

# ERS 400 Sustainability Approaches (Political Ecology)

## Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we live and work on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

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“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.” - Angela Davis

“The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation.” - Nelson Mandela

## Keeping in Contact

### Announcements

We will be using the **Announcements** widget on the Course Home page during the term to communicate new or changing information regarding due dates, instructor absence, etc., as needed. You are expected to check the announcements on a regular basis to ensure you don't miss any updates!

To ensure you are viewing the complete list of announcements, you may need to click Show All Announcements.

### Contact Information

Who and Why	Contact Details
<p><b>Instructors and teaching assistant</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course-related questions (e.g., course content, deadlines, assignments, etc.)</li> <li>• Questions of a personal nature</li> </ul>	<p><b>Please email your questions</b> about course content, course structure and assignments and questions of a personal nature directly to the instructors.</p> <p><b>Co-Instructors:</b></p> <p>Dr. Derek Armitage (derek.armitage@uwaterloo.ca) &amp; Ella-Kari Muhl (M.Sc.) (emuhl@uwaterloo.ca)</p> <p><b>Teaching Assistant:</b></p> <p>Trang Le (<a href="mailto:t52le@uwaterloo.ca">t52le@uwaterloo.ca</a>)</p> <p>Your teaching team checks email frequently and will make every effort to reply to your questions within 24 hours, Monday to Friday. When emailing the instructor, please indicate the course code in the subject line.</p> <p>Office Hours (*office hours will be virtual (TEAMS) until further notice):</p> <p>Trang Le (Tuesday 10:00 - 11:00am)</p> <p>Ella-Kari Muhl (Wednesday 10:00 - 11:00am)</p> <p>Derek Armitage (Thursday 10:00-11:00am)</p>
<p><b>Technical Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical problems with Waterloo LEARN</li> </ul>	<p><a href="mailto:learnhelp@uwaterloo.ca">learnhelp@uwaterloo.ca</a></p> <p>Include your full name, WatIAM user ID, student number, and course name and number.</p> <p>Technical support is available during regular business hours, Monday to Friday, 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM (Eastern Time).</p> <p><a href="#">LEARN Help Student Documentation</a></p>
<p><b>Student Resources</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Student Resources</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic advice</li> </ul>

Who and Why	Contact Details
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student success</li> <li>• WatCards</li> <li>• Library services and more</li> </ul>

## Course Description and Learning Outcomes

### Course Description

In this course you will critically examine how individuals and societies can respond to social-ecological complexity, uncertainty and change, and in ways that are more equitable and just. We will build on material covered in previous SERS courses, and further emphasize the application of critical systems thinking concepts in the context of real-world cases and your own interests. In doing so we will explore selected approaches, concepts and tools to foster sustainability using a lens of political ecology.

Political ecology is an emergent field of inquiry that draws on theory, concepts and methods from several disciplines, including geography and environmental studies/science, anthropology, political science, development studies and economics. At its core, political ecology integrates political economy perspectives and ecology to analyze the underlying contexts and processes of human-environment interaction. Political ecological research has provided valuable insights into the challenges created by overlapping institutional arrangements, local access and distribution conflicts, the narratives concerning science and modernization, marginalization of certain groups, the devaluation of local knowledge systems, and the governance of natural resources from local to global scales.

As an analytical framework, political ecology incorporates broad themes in human-environment interaction with critiques about power within society and institutions of governance, and the mediating influence of class, gender, identity and knowledge. Challenges to economic globalization, neo-liberal development strategies, and inequitable power relationships have been linked to the loss of local culture and knowledge systems and increasing livelihood vulnerability. Political ecology is not without its critics, however, and there are many fascinating issues, debates and new directions emerging. We will engage with these ideas and debates to examine how societies govern their interactions with nature, and the implications for sustainability.

### Learning Outcomes

We live in a human-dominated earth system. Sustainable responses to local and global challenges will test our individual and collective capacities to cope, adapt and deliberately transform our interactions with nature. This course will emphasize actionable concepts and encourage transdisciplinary thinking as a foundation to foster sustainability.

## **Our approach to the class is:**

1. **Systemic** - thinking in terms of social and ecological connections and feedbacks across scales;
2. **Critical** - not accepting the obvious explanation and challenging the relationships of power and narratives that influence sustainable outcomes (generally and in regards to your own interests); and
3. **Applied** – developing and using concepts, tools and skills in the context of some real-world challenges, with an emphasis on your own interests and career aspirations.

## **ERS 400 connects in a variety of ways with our School's desired learning outcomes. At the end of the course you should be able to:**

1. Understand the challenges and opportunities of moving towards sustainability (e.g., understand and assess various approaches, concepts and ideas as they are applied at local to global scales to deal with sustainability challenges)
2. Better define and articulate your core skills and areas of knowledge relating to SERS' areas of strength (e.g., ability to think critically, and to use logic, reason and evidence in support of positions on key environmental and sustainability challenges and opportunities.
3. Understand and work within, between and across disciplines and ways of knowing (e.g., to carefully consider the role of narrative, discourse and power with regards to knowledge, science and governance of resources and the environment)
4. Mobilize your skills and knowledge to contribute to better understandings, diagnoses and solutions for environmental and sustainability challenges and opportunities
5. Work collaboratively and effectively with people and organizations affected by or responsible for addressing environmental and sustainability challenges and opportunities (e.g., critically assessing the assumptions underlying sustainability ideas and applications and by extension, your own interests and experiences); and
6. Communicate ideas effectively in different oral and written formats for diverse audiences (professional and public).

Course activities involve a mix of remote/asynchronous lecture, experiential assignments and 'synchronous' (i.e., real-time) interactive discussions either in person or online during (mandatory) tutorials. Asynchronous lectures will be relatively short, focus on key themes and give guidelines for your reading of the text and application of ideas. Lectures should be viewed and readings completed prior to the tutorials.

We will use a range of examples and cases, both close to home and internationally. Guest speakers and additional multi-media (e.g., video) will be used to supplement course content.

## **Readings and Resources**

### **Required Readings**

The following required text is available directly through the publisher (Wiley Press), online (e.g., through Amazon), or through the UW book store. You are free to obtain either a hardcopy or a digital e-book. The publishers link is: [shorturl.at/nwBGY](http://shorturl.at/nwBGY)

**Robbins, P. 2020. Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction (Third Edition). Wiley: Hoboken, New Jersey.**

Readings are drawn from the course text and selected articles that will be made accessible on the course LEARN site - the additional required readings are identified in the class schedule. Other required resources (e.g., videos, etc.) will also be uploaded to the LEARN site and indicated in the class schedule.

## **Course Requirements and Evaluation**

Your assignments should be submitted to the corresponding Dropbox in LEARN. (See [Course Schedule](#) for due dates). Assignments and evaluation are outlined below:

### **Tutorial Participation (5%):**

Engagement and participation come in many forms. However, we do want everyone to be present and engage in the synchronous sessions (whether in-person or remotely). We are hoping to have the opportunity for good conversation and discussion. For that reason the synchronous sessions are 'mandatory'. There is not a specific expectation for 'how' to participate. We all have different learning styles and as a teaching team we are happy to accommodate those different styles. So come out to the synchronous sessions and engage with the ideas and debates whether you are listening, talking or doing a bit of both!

### **Short Assignments (3 @ 15% = 45%):**

Three short assignments will be used to connect with selected themes in the class. Marks will be assigned to reflect (a) completion of the assignment; (b) evidence of engagement with core ideas in readings and lectures (i.e., what are they, why are they important, what's missing); and c) your ability to connect theory and practice. Each assignment will be centred on a specific issue (e.g., a recent event, a policy process). Each assignment will require a maximum of 1250-1500 words of writing, along with completion structured responses. We will maintain reasonable expectations about the quality and clarity of writing, although the primary interest is in the application of ideas. Please see the guidelines and rubric on the [Short Assignments](#) page in the Assignments folder for more details.

### **Communicating Political Ecology (25%):**

You will produce and record a **maximum** 4-5 minute podcast OR approximately **2 minute** high quality video. The purpose of the podcast/video is three-fold:

i) to develop your communication skills;

ii) reflect your understanding of political ecological ideas; and

iii) to serve as a tool to address a key issue of interest through the lens of critical political ecology. Please see the guidelines and rubric on the [Communicating Political Ecology](#) page in the Assignments folder for more details.

### **Engaging Political Ecology: A Theory of Change (25%):**

Regardless of our intellectual footing (e.g., ecology, policy, restoration, etc.) or applied aspirations (e.g., resource manager, researcher, outreach, education, etc.), we need to position ourselves in relation to issues that are of primary concern to us. In this final assignment you will identify a particular sustainability challenge of your choice (N.B.: you are welcome to use your podcast/video issue as a base for this assignment) and critically examine how you would effect 'change' to address that problem, or in other words, develop a 'theory of change'. Your 'theory of change' should reflect political and ecological realities we have covered, and inevitably this will require you to engage with issues of identity (i.e., your positionality, worldviews and values, knowledge perspectives) and how you see the 'natural' world. Please see the guidelines and rubric on the [Theory of Change](#) page in the Assignments folder for more details.

**IMPORTANT: ALL TIMES EASTERN** - Please see the University Policies section of your Syllabus for details.

*(\*Subject to some change to reflect guest speaker availability)*

<b>Week</b>	<b>Class Date</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Readings/Resources</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>
<b>1</b>	Sept. 13	Introduction, overview and course structure	Latour 2020; Davis 2020	Tutorial 1
<b>2</b>	Sept. 20	Political ecology as an approach to sustainability	Robbins, Chapters 1 & 2; Nagendra 2018	Tutorial 2
<b>3</b>	Sept. 27	Tools for critical thinking and understanding in sustainability	Robbins, Chapters 3 & 4  Guest lecture: Dr. Jennifer Silver, University of Guelph	Tutorial 3 (Assignment 1)  A1 due Oct 1 (11:59 pm) (Submit to appropriate dropbox on LEARN)

<b>Week</b>	<b>Class Date</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Readings/Resources</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>
<b>4</b>	Oct. 4	Challenges in ecology	Robbins, Chapter 5  Guest lecture: Dr. Nasreen Peer, Stellenbosch University	Tutorial 4 (Assignment 2)  A2 due on Oct 8 (11:59 pm) (Submit to appropriate dropbox on LEARN)
	Oct. 11–15	READING WEEK		
<b>5</b>	Oct. 18	Challenges in social construction and explanation	Robbins, Chapter 6 & 7; Hau'Ofa 2014	No tutorial
<b>6</b>	Oct. 25	Degradation and marginalization	Robbins, Chapter 8; McCarthy 2020  Guest lecture: Dr. Prateep Nayak, University of Waterloo	Tutorial 5 (Assignment 3)  A3 due on Oct 29 (11:59pm) (Submit to appropriate dropbox on LEARN)
<b>7</b>	Nov. 1	Conservation and control	Robbins, Chapter 9  Guest lecture: Cindy Boyko, Archipelago Management Board, Haida Gwaii and Dr. Hilary Thorpe, Parks Canada	Tutorial 6

<b>Week</b>	<b>Class Date</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Readings/Resources</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>
<b>8</b>	Nov. 8	Environmental conflict	Robbins, Chapter 10; Powys White 2017; Smith 2019  Guest lecture: Dr. Philile Mbatha, University of Cape Town	No tutorial  Podcast/video assignment due Nov 19 (11:59pm)  (Submit to appropriate dropbox on LEARN)
<b>9</b>	Nov. 15	Environmental subjects and identities	Robbins, Chapter 11; Subramanian 2019  Guest lecture: Lowine Hill, University of Waterloo	Tutorial 7
<b>10</b>	Nov. 22	Political objects and actors	Robbins, Chapter 12	Tutorial 8
<b>11</b>	Nov. 29	Looking ahead: political ecology and sustainability	Robbins, Chapter 13; Semaan 2020	No tutorial
<b>12</b>	Nov. 30–Dec. 6	No class - Theory of Change paper		Synthesis Paper due Dec 6 (11:59pm)  (Submit to appropriate dropbox on LEARN)

## **Course and Department Policies**



## Extension and Late Assignment Policies

Please note the following:

1. All assignments must be completed to receive a mark for the course;
2. Requests for extensions of an assignment must be done so in writing in advance of the assignment due date;
3. In the event of an illness, a supporting medical certificate completed by a physician must be provided; and
4. Extensions may be granted for significant emergencies at the discretion of the Instructor.

## University Policies

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. The University's guiding principles on academic integrity can be found here: <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity>. ENV students are strongly encouraged to review the material provided by the university's Academic Integrity office specifically for students: <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/Students/index.html>

Students are also expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their actions. Students who are unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who need help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. Students may also complete the following tutorial: <https://uwaterloo.ca/library/get-assignment-and-research-help/academic-integrity/academic-integrity-tutorial>

When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. Within ENV, those committing academic offences (e.g. cheating, plagiarism) will be placed on disciplinary probation and will be subject to penalties which may include a grade of 0 on affected course elements, 0 on the course, suspension, and expulsion. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline: <https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>. Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance: <https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>

**Turnitin.com:** Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit alternate assignment.

**Intellectual Property:** Students should be aware that this course contains the intellectual property of their instructor(s), TA, and/or the University of Waterloo. Intellectual property includes items such as: Lecture content, spoken and written (and any audio/video recording thereof); Lecture handouts, presentations, and other materials prepared for the course (e.g., PowerPoint slides); Questions or solution sets from various types of assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, tests, final exams); and work protected by copyright (e.g., any work authored by the instructor or TA or used by the instructor or TA with permission of the copyright owner).

Course materials and the intellectual property contained therein, are used to enhance a student's educational experience. However, sharing this intellectual property without the intellectual property owner's permission is a violation of intellectual property rights. For this reason, it is necessary to ask the instructor(s), TA and/or the University of Waterloo for permission before uploading and sharing the intellectual property of others online (e.g., to an online repository). Permission from an instructor, TA or the University is also necessary before sharing the intellectual property of others from completed courses with students taking the same/similar courses in subsequent terms/years. In many cases, instructors might be happy to allow distribution of certain materials. However, doing so without expressed permission is considered a violation of intellectual property rights.

Please alert the instructor if you become aware of intellectual property belonging to others (past or present) circulating, either through the student body or online. The intellectual property rights owner deserves to know (and may have already given their consent).

**Students with Disabilities:** AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

**Mental Health and Wellbeing:** The University of Waterloo, the Faculty of Environment and our Departments/Schools consider students' wellbeing to be extremely important. We recognize that throughout the term students may face health challenges - physical and/or emotional. Please note that help is available. Mental health is a serious issue for everyone and can affect your ability to do your best work. Counselling Services <http://www.uwaterloo.ca/counselling-services> is an inclusive, non-judgmental, and confidential space for anyone to seek support. They offer confidential counselling for a variety of areas including anxiety, stress management, depression, grief, substance use, sexuality, relationship issues, and much more. We understand that these circumstances can be troubling, and you may need to speak with someone for emotional support. [Good2Talk](#) is a post-secondary student helpline based in Ontario, Canada that is available to all students.

**Religious Observances:** Students need to inform the instructor at the beginning of term if special accommodation needs to be made for religious observances that are not otherwise accounted for in the scheduling of classes and assignments.

**Unclaimed Assignments:** Unclaimed assignments will be retained until one month after term grades become official in Quest. After that time, they will be destroyed in compliance with UW's confidential shredding procedures.

**Communications with Instructors:** All communication with students must be through either the student's University of Waterloo email account or via Learn. If a student emails the instructor or TA from a personal account they will be requested to resend the email using their personal University of Waterloo email account.

**Co-op Interviews and Class Attendance:** Co-op students are encouraged to try and choose interview time slots that result in the least amount of disruption to class schedules. When this is challenging, or not possible, a student may miss a portion of a class meeting for an interview. Instructors are asked for leniency in these situations; but, a co-op interview does not relieve the student of any requirements associated with that class meeting.

When a co-op interview conflicts with an in-class evaluation mechanism (e.g., test, quiz, presentation, critique), class attendance takes precedence and the onus is on the student to reschedule the interview. CECA provides an interview conflict procedure to manage these situations. Students will be required to provide copies of their interview schedules (they may be printed from WaterlooWorks) should there be a need to verify class absence due to co-op interviews.

## **Coronavirus Information**

### [Coronavirus Information for Students](#)

This resource provides updated information on COVID-19 and guidance for accommodations due to COVID-19.