

Cultures of Sustainability ANT 325L Unique# 30855
Dr. John Hartigan
SAC 4.118, TTH, 11:00 - 12:30
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Office Hours: Wed & Fri, 2-3pm, & by appt. (SAC 4.158)

Overview: This course guides students in recognizing how ecological concerns are articulated and perceived in different cultural contexts. Environmentalists in the U.S. and Europe often face challenges both in convincing peoples around the world to participate in conservation projects and in recognizing local, situated (particularly indigenous) forms of caring about ecological health and social equity. Notions of “nature” are fundamentally culture-bound, entangled with concepts of personhood and agency, power and risk, and cosmological orderings of humans and nonhumans. Beginning with an explanation of culture and its dynamics, this course will survey ecological activities in a range of settings, providing students a comparative framework for recognizing the criteria mobilized as people assess whether or how their environments are in peril. The analytical foundation is anthropological, emphasizing biocultural perspectives and recent work in cultural ecology, but the course will encourage interdisciplinary formulations of student research projects. Some of our case-studies will draw from science and technology studies, and students will be assisted in developing proposals that tap and mobilize various forms of expertise and knowledge claims. We will also spend time considering disciplinary debates over the Anthropocene (how to understand its dimensions and consequences) and sampling the exciting new development of “multispecies ethnography” (projects that analyze nonhumans’ roles in social and political formations).

Over the course of the semester, students will research particular settings where resource management, climate science, or environmental ethics involves work of cultural translation—generally, encounters of natural scientists, governmental agents, and ecological activists with local peoples who are being impacted by conservation efforts. Students will learn to develop a commodity-chain analysis—how resources (from lumber to coffee) are harvested and circulated for markets—and to recognize the underlying ecological dynamics both impacted by and influencing various forms of consumption. They will then be introduced to the range of cultural conflicts over conservation, from local/national clashes to transnational disputes over establishing and managing cross-border preserves. We will also cover basic methods and techniques of ethnography and ethnology, so students will comprehend how they are deployed in field research. From this foundation, students will pursue projects that analyze the cultural dimensions of conservation efforts and the interactions of humans and nonhumans in such settings.

Assignments: There are 3 components to your overall evaluation in this course—class participation, memo writing, and a research paper. Class participation involves the usual, showing up prepared and actively participating in discussions during class; additionally, you will generate *agenda items* based on each sessions’ readings, as well as several written *annotations* of natural objects. The latter will be presented in class but not be graded. Over the semester, you will be assigned several memos on topics related to the course, such as climate change, the ethics

of sustainability, and the role of ethnography in studying conservation projects. These memos will be addressed to hypothetical audiences (directors of NGOs, policy boards, or lab managers), explaining the basics of cultural analysis and its relevance (in various settings) to conservation issues. Memos are the most common genre in institutional settings (politics and business) yet students generally receive very little guidance in this format and how to use it effectively to convey complex ideas or analytical perspectives. I will familiarize students with the most common styles and offer direction on the challenging task of conveying critical-thinking in this highly restrictive format. The final research project will encompass various analytical components from the course directed toward a subject of your choosing. The elements of this project will include 1) a focus on a sustainability project in a country of your choice, 2) a commodity chain analysis, 3) engagement with concepts covered in the course, 4) analysis of social dynamics, 5) tapping at least one discipline and its key knowledge practices, 6) an analysis of the ethical dimensions of this sustainability project. Agenda items must be posted to Canvas 12 hours before class.

Grading: Class participation (agenda items, annotations, discussion, attendance) = 30%; Memos = 30%; Final Paper = 40%. Plagiarism will not be tolerated on any writing assignment and will receive a failing grade.

Attendance: Being present for class is a requirement of this course. More than 3 unexcused absences will result in at least a letter-grade reduction.

Books (required):

The Sixth Extinction, Elizabeth Kolbert.

Coyote Valley: Deep History in the High Rockies, Thomas Andrew.

Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation after Nature, J. Lorimer

Emergent Ecologies, Eben Kirksey

Week 1: Sustainability.

Jan. 22: Introduction. Answer the following questions for the next session: what do you know about climate change; how do you know; does it matter?

Jan. 24: Find one aspect of climate change to examine. Start thinking about how humans might adapt to it.

Week 2: What's Happening?4

Jan. 29: What is climate change about?

Readings: "[It's a conspiracy theory and climate change](#)": Of beastly encounters and cervine disappearances in Himalayan India, Nayanika Mathur, *Hau*, Vol 5, No 1 (2015); "[Against Sustainability](#)", Jeremy Butman, *New York Times*, 8/8/16; "[Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene](#)", Roy Scranton, *New York Times*, 11/10/13; "[Why Academics are Losing Relevance](#),"

Jan. 31: **Deep History.**

Readings: Introduction & Chaps 1-2, *Coyote Valley*; “Rhino poaching is out of control!”, Bram Buscher, *Environment and Planning*, 2016.

Week 3: Perspective & Peril.

Feb. 5: Anthropocene, part 1.

Readings: Prologue and Chaps 1-3, *The Sixth Extinction*.

Assignment: Annotate a Natural Artifact.

Feb 7: Anthropocene, part 2.

Readings: Chaps 4-9, *The Sixth Extinction*; “Recognitions and Responsibilities,” Ben Orlove et al, *Current Anthropology*, 2014.

Week 4: Conservation

Feb 12: Locating conservation.

Readings: Chaps 10-13, *The Sixth Extinction*; “The local-food movement and the anthropology of global systems,” Donald M. Nonini, *American Ethnologist*, 2013; “Campus Sustainable Food Projects: Critique and Engagement,” Peggy Barlet, *American Anthropologist*, 2011.

Feb 14: Memo on Climate Change discussion.

Assignment: 1st Memo due.

Readings: Chaps 3-5, *Coyote Valley*.

Week 5: Locating Climate Change

Feb 19: For whom?

Readings: Chaps 6-9 and Conclusion, *Coyote Valley*; and “Conservation planning and Indigenous governance in Australia’s Indigenous Protected Areas,” Godden and Stuart Cowell, *Restoration Ecology*, 2016.

Feb 21: Discuss annotations.

Assignment: Annotate an artifact of climate change.

Readings: Chap13, *The Sixth Extinction*.

Week 6: Urban Settings.

Feb 26: Greening cities and urban vulnerability.

Readings: <http://www.nature.com/news/expand-the-frontiers-of-urban-sustainability-1.20459> and <https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/thematic-series/the-nature-of-infrastructure/>: commentaries by Carse and Stoezer, *plus two blog posts* from each section.

Feb 28: Research Day.

Assignment: Identify a country of interest and particular conservation or sustainability project.

Week 7: Commodity Chains.

Mar 12: Coffee.

Readings: The Search for Sustainable Markets: The Promise and Failures of Fair Trade, Julia Smith, *CAFE*, 2011; Anna Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, selections: Prologue, Arts of Noticing, Some Problems w/ Scale, Working the Edge, Gifts to Commodities, Salvage Rhythms, preface].

Assignment: hand in summary of your research activities and sites of interest.

Mar 14: Water & Land.

Readings: “What is land?”, Tania Murray Li, *Transactions*, 2014; “Environmental Conservation and Mining,” Paige West, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2006.

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Week 8: Targeting Conservation.

Mar 26: Ideals of conversation.

Readings: Intro & Chaps 1-4, *Wildlife in the Anthropocene*.

Assignment: Annotate a sustainable commodity.

Mar 28: Critiques of Conservation.

Readings: Chaps 5-8 & Conclusion, *Wildlife in the Anthropocene*.

Assignment: 2nd memo due, on environmental ethics.

Week 9: Ethnographic Method

Apr 2: Field Research Techniques.

Readings: “Sustainability in the City: Ethnographic Approaches,” McDonogh et al, “Learning from Barcelona,” *City & Society*, 2011.

Apr 4: Field Research Day: Ethnographically observe a sustainable site or activity.

Week 10:

Apr 9: Discussion of Ethnographic Examples.

Readings: “Sustainability in the City: Ethnographic Approaches,” continued.

Assignment: 3rd memo due, on using ethnography to analyze sustainability projects.

Apr 11 {OSMF} : Environmentality.

Readings: Foucault in the forest: Questioning environmentality in Amazonia, Michael Cepek, *American Ethnologist*; Neoliberal Environmentality among Elites: Becoming “Responsible Producers” in Santarém, Brazil, Ryan Thomas Adams, *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment*.

Week 11: Developing Research Sites.

Apr 3: Discussion of sites and projects.

Readings: The Low-Wage Conservationist: Biodiversity and Perversities of Value in Madagascar, Genese Sodikoff, *American Anthropologist*

Apr 5: Discussion of sites and projects.

Readings: Teaching collaborative environmental anthropology: A case study embedding engaged scholarship in critical approaches to voluntourism, Brondo et al, *Annals of Anthropological Practice*,

Week 12: Identifying Core Knowledges.

Apr 16: Indigenous and scientific forms of knowledge.

Readings: Social and River Networks for the Trees: Wounaan's Riverine Rhizomic Cosmos and Arboreal Conservation, Julie Velásquez Runk, *American Anthropologist*; Translation, Value, and Space: Theorizing an Ethnographic and Engaged Environmental Anthropology, Paige West, *American Anthropologist*,

Apr 18: Locating Conservation Expertise.

Readings: Witch Hunts, Herbal Healing, and Discourses of Indigenous Ecodevelopment in North India: Theory and Method in the Anthropology of Environmentality, Snodgrass et al, *American Anthropologist*; Crafting the Public Sphere in the Forests of West Bengal: Democracy, Development, and Political Action, K. Sivaramakrishnan, *American Ethnologist*.

Week 13: Hope!

Apr 23: Practices of Possibility.

Readings: Intro & Chaps 1-5, *Emergent Ecologies*.

Apr 25: Nonhuman Futures.

Readings: Intro and Chaps 6-10 & Conclusion, *Emergent Ecologies*.

Week 14: Ethnicity and Race and Conservation.

Apr 30: Global Perspectives on Race.

Readings: "Enclosing Ethnic Minorities and Forests in the Golden Economic Quadrangle, Sturgeon et al *Development and Change*, 2013.

May 2: Presentations.

Week 15:

May 7: Presentations.

May 9: Presentations.

Assignments:

Memo #1: Climate Change vs Sustainability.

Length: 4 pages

Due Date: February 8th.

Memo Instructions: *In responding to the following scenario/assignment, be sure to follow closely the standard format for memo writing, as summarized in the “Memo Writing” rubric posted on Canvas.*

Scenario: You are interning at 350.org, an NGO devoted to “building a global climate movement.” You’ve been assigned to assist Olivia Longhoff, a Global Trainings Manager. In a meeting, you mentioned reading an article in *Current Anthropology* (“Recognitions and Responsibilities”) that you thought might be relevant to the organization’s efforts. After reading it, Longhoff agreed but thinks it’s too long to circulate among the staff. She tasks you with summarizing it in a memo. Specifically, she wants you to sketch the history of “climate change” and “sustainability” as concerns; also, what differentiates them. Then explain the issues of selectivity, historicity, and consequentiality. How might members of this organization keep this trio of concerns in mind as they are targeting new projects for organizing globally? Does it matter that “the distribution of concern about climate change” is a “construct”? Follow the standard memo format (see posted “memo writing guidelines”), with Header, Opening, Summary, Discussion, and Closing segments.

Memo #2: Ethnography of Sustainability and Conservation.

Length: 4 pages

Due Date: March 1st

Memo Instructions: *In responding to the following scenario/assignment, be sure to follow closely the standard format for memo writing, as summarized in the “Memo Writing” rubric posted on Canvas.*

Scenario: Based on the favorable reception of your previous memo explaining public understandings of climate change and sustainability, Olivia Longhoff, a Global Trainings Manager at 350.org, has asked you to write another one. Your task is to explain the role ethnography can play in analyzing dynamics related to sustainability or conservation projects. Convey the particular perspective that ethnographers bring to bear via fieldwork; what do they typically look for and what counts as data in their research? Present a series of examples of ethnographic findings from our readings to date. How would these relate to more general anthropological findings? Offer at least one idea for how this organization might make use of ethnography in relation to its ongoing projects. Follow the standard memo format (see posted “memo writing guidelines”), with Header, Opening, Summary, Discussion, and Closing segments.

Memo #3: Concepts from ethnographies on conservation.

Length: 4 pages

Due Date: March 28th (in class).

Memo Instructions: *In responding to the following scenario/assignment, be sure to follow closely the standard format for memo writing, as summarized in the “Memo Writing” rubric posted on Canvas.*

Scenario: Your previous memos effectively piqued interest in ethnographies dealing with conservation and related subjects. But your co-workers found these books hard to read because of their reliance on unfamiliar concepts. Olivia Longhoff, a Global Trainings Manager at 350.org, has now tasked you with providing explanation of central concepts in works by Tsing, Lorimer, and Kirksey. Start with the idea of an “assemblage”—what is it and why is it a useful analytic? Explain how these ethnographers make use of the concept of “biopolitics” in approaching a subject like “biodiversity.” What are “affective logics,” forms of “lively capital” and “encounter value”? How do these concepts sharpen observation of field settings, guiding researchers to important aspects of conservation? How do they help us see the cultural dimensions of biodiversity?

Final Assignment: Sustainability Research Project.

Length: 12 pages

Due Date: May 4th (in class)

The purpose of this assignment is for you to imagine studying in-depth an aspect of the many topics related to sustainability and conservation, using an ethnographic approach. This will involve several components: 1) becoming familiar with research literature on your subject; 2) finding an ethnographic model for your project; 3) fully imagining how you would conduct this research; 4) think about how to apply concepts from the course in analyzing your site. Wherever around the globe your setting lies, there should be a great deal of pertinent research pertaining to core questions of sustainability and ecological management. Part of your task involves identifying this literature; then pick an ethnographic model for imagining how you would go about studying this place or set of relationships. This involves 1) identifying a setting or problem; 2) explain what we know about it; 3) imagine how fieldwork can expand or improve our understanding of the context or situation. This paper will convey your capacity to marshal sustainability research

How to Proceed: propose an ethnographic research project to be conducted somewhere in outside of the continental US. Identify a location (or multiple sites) and delineate a cultural question you will seek to answer. Describe the setting or problem you would investigate and explain how you would pursue this subject ethnographically. What are the defining social features or dynamics? What methods would you use and what would count as data? What types of questions will you pose to research subjects? Using various disciplinary sources, explain what is already known about your subject; then, explain how you would extend this body of knowledge through fieldwork. What gaps can you identify in extant research, or what lines of inquiry would you like to pursue further but perhaps in different settings or directions? Are there significant historical aspects of this subject? Finally, and importantly, bring to bear concepts from the course in analyzing the social aspects of your site.

Discuss at least six academic sources (articles or books *in addition to ones we’ve already read*).

Summarize your findings for a 10-15 minute in-class presentation.

Format: Include the following sections: *research objectives*, *discussion of literature*, *methods and aims*. The research objectives should describe your plan of study—where, who, and when—and convey your ethnographic models in a couple of paragraphs. Your discussion of literature relevant to your project will form almost half of the paper. This is an opportunity for you to summarize and reflect on materials we have discussed in class, in addition to those you have identified through your search for relevant literature. Explain relevant concepts, detail ethnographic strategies, and identify larger questions and concerns related to conservation, sustainability, and biodiversity. What have you learned from these readings that can be applied in a fieldwork setting to generate new findings? In the methods and aims section (accounting for roughly the other half of the paper), describe the fieldwork project you would pursue. What is the location and why is it potentially interesting; who are the people and what forms of social structure are in place? What kinds of questions will you pose, of the project in general and of individuals in the field? Be specific and developed in conveying these. What methods will you use and why—what will count as data? What conclusions would you hope to reach?