Course Syllabus

Comparative Issues in Food and Water

SDIS-3070 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Climate Change: The Politics of Food, Water, and Energy

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent 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 takes a political ecology approach to the production of food and the management of water within the context of climate change. Political ecology begins with the understanding that the ways in which we organize and produce natural resources are always socially and historically constituted. From this perspective, we are led to interrogate how and why certain ways of organizing and producing resources become dominant, while others become marginalized or excluded. The course is structured around three key lines of inquiry: first, what are the historical processes which can help us to understand existing modes of food production and water management?; second, how are contemporary concerns about food and water security in the context of climate change being problematized and addressed?; third, what conflicts have emerged, and are emerging, around access to food and water and how might they help to generate alternative visions of the future?

Course Objectives
• To introduce students to the theoretical, analytical and methodological tools necessary for a critical understanding of contemporary issues in food and water;
• To experience, observe, understand and respond to the multi-scalar impacts of regional and global forces on the landscapes, communities and economies of Vietnam, Morocco and Bolivia;
• To challenge students to engage with people and place through discussion, dialogue and observation in reflexive and substantive ways; to become
conscious of the many alternatives which may not be recognized within
dominant narratives of development;
• To develop critical assessment and analytical skills to connect theory to
practice, enabling students to formulate their own position on the political
ecology of food and water while at the same time recognizing that issues of food
and water are always contested.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will be able to:
• develop a political ecology approach to contemporary issues in food and
water;
• develop an historical approach to contemporary issues of food and water;
• recognize the complex inter-play between local, national and global scales of
development;
• acquire a variety of methodological and analytic tools for researching different
sites of social practice and knowledge.

Course Materials
Required readings, compiled in individual course readers, will be distributed at the
start of each country program. Thematic readings, listed at the end of the syllabus, are
provided for further reference. If students would like to focus on a particular issue
in more depth guidance on further reading will also be provided. Students are expected
to complete required readings before each faculty sessions and to use readings for
reference in discussions as well as essays. In addition, students are encouraged to
make use of the IHP in-country and traveling libraries and to investigate local resources,
including news media. Reading newspapers regularly in each city offers a valuable
resource for understanding current issues and debates. Students are also encouraged to
use her/his own initiative to find supplementary resources.

Course Chronology
Topics covered in each module will draw on site visits, guest lecturers, and other
activities, in addition to the assigned readings. Each country will involve a series of three
classes structured around the three key lines of inquiry outlined in the course overview.
The first class will examine the main historical processes responsible for existing
patterns of food production and water management; the second class will examine
contemporary issues relating to food and water, specifically in the context of climate
change and resource scarcity; and the final class will examine the contested terrain of
sustainable development. The order of the modules may be rearranged to respond to
activities or opportunities presented in each country program.

SAN FRANCISCO, USA
Class 1 : What is Political Ecology?
• Swyngedouw, E. (2009). The Political Economy and Political Ecology of the
VIETNAM

Class 2: Doi Moi and the Enclosing of the Mekong
This class will focus on the Vietnamese policy of ‘innovation’, or Doi Moi, and its role in transforming the political ecology of the Mekong Delta.


Class 3: Climate Change and Environmental Governance
This class looks at the contemporary challenges of Climate Change in Vietnam, specifically in relation to rising sea levels and the people who will be most affected. It examines how the problem is represented and addressed at different scales of governance and by different agencies and institutions.


Class 4: Contradictory Development
This class looks at key elements in the ongoing development of Vietnam and their relation to food and water. It examines Vietnam's position within a global economy, the changing role of the state and emerging forms of resistance.


MOROCCO

Class 5: Debt and Agricultural Modernization
This class examines the recent history of agricultural modernization in Morocco. As part of a series of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s, these developments have been inextricably tied up with international financial institutions and markets with far reaching social and ecological consequences for the country.

Class 6: The Green Morocco Plan
This class looks in detail at the 'Green Morocco Plan', a national strategy to generate economic growth through the agricultural sector. The Plan promises to ensure food security for the people of Morocco at a time when popular unrest has been closely linked to high commodity prices and a crisis of social reproduction.


Class 7: Water Scarcity and Privatization
This class looks at the problem of water scarcity and water provision in Morocco over the past two decades. It examines the different ways in which water is framed as a resource, the politics of scarcity and the recent conflicts which have arisen over access to water in urban and rural settings.


BOLIVIA
Class 8: Livelihoods and Subsistence
This class looks at the Structural Adjustment Policies of the 1980s and the effects it had on the use of land in Bolivia. It examines how some of the negative social and environmental impacts of these economic policies have subsequently been framed and addressed.


Class 9: The Right to Water
This class looks at the recent history of Bolivia's debt crisis and the privatization of state assets, including municipal water supplies. It focuses on the successful and popular
mobilization against water privatization in the city of Cochabamba and the subsequent debates around the right to water.


Class 10: Development vs. The Commons

This class looks at recent debates which have been emerging in Bolivia, and Latin America more generally, about different models of sustainable development. It examines the ongoing conflict between a state development model based on the continued extraction of fossil fuels, and a largely indigenous community who advance a different vision of the natural world and our relationship with it.


Class 11: Project Presentations and Assessment

Course Requirements

Fieldnote Journals

It is expected that each student will keep a fieldnote journal throughout the duration of the program. This is for recording everyday observations and experiences. These might include notes from specific field visits, observations made during homestays or on the street, as well as more concerted reflections which draw on some of the concepts elaborated through the classes. While there is no formal grade for these journals, they will provide the backbone of the student’s research and will thus impact significantly on the quality of the graded assignments. There will be some guidance at the beginning of the course as to the function of these journals, what might be included in them and how they can be used as part of the research and writing work.

Class Participation (30%)

Students are expected to participate actively in faculty sessions and to complete required readings beforehand. Faculty sessions will be connected to and complemented by site visits and guest lectures in each country, as well as content from other courses. Participation is more than just showing up or speaking out; it means that you actively contribute to the intellectual growth of the group by thoughtfully engaging with guest lectures, faculty, and fellow students and integrating information from field visits, other courses, observations and discussions from homestays, daily experiences and so forth.
Assignments
As well as class participation, there are three graded assignments on this course. The objective of these assignments is to encourage students to bring historical, social and political reflections to bear on particular issues relating to food and/or water within each of the three countries we visit. While there may not be much opportunity for in-depth research, it is hoped and expected that these assignments will enable students to develop their critical capacities, helping them to ask better questions about the complex situations they encounter. The faculty will provide productive comments and suggestions after each assignment.

Vietnam: Written Paper (35%)
The first assignment is a 1500 word written paper to be submitted on October 18th. Focussing on a specific area (e.g. effects of land reform on subsistence livelihoods; aquaculture in the Mekong Delta; urbanization and land use), this paper should provide a political ecology of food production in Vietnam. Questions to address are: what are the historical and socio-economic processes through which particular modes of production have become dominant? What are the social and environmental consequences of these modes of production? What alternative modes of production and reproduction have been excluded and how are they articulated in moments of contestation?

Morocco: Written Paper (35%)
The second assignment is a 1500 word written paper to be submitted on November 6th. Thinking through the concept of ‘access’, students are required to carry out independent research on a particular area of food production or water management where clear boundaries have been drawn. These boundaries may be legal, physical or economic, but they function to exclude certain people from access to a vital resource, such as land and water. Questions to address are: Who is excluded? Why are they excluded? Who has the power to decide? How are the boundaries of exclusion constructed and maintained, and how are they resisted?

Grading
Faculty will give grades in the form of points and will return assignments with written comments. In the case of group assignments, an overall points score will be awarded for each group project as well as an individual score based on the performance and effort contributed individually to the group. At the end of the semester, the cumulative point score will be calculated in order to determine the final letter grade for the course. The final letter grades will be determined on the basis of cumulative points on assignments completed across the countries.

For final grades in IHP Climate Change courses it is useful for both faculty and students to think of letter grades in the following way. An “A” represents truly outstanding work that exemplifies thorough analysis, superior insight, and crystal clear presentation. A "B" signifies highly competent work that accomplishes the task at hand very well, through considerable thought, reasonable analysis, and an organized presentation. A "C" represents adequate work that meets basic requirements but
demonstrates no distinction in terms of analytical insight or organization. A "D" is characterized by poorly or partially completed work that reflects a lack of initiative, inconsistent analysis, and/or erratic presentation. Plus and minus indicate relatively better or poorer work within each category. There is no A+.

Course Policies
Attendance and Participation: All students are expected to be present at every program session, with the only exceptions being illness (written note required from a non-IHP adult, e.g. homestay parent, or preferably, health care professional). Unexcused absences and habitual lateness will result in penalties reflected in your participation grade. Please inform the instructor if tardiness is anticipated. All students are expected to come to class on time.

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Late work: In keeping with IHP policy, papers handed in late will drop one point per day, unless permission is granted otherwise. Course assignments are due at the beginning of the day.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.