ANTH 322: Method and Theory in Ecological Anthropology

Fall 2014

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:45 am

Dr. Sean S. Downey
Department of Anthropology
University of Maryland

Class Location: WDS0104
Brief Description

This course is a broad exploration to the field of ecological anthropology, focusing on issues related to cooperation, the management of common property, sustainability, and complexity. The main goals for the course are to help students acquire an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of competing approaches to the question of the relationship of ecology to the social world. In doing this, you will come to understand how societies from across the world achieve sustainability, and also what has caused environmental collapse. On the natural science side, the major approaches to be considered are behavioral and systems ecology. From the social sciences, we will explore the methods of sociocultural anthropology, evolutionary game theory, cognitive models, agent-based modeling, and political ecology. Case studies will draw on the ethnology and archaeology of Indonesia, Africa, Europe and Latin America.

Why combine anthropology and ecology in a single course? Traditionally, social scientists study social systems, and natural scientists study ecosystems. But many of the most pressing problems of our time have to do with the relationship of human societies to the natural world. There is now abundant scientific evidence that humanity is living unsustainably, and “sustainability science” is emerging as a high priority for research and education. In this course, we will consider the strengths and weaknesses of the three major competing approaches to the study of humans and the environment: systems ecology, behavioral ecology, and political ecology. How do these approaches differ? Systems ecology focuses on the flow of energy and information in ecosystems, at scales ranging from a single organism to the planet as a whole. This is also the starting-point for investigating the resilience and robustness of ecosystems. In contrast, behavioral ecology uses the theory of natural selection to analyze the fitness benefits of social behaviors, like cooperation and competition. Finally, political ecology addresses questions about governance, power and institutions.

The best way to learn how to use these analytical tools is to see how they have been used to investigate specific cases. In addition to a core textbook on ecological anthropology Human Adaptability (Moran), we will read two classic ethnographies, The Dobe Ju’hoansi (Lee) about African hunter-gatherers, and Priests and Programmers (Lansing) about Balinese rice-farmers. So while you are learning about ecological anthropology, you will also be introduced to the ethnology of these, and other regions. The course is very carefully organized to maximize your learning opportunities. But as you are about to discover, much about the the format is different from other classes. In addition to lectures, the course incorporates participatory activities, ethnographic film, and exercises in agent-based modeling (ABM). Finally, there is a semester-long process designed to help you write an excellent research paper. The key to success in this course is to pay very close attention to the instructions for your assignments, and to keep a close watch on the course website on ELMS for deadlines.

This course is part of the Chesapeake Project which means it contributes a growing curriculum about sustainability at UMD. The learning objectives in this course with respect to sustainability are (1) to be able to recognize and explain how individual actions can contribute to the emergence of sustainability at aggregate social levels, ad the conditions necessary for this to occur; and (2) to become familiar with examples of western and non-western cultures that have coped successfully (and unsuccessfully) with sustainability.
Textbook(s)


All the books are available through the UMD bookstore.

Classroom Participation

Periodically throughout the course (and on no particular schedule) I will pass around a sign-in sheet which will count towards classroom participation.

Pre-requisites

Students in this course are assumed to understand basic concepts in evolution and natural selection. Acceptable pre-prerequisites are ANTH 222, ANTH 220 or equivalent. If you have not taken one of these courses you may still take the course with permission from the instructor.

Cellphone and laptops in the classroom

Texting, email, and web-surfing (Facebook, etc.) is unacceptable during class. It disrupts me, and thereby, the rest of your classmates. If I find you violating this rule you will be asked to leave. Electronic devices may be used for note-taking only.

Proper Citation and plagiarism

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. Provide citations for everything. Credit directly quoted and paraphrased words of others as well as sources of information. This includes internet sources as well.

If you have any questions about proper citation, please refer to the library help page or ask me:


The UMD Code of Academic Integrity can be viewed online

http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii100a.html (http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii100a.html)

Incompletes

Incompletes should be reserved for extreme emergencies that prevent the completion of course assignments toward the end of a school semester. It is very difficult to make up course assignments from a previous semester once a new semester begins, and students are often not able to prevent an Incomplete grade from lapsing into an F before the assigned deadline. If you think it is necessary to apply for an Incomplete grade due
to an end of semester emergency, please contact the instructor immediately to arrange for a new submission date for the incomplete work and to fill out the proper paperwork. The instructor reserves the right to refuse an Incomplete grade to any student.

**Late assignments**

Late assignments will only be accepted under extreme circumstances, and if accepted, will be subject to point deductions at the instructor's discretion. Always alert the instructor ahead of time if you think that you may not be able to submit an assignment on time.

**Special Needs**

If any student has any special study or test-taking needs (e.g., test anxiety, dyslexia, poor vision or hearing, special seating requirements, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make your participation in this course a rewarding one. In addition, I will make students aware of special services/facilities on this campus that might be of assistance in the course of your studies here at UMCP including Disability Support Services ([http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/](http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/)) and the University Counseling Center ([http://counseling.umd.edu](http://counseling.umd.edu)).

**Religious Observance**

Effort will be made to avoid scheduling assignments with major religious holidays. However, it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of any intended absences for religious observances other than those listed on the UMD website in advance ([http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/attend_student.html#religious](http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/attend_student.html#religious)). Prior notification via the ELMS Messaging is required by the end of the second week of class.

**Copyright**

All course materials (presentations, exams, handouts, labs, etc. in digital or paper format) are subject to copyright protection and may only be used for personal use. Course materials must not be distributed without permission of the instructor.
Course Syllabus

Week 1 (9/2, 9/4) - Introduction to Ecological Anthropology. Moran c1-4.


PD game in class. PD Game Handout [Listen: Radio Lab Axlerod MP3]


Uploaded three completed peer reviews here after class: Peer review workshop #1


Peer review workshop #2

Week 11 (11/11, 11/13) - Coupled systems: The subaks of Bali. Lansing c3-5; Bali Subak Simulation Lab.


Week 13 (11/25, 11/27 is Thanksgiving) - Group Discussion on Tuesday. Please develop ONE open-ended question that will stimulate discussion about any topic we have covered thus far in this course. It can be something you don't understand and want clarified, or a topic you find contentions or interesting. We will "circle-up" the desks and work around the class so everyone will have the opportunity to pose their question.


Research paper due Thursday -- upload here.

Exam Week. In-class Final Exam on Tuesday, Dec. 16, 8-10AM. Final Exam Review Sheet.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
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<td>Thu, Apr 3</td>
<td>Thu</td>
<td>Research Paper Draft (<a href="https://myelms.umd.edu/courses/1087902/assignments/3344085">https://myelms.umd.edu/courses/1087902/assignments/3344085</a>)</td>
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