) Natural Disasters: The Case of Puerto Rico Post-Hurricane Maria'. *Environmental Justice*, 11(3), 101-108.
4. Bonilla, Y., & LeBrón, M. (2019). *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*. Haymarket Books, Chicago, IL. [selected chapters]
5. McCaffrey, K. T. (2008). *The struggle for environmental justice in Vieques, Puerto Rico. Environmental justice in Latin America: problems, promise and practice*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Recommended Reading:

6. Mattis, Kristine. 2017. 'We Are Barely Even Trying'.
<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/04/13/we-are-barely-even-trying/2>
7. Lilley, Sasha. 2011. 'Introduction' in *Capital and its Discontents: Conversation with Radical Thinkers on a Time of Tumult*. pp. 1-23. Oakland: PM Press.

Class 2 – Transformative Change vs. Reformist Notions

Required Reading:

1. Kothari, Ashish (Ed.). 2019. Introduction in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*. New Delhi: Tulika Books.
2. Klein, Naomi. 2019. *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*. pp. 1-69 & 104-109. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Recommended Reading:

3. Moore, Jason. 2017. 'World Accumulation and Planetary Life, or Why Capitalism will not Survive until 'The Last Tree is Cut''. *IPPR Progressive Review* 24(3): 176-202.
4. Mies, Maria. 2014. 'Housewifisation –Globalisation –Subsistence-perspective' in M. van der Linden & K. Heinz Roth (eds.) *Beyond Marx: Theorising the Global Labour Relations of the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 209-226. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
5. Castree, Noel. 2010. 'Neoliberalism and the Biophysical Environment 2: Theorising the Neoliberalisation of Nature'. *Geography Compass* 4(12): 1734-1746.
6. Polanyi, Karl. 2001[1944]. 'Chapters 3-6' in *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (2nd ed.), pp. 35-80. Boston: Beacon Press.

Class 3 – Colonialism, Capitalism, "Development"

Required Reading:

1. Federici, Silvia. 2004. 'The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women' in *Caliban and the Witch*, pp. 61-103. Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia.
2. Bernstein, Henry. 2000. 'Colonialism, Capitalism, Development' (part I). T Allen & A. Thomas (eds) in *Poverty and Development into the 21st Century*, pp. 241-265. The Open University & Oxford University Press.
3. Nkrumah, Kwame. 1965. 'Introduction' in *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, pp. ix-xx. New York: International Publishers.
4. Klein, Naomi. 2019. *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*. pp. 70-103. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Recommended Reading:

5. Gunder Frank, Andre. 1966. 'The Development of Underdevelopment', *Monthly Review*, September, pp. 17-31.
6. Escobar, Arturo. 1995. 'The Problematization of Poverty: The Tale of Three Worlds and Development' in *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, pp. 21-54. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
7. Rahnama, Majid and Victoria Bawtree. 1997. 'Chapters 4, 8, 9, 14, 20, 26' in *The Post-Development Reader*. London: Zed Books.
8. Galeano, Eduardo. 1973. 'The Invisible Sources of Power' in *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, pp.134-172 & 'Part II: Development Is A Voyage With More Shipwrecks Than Navigators', pp.173-262. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Class 4 – Extractive Relations: Energy, Mining, and Coloniality

Required Reading:

1. García López, Gustavo A., Velicu, I., & D'Alisa, G. (2017). Performing counter-hegemonic common (s) senses: Rearticulating democracy, community and forests in Puerto Rico. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 28(3), 88-107.
2. Kwasinski, A., Andrade, F., Castro-Sitiriche, M. J., & O'Neill-Carrillo, E. (2019). Hurricane Maria Effects on Puerto Rico Electric Power Infrastructure. *IEEE Power and Energy Technology Systems Journal*, 6(1), 85-94.
3. de Onís, C. M. (2018). Energy colonialism powers the ongoing unnatural disaster in Puerto Rico. *Frontiers in Communication*, 3, 2.
4. "Energy Insurrection: Puerto Rico's power failures inspired a Rooftop Solar Movement, But officials are Undermining It--in Favor of Natural Gas" by Alleen Brown, *The Intercept*, February 9, 2020. <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/09/puerto-rico-energy-electricity-solar-natural-gas/>
5. "Puerto Rico is targeting 100% renewable energy. The Trump administration has other ideas." by Umair Irfan, *Vox*. April 17, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/17/18306417/puerto-rico-renewable-energy-natural-gas>
6. Massol Deyá, A. (2019). The Energy Uprising: A Community-Driven Search for Sustainability and Sovereignty in Puerto Rico. in *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*, 298-308.
7. Lloréns, H. (2016). In Puerto Rico, environmental injustice and racism inflame protests over coal ash. *The Conversation*, 8.

Class 5 – Restorative Relations: Agroecology & Food Sovereignty

Required Reading:

1. McCune, N., Perfecto, I., Avilés-Vázquez, K., Vázquez-Negrón, J., & Vandermeer, J. (2019). Peasant balances and agroecological scaling in Puerto Rican coffee farming. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 43(7-8), 810-826.
2. Félix, G. F., & Holt-Giménez, E. (2017). "Hurricane María: An Agroecological Turning Point for Puerto Rico?"
3. "Puerto Rico and the cultivation of food sovereignty," by Nicole Medina Collazo. Centre for Sustainable Development Studies (CSDS), University of Amsterdam.
4. Martínez Meraco, Eliván. "The Boom of Monsanto and other Seed Corporations Blows in the South of Puerto Rico." *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*. March 7, 2017. <http://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2017/03/the-boom-of-monsanto-and-other-seed-corporations-blows-in-the-south-of-puerto-rico/>.

Class 6 – Disaster Capitalism, Autonomy, & Mutual Aid

Required Reading:

1. Klein, Naomi. 2018. *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
2. Big Door Brigade. 2020. 'What is Mutual Aid?' <https://bigdoorbrigade.com/what-is-mutual-aid/>

Recommended Reading:

3. Kropotkin, Petr. 1902. 'Introduction and Chapter I' in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.
4. Milstein, Cindy. 2010. *Anarchism and its Aspirations*. Oakland: AK Press.

Class 7 – Non-Violent Direct Action

Required Reading:

1. Brecher, Jeremy. 2017. *Against Doom: A Climate Insurgency Manual*. Oakland: PM Press.

Recommended Reading:

- Engler, Mark & Engler, Paul. 2016. *This is An Uprising: How Non-Violent Revolt is Shaping the 21st Century*. [Selected Chapters]. New York: Nation Books.

Class 8 – Organizing Tools & Tactics

- Hunter, Daniel. 2019. *Climate Resistance Handbook: Or, I was Part of a Climate Action*. Now What? 350.org.
- Moore, Hilary & Russell, Joshua Kahn. 2011. *Organizing Cools the Planet: Tools & Reflections to Navigate the Climate Crisis*. Oakland: PM Press.

Recommended Reading:

- Engler, Mark & Engler, Paul. 2016. *This is An Uprising: How Non-Violent Revolt is Shaping the 21st Century*. [Selected Chapters]. New York: Nation Books.

Class 9 – The Pluriverse

Required Reading:

- Esteva, Gustavo. 2014. 'Commoning in the New Society', *Community Development Journal*. 49, 144-159.
- Kothari, Ashish (Ed.). 2019. *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*. New Delhi: Tulika Books.
- Haiven, Max. 2020. 'No Return to Normal: For a Post-Pandemic Liberation'. <https://roarmag.org/essays/no-return-to-normal-for-a-post-pandemic-liberation/>
- Davis, Mike. 2020. 'Pandemics, Supercapitalism, and the Struggles of Tomorrow'. <https://madamasr.com/en/2020/03/30/feature/politics/mike-davis-on-pandemics-super-capitalism-and-the-struggles-of-tomorrow/>

Recommended Reading:

- Gibson-Graham, J.K. Cameron, J. & Healy, S. 2016. 'Commoning as a Post-Capitalist Politics,' in A. Amin & P. Howell (eds.), *Releasing the Commons*, London and New York: Routledge.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assessment

Engagement/Participation 45%

Assignments 55%

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Engagement (45%): This aspect is about **how you show up** to the program on a daily basis, including:

Participation in Class and during Reflections (10%)

- Readings: Respect yourself, your peers, and the syllabus by not only completing the readings on time, but by thoroughly reading and annotating, showing up ready to contribute your thoughts and ask questions, raising the level of discussion for everyone.

- Contributions: Respect yourself and your peers by assessing on a daily basis whether you need to 'step up or step back' in terms of whose voice is in the conversation. Challenge yourself to add your thoughts and questions to the discussion if you usually listen. Challenge yourself to listen to others if you usually speak. Actively find that balance.

Participation during Site-Visits and Activities (10%)

- Ask site-visit hosts and guest-lecturers thoughtful questions
- Actively take notes, listening respectfully
- Make connections to the readings and other site-visits thinking about larger themes and concepts
- Show respectful and engaged body language

Timeliness & Preparedness (5%)

- Arrive to class, site-visits, group activities, guest-lectures, and travel on time (which means 5-10 minutes early in case you encounter the unexpected). This shows respect to our hosts and facilitators, and everyone who is organizing logistics and content. These are often busy professionals and community leaders who are doing us an honor by meeting with us and deserve your full attention and respect. It also makes group life so much lovelier and easier. As a group we maintain our own internal time, regardless of external cultural norms. This means that if an activity begins at 9am, we show up at 8:55am, and give emotional grace and flexibility if a host arrives at 9:30am.
- Arrive prepared with the necessary items for the day (Daybag with notebook, pen/pencil, annotated readings, filled water bottle, hat, snack, layer, small sunscreen, small hand sanitizer, facemask, culturally appropriate clothing and shoes for the day's activities)

Respect in Communal Living (20%)

- Do you help with group tasks?
- Are you extending kindness to all?
- How do you affect the group? What energies do you bring to the space?
- What do you contribute to enrich the experience of others?

Assignments (55%): This aspect is about *the academic work* throughout the program, including:

Observations, Reflections, Connections, Questions (15%)

Create a reflection piece that can be shared with the group (poem, song, spoken word, art piece, dance, theater skit, journal entry, etc) once a week, 3 total, 5% each.

1. **Describe** a particular moment or event that stayed with you/was intriguing or powerful or challenging or beautiful (could be a moment from a class discussion, a site-visit, a guest-speaker, a conversation with a peer, an interaction on the street, something you saw on your own time, etc.): What were your observations? What was going on? Why did it stick out to you? What was powerful/attention-grabbing about it? (100-200 words)
2. **Reflect** on the moment you described and **Connect** it to other topics/themes/concepts/notions. So what? What does it mean? Why does it matter? What are your reflections on the event? What comes up for you because of it? (100-200 words)
3. **Ask** 3-9 open-ended questions that you are left with

Class Facilitation (5%)

In pairs, facilitate an assigned reading for the rest of the group (preparing at least a day in advance):

- Engage the class in a discussion or activity that you feel will deepen their (and your own) understanding of the text
- Highlight the author's assertions or key argument(s) in a thoughtful way
- Give a brief description of the historical context (locating the work in the larger academic debate)
- Connect (and/or invite others to connect) the reading to an experiential component of the program
- Raise new or deeper questions for future analysis

Reformist “Solutions”/Change Myths (4%)

Teach the group (get creative in how you share knowledge) about the underlying assumptions and assertions of a Reformist “Solution”/Change Myth, debunking the myth outlined in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*

Systemic Change/Transformative Initiatives (16%)

Teach the group (get creative in how you share knowledge) about the historical context, praxis (philosophy and practice), and theory of change of 2 different Transformative Initiatives/Systemic Change Concepts outlined in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, including why and how these concepts transform systems – addressing root causes – instead of reforms them (twice over the course of the program, 8% each)

Culminating Project (15%)

Teach the group (get creative in how you share knowledge) about the historical context, praxis (philosophy and practice), and theory of change of 4 different Transformative Initiatives/Systemic Change Concepts outlined in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, including why and how these concepts transform systems – addressing root causes – instead of reforms them. Highlight what ideas and practices you're inspired by to weave into your communities in your transition home.

Late Work

Due to the structure of our program, with a tightly planned country schedule, there is little time available to make up late work. Assignment deadlines are set with this already in mind. Do not expect to be provided extensions. Deadlines for assignments will be confirmed in class. Late work will be assessed a penalty of a grade step per day late (eg. an A- would drop to a B+ if one day late).

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	Excellent
90-93%	A-	
87-89%	B+	
84-86%	B	Above Average
80-83%	B-	
77-79%	C+	
74-76%	C	Average
70-73%	C-	
67-69%	D+	
64-66%	D	Below Average
below 64	F	Fail

Program Expectations

Participation

IHP is an experiential learning program; you have to show up to have the experience. Students are expected to attend all classes, guest lectures, and field activities unless they have a medical excuse that has been communicated and approved of by IHP staff, faculty, or Fellow. IHP has academic requirements to attend class meetings and field activities. Failure to attend classes or field activities means that a student may not be eligible for credit from their university or could result in program dismissal.

Class Preparation

This program is built upon the strong belief that your experiences result in deep insights and powerful learning. Course assignments are created to facilitate learning opportunities and experiences. Dialogue in class about these insights and participation in these activities is critical. For this reason, your active engagement is very important. As a learning community, each one of us will influence the learning environment. Please take responsibility for your role in this environment and come to class prepared to engage with others in a positive and thought-provoking manner.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is the failure to maintain academic integrity. It includes, but is not limited to, obtaining or giving unauthorized aid on an examination, having unauthorized prior knowledge of the content of an examination, doing work for another student, having work done by another person for the student, and plagiarism. Academic dishonesty can result in severe academic penalty, including failure of the course and/or dismissal from the institution/program.

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's ideas or product as one's own. Examples of plagiarism are: copying verbatim and without attribution all or parts of another's written work, using phrases, charts, figures, illustrations, computer programs, websites without citing the source; paraphrasing ideas, conclusions or research without citing the source; using all or part of a literary plot, poem, film, musical

score, computer program, websites or other artistic product without attributing the work to its creator.

Students can avoid unintentional plagiarism by carefully following accepted scholarly practices. Notes taken for papers and research projects should accurately record sources of material to cited, quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, and research or critical papers should acknowledge these sources in footnotes or by use of footnotes.

Violations of SIT Study Abroad academic integrity policy are handled as violations of the student code of conduct and will result in disciplinary action. Please discuss this with your faculty and staff if you have questions.

General Considerations

- **Show up prepared.** Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- **Complete** assignments on schedule and according to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- **Engage** the lecturer. Ask questions in class. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- **Comply** with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Respect** differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.