INTL 4610: Environmental Politics
University of Georgia – Spring 2021
MLC 147/President’s Club Garden and via Zoom
Tuesday/Thursday 14:20-15:35

Prof. Gregory M. Thaler (he/him)
International Affairs Building (202 Herty Drive), Room 328
gthaler@uga.edu
Zoom Office Hours: Thursday 13:15-14:15 and by appointment (all times Eastern Time)
Sign up for scheduled office hours at
    Join Office Hours Zoom Meeting:
    Meeting ID:

INTL 4610 Class Zoom Meeting (unless otherwise announced):

    Meeting ID:
    Passcode:

Land and Labor of Indigenous and Enslaved Peoples:

The University of Georgia is located on the ancestral lands of the Muscogee Creek and Cherokee Peoples. The labor of enslaved people, primarily of African descent, built much of this University. I am committed to acknowledging and redressing these legacies of injustice.

Course Description:

Politics is the exercise of power. Ecology is the interaction of lifeforms with each other and the physical environment. This course examines how power structures human and more-than-human ecological relations, or ‘socio-ecological systems,’ with a particular focus on themes of governance, development, and conflict.

In a very narrow sense, environmental politics is the management of non-human surroundings by humans through the formulation and application of policy. This narrow definition lacks an appreciation for how humans exist within and through ecological relations, how power operates beyond the technical realm of policy, and how other species exercise agency in their relations with human beings. We will open broader perspectives on environmental politics by asking a series of critical questions. What is ‘Nature’? How do we come to know Nature, scientifically or otherwise? How are socio-ecological systems governed? What is the ecology of capitalist development? How are environmental politics constructed through categories of gender, race, and species? And what does it mean to be human in a time when the ‘Great Forces of Nature’

† Learn more about slavery at UGA: https://digihum.lib.uga.edu/exhibits/show/slavery.
have seemingly been overwhelmed?‡ We will consider responses from diverse scholarly traditions, including commons governance, political ecology, ecological modernization, ecological Marxism, eco-feminism, environmental justice, traditional ecological knowledge, and multispecies politics.

**NB:** This course forms part of the Social Sustainability sphere for the UGA Certificate in Sustainability (https://sustain.uga.edu/).

**Pedagogical Commitments:**§

I know that your academic pursuits are complemented by richly-textured personal lives. In the coming months, you may encounter extraordinary challenges at home and in your family as we face a continuing pandemic and other crises in Georgia, in the US, and around the globe. I want you to know how I will respond when challenges arise:

- **I will privilege care.**
  Care for your well-being – in all its many dimensions and expressions – is my paramount commitment to you.

- **I will invite your feedback.**
  This course is imperfect and the world is changing quickly. I will ask for your help to improve the quality and relevance of our course readings, activities, and assignments. If you have concerns about any elements of the course, please let me know, and I will do my best to be a responsive and respectful partner in improving your learning experience and the course itself.

- **I will be adaptive with course policies.**
  If you have questions or concerns about assignments, deadlines, requirements, details, norms, technology, or anything else, please ask. All course policies exist not for themselves, but rather in the service of our educational goals.

- **I will be reflective.**
  Just as I aim to facilitate critical inquiry among all of you, I will continue to reflect critically on my own role, positionality, and viewpoints as we move forward together.

**Course Structure, Requirements, and Evaluation:**

This is a rigorous elective course based on a combination of lectures, group discussion, and popular and academic writing. The course provides an introduction to key themes in environmental politics, but it is by no means comprehensive. Rather, the course is designed to orient you with regard to an interconnected set of perspectives and debates.

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Tuesday sessions will usually be devoted to an interactive lecture. Thursday sessions will usually be devoted to discussions based on reading groups, which will be assigned in Week 2. Lectures and readings are designed to be complementary, and you should be prepared to address the content of both in discussions and graded assignments. Required readings and materials will be posted to the eLC Content folder.

“Recommended” materials listed on the syllabus are not required for the course and may not be covered in lecture or discussion, though you are welcome to share insights derived from those sources. They comprise references closely related to our assigned materials that will be of interest to those who want to read deeper on a particular topic.

Special Considerations Related to COVID-19: I would dearly like to be in the classroom face-to-face with all of you this semester. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, we must modify instructional practices in order to protect each other’s health and the health of the broader UGA and Athens communities. I view our class as a community, and we have a fundamental obligation to keep each other safe, and to safeguard the health of our extended community of friends, colleagues, neighbors, and loved ones. This course will comply with all UGA guidelines and the commitment by the Department of International Affairs to ensure that all students are able to learn safely (see statement on eLC). We will work together to ensure the best possible learning environment under these circumstances.

The primary mode of instruction for this course is ‘hybrid synchronous.’ You are neither required nor encouraged to attend class in person for face-to-face instruction. You are welcome to choose online-only engagement in this course, and you will in no way be penalized for that choice. You will have the option to attend class in person on certain days following the procedures outlined below.

1. If you experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or are exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, **DO NOT ATTEND CLASS.** Report your exposure and any symptoms immediately through UGA’s contact tracing app and seek a test as soon as possible.

2. If you are ill and unable to complete your work on time, **DO NOT PANIC.** Reach out to me as soon as possible so we can find an appropriate accommodation.

3. There is no face-to-face attendance requirement for this class, and you will not be penalized in any way for participating in this class exclusively online.

4. Lecture classes (usually Tuesdays) will be delivered synchronously via Zoom. A recording of the lecture session will be uploaded to eLC immediately after the class session. Attendance at lectures is optional. You may choose to attend synchronously for an interactive experience, or you may view the lecture video asynchronously. If you choose to view the lecture asynchronously, you must do so prior to the next class session.

5. Discussion classes (usually Thursdays) will be delivered synchronously via Zoom, and attendance is required. Discussion sessions will not be recorded. If you must miss a discussion session due to illness, emergency, or an unavoidable conflict, you should notify me via email with as much advance notice as possible, or in the case of an emergency, as soon as possible after the missed session. Unexcused absences will detract
from your participation grade for this course. This format applies also to combined Lecture/Discussion sessions on April 6th and April 13th – those sessions will be delivered synchronously, attendance is required, and the sessions will not be recorded.

6. Once the class roster is settled, you will be assigned to an ‘attendance group’ (A or B). You will only be eligible to attend class in person on your attendance group days. If you plan to attend class in person on a day for which you are eligible, you must sign up via eLC at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled class time. If you fail to attend an in-person session for which you are registered without an excused absence, your participation grade will be penalized. If an emergency prevents you from attending an in-person session for which you are registered, you must notify me via email as quickly as possible to excuse your absence and avoid a participation grade reduction. During add/drop period, classes will be held online only to facilitate transfers and to test technology and procedures that will be important for the rest of the semester.

7. According to the CDC, COVID-19 spreads more easily indoors than outdoors, and outdoor activities are generally safer than indoor activities.** Consequently, in-person instruction for this course will take place preferentially outdoors at the President’s Club Garden. Note that if you attend class in person, you are required to wear a face covering over the nose and mouth and maintain a distance of at least six feet from others. You also must bring a laptop or tablet and headphones/earbuds to the session, since you must be connected to Zoom at all times to communicate with classmates who are participating remotely.

Reading Groups: You will participate in reading groups consisting of five or six students. In Week 2, you will be assigned to your groups, and you will sign up to serve as discussion leader for your group two times during the semester. At the end of each lecture, I will pose several questions or prompts related to that week’s material. By 19:00 of the day before a Discussion, you must upload to eLC a 1-2 paragraph response to one of the prompts and you must suggest one additional question or prompt for group discussion. Your responses should engage directly with the readings, incorporating citations where appropriate. Your questions may be points of clarification, or may raise broader theoretical or practical issues to be taken up by the class.

We will use Perusall, a collaborative reading platform, to engage with each other on key texts from the syllabus. You should access our course Perusall page from the eLC Content folder (Content>Perusall). Reading groups will be assigned to comment on specific texts. When working in Perusall, you should read and actively participate in collaborative annotation for the documents assigned to your group. You are encouraged to participate in discussions and view your peers’ work on documents assigned to other groups as well.

The role of discussion leaders is to review group members’ Perusall annotations, reading responses, and suggested questions prior to class, to begin and direct group discussion on days where we use breakout rooms, and to be prepared to report to the full class the main topics or

questions engaged with by the group. Variations to this format will be announced as needed during the semester.

You will be graded on a ‘reading group portfolio’ consisting of all of your reading responses from the semester, as well as on your participation in the reading group and Perusall discussions. Reading groups are not expected to meet outside of class time. Your grade for this component will be individual, i.e., you will only be graded on the quality of your individual portfolio and participation and not on the quality of your group.

I assign an average of around 60 pages of academic material per week. I consider this a moderate reading load for an upper-level course. The reading load is somewhat heavier earlier in the semester as we are developing foundations, and lighter later in the semester as you are expected to devote a greater amount of time to your research paper. Nonetheless, you may find yourself with insufficient time to read all assigned materials in minute detail. Strategic reading is an essential skill for college and beyond. You may wish to consult this helpful guide for tips on reading strategically for class:


**Participation:** Complete the required readings and other assignments prior to our Discussion class sessions and contribute fully to class discussions. Our class should be an environment for respectful, substantive discussions in which everyone feels comfortable participating. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable speaking during our discussions, please advise me so we can make appropriate adjustments. I recognize that people contribute to discussions in different manners, and I also value as participation conversations during office hours or over email.

**Op-Ed:** You will write an 800 to 1200-word opinion post that takes a stance on a relevant topic of your choosing. You may choose to write about the same topic that you investigate in your research paper (see below), but the tone and content must be directed to a general public. Alternatively, you may choose to write about a topic different from the subject of your paper. In either case, your post must engage explicitly with concepts or theories from the course, and your arguments must be supported with empirical evidence and references. Your op-eds will be posted to Tremr, an interactive web platform. We will discuss together the modalities for publishing and interacting with these posts, and you will have the option of publishing your post anonymously. You can view posts from previous students in this course on the Environmental Politics @UGA Tremr page: https://www.tremr.com/environmental-politics-uga. For additional examples of environmental politics opinion posts, see work by Bill McKibben (http://www.billmckibben.com/articles.html), George Monbiot (https://www.theguardian.com/profile/georgemonbiot), or myself (https://www.tremr.com/greg-thaler). Your op-ed must be posted to the web platform on or before 01 March.

**Final Paper:** You will write a research paper for this course on a relevant topic of your choosing. Your paper must incorporate references to the assigned course materials and should engage some of the themes and theoretical frameworks that we discuss in the course. Your research on your topic must go beyond our course material, however. In addition to a primary reliance on peer-
reviewed academic literature on your chosen topic, you may also wish to draw on non-peer reviewed ‘gray’ literature (e.g., NGO, think tank, or government reports) and primary source materials such as news stories, memoirs, artworks, audio/visual media, etc. Your research should be motivated by a question or puzzle, frame that puzzle in relation to theory, and make a cogent argument that is theoretically-informed and grounded in empirical evidence.

Papers may not exceed 20 double-spaced pages (not including the title page, references, and any tables or figures), formatted in Times New Roman 12-point font and justified with 1-inch margins. There is no formal minimum number of pages, but I would expect you to have to cut material to reach 20 pages, and a paper of fewer than 18 pages would likely benefit from expansion. The expectation, in other words, is for a 20-page paper. Your paper should include parenthetical (Author YEAR) citations in the text, with page numbers for direct quotations, and a full list of references in APA format. Your paper should begin with a title page and abstract (not included in the page count), and you should use section headings to structure the body of the paper. Pages should be numbered in the upper right-hand corner.

Your paper will be written in four stages to provide multiple opportunities for feedback:

On or before 10 February, you should email me a 1-paragraph description of your proposed paper topic so that I can provide feedback on the suitability of the topic and suggest potential references or directions to explore. I encourage you to schedule a time during office hours if you would like to discuss potential topics individually.

On or before 15 March, you will upload to eLC an annotated bibliography of at least 10 sources related to your project from beyond this syllabus. Each source (given in APA format) should be accompanied by a one or two sentence annotation of how the source relates to your research.

On or before 12 April, you will upload to eLC a five-page executive summary or extended outline of your paper. You will workshop your summary or outline with your reading group on 14-16 April. I am available during office hours to give feedback on executive summaries or full drafts that are sent to me at least 24 hours in advance of your office hours appointment.

Your final paper must be submitted in .doc or .docx format via eLC by 15:30 on 06 May. Late papers will be penalized 10 points for every 24-hour period by which they exceed the deadline. A paper submitted after 15:30 on 06 May cannot receive a grade higher than 90. A paper submitted after 15:30 on 07 May cannot receive a grade higher than 80.

Grading: Your grade in this course will be composed as follows:

- Participation: 20%
- Op-ed blog post: 20%
- Reading group portfolio: 20%
- Final paper: 40%

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scale:
General Considerations:

Recording Policy: All video and audio recordings of lectures and class meetings, as well as other course handouts and assignments, are for educational use by students in this class only and may not to be otherwise copied, shared, or distributed. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not enrolled in the class, or uploaded to other online environments. Video and audio recording by students of class interactions, whether in person or online (Zoom), is not permitted.

Zoom Guidelines: You must use your UGA Zoom account for all course-related Zoom meetings. We will use the class Zoom link located at the top of this syllabus unless otherwise announced. As a general practice, during class time please have your Zoom video camera turned on and keep your microphone muted when not speaking. I expect we will all experience occasional moments when we need to connect without video. If for any reason it will not be comfortable or feasible on a regular basis to have your video turned on, please let me know.

Email: I will only respond to emails that are sent from your UGA account and include the course name (INTL 4610) in the subject line. For useful email guidelines, please consult: http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor.

File Formats: Please upload files to eLC in either .doc, .docx, or .pdf formats exclusively. Your final papers must be submitted in .doc or .docx format.

Academic Honesty: As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at: https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/. Instances of cheating or plagiarism will be reported in accordance with university policy, and lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Plagiarism entails the use of the words, figures, or ideas of another person or entity without attribution. Regardless of whether you are quoting directly or paraphrasing, attribution is required for information or arguments that are the product of someone else’s intellectual labor. Please review the definition of plagiarism in the Academic Honesty Policy: https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/Prohibited_Conduct/. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Students with Disabilities: UGA is committed to providing full participation and access for students with disabilities. If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register
with the Disability Resource Center. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting http://drc.uga.edu.

**Mental Health and Wellness Resources:** If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) or crisis support (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

Please be aware that as UGA faculty, I am obligated to report to UGA’s Equal Opportunity Office any knowledge of sexual assault/relationship violence, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment involving UGA students, faculty, staff, or visitors. UGA’s Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention program (see below) can speak to students confidentially. Additional health and wellness resources available to you include:

- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 706-542-2273 (during regular business hours)
- After-Hours Mental Health Crisis: 706-542-2200 (UGA Police—ask to speak to the CAPS on-call clinician)
- Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention – 706-542-SAFE (advocates at RSVP can provide student confidentiality)
SCHEDULE AND READINGS††

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

14 Jan   Lecture: Politics, ecology, and the human condition


Week 2: What is ‘Nature’?

19 Jan   Lecture: The human-nature dichotomy

- Upload short bio with photo to eLC by 23:59 on 20 Jan.

21 Jan   Discussion

Assignment of reading and attendance groups and sign-up for leadership weeks


Recommended


†† Please note that the course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. I recommend completing each week’s readings in the order listed.

**Week 3: What is environmental science?**

**26 Jan**  
**Lecture:** The production of ecological knowledge

• Complete first Perusall assignment and upload first reading response to eLC by 19:00 on 27 Jan.

**28 Jan**  
**Discussion**


**Recommended**

Week 4: First Approach – Commons Governance

02 Feb  
**Lecture:** Institutionalism and the socio-ecological system

04 Feb  
**Discussion**


**Recommended**


Week 5: Second Approach – Political Ecology

09 Feb  
**Lecture:** Ecological distribution conflicts

- Email proposed paper topic to Prof. Thaler with subject “INTL 4610 Paper Proposal” by 23:59 on 10 Feb.

11 Feb  
**Discussion**


**Recommended**


**Week 6: Third Approach – Ecological Modernization**

- **16 Feb** Lecture: Sustainability and hegemony

- **18 Feb** Discussion


**Recommended**

Week 7: Fourth Approach – Ecological Marxism

23 Feb  Lecture: The capitalist world ecology

25 Feb  Discussion


Recommended


Week 8: Environmentalism and Conservation

- Post op-ed to web platform by 23:59 on 01 Mar. Upload a link to your post to eLC. In lieu of a reading response: 1) read and react to posts by your group members by 23:59 on 03 Mar, and 2) read and react to other posts that interest you.

02 Mar  Lecture: Saving nature

Film: *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front, USA, 2011*

[https://youtu.be/UmZkNNJqr1](https://youtu.be/UmZkNNJqr1)

Watch prior to discussion on 04 Mar.

04 Mar  Discussion


**Recommended**


**Week 9: Term Paper Accelerator**

09 Mar Term Paper Hackathon [online only]

11 Mar Term Paper Hackathon [online only]

**Week 10: Gender and Environment**

• Upload annotated bibliography to eLC by 23:59 on 15 Mar.

16 Mar Lecture: Gendered environments

18 Mar Discussion


**Recommended**

• Ojeda, Diana, Jade S. Sasser, and Elizabeth Lunstrum. 2019. “Malthus’s Specter and the Anthropocene.” *Gender, Place and Culture*.

**Week 11: Environmental Justice**

23 Mar **Lecture:** Racialized environments

25 Mar **Discussion**


**Recommended**


**Week 12: Multispecies Politics**

**30 Mar**  **Lecture:** Beyond humans

**01 Apr**  **Discussion**


**Recommended**


Week 13: Indigenous Environmental Politics

- Complete readings prior to 06 April class session.

06 Apr  Lecture & Discussion: Decolonizing environmental politics

08 Apr  INSTRUCTIONAL BREAK – NO CLASS


Recommended

Week 14: Political Ecology of Pandemic Disease / Paper Workshop

- Upload five-page research paper executive summary or extended outline to eLC by 23:59 on 12 Apr. Include your preferred email address or editable Google Doc link for receiving feedback.
- Complete readings prior to 13 April class session.

13 Apr  
Lecture & Discussion: Health as an ecological relation

14-16 Apr  
Workshop Outlines with Reading Groups


Recommended


Week 15: The Anthropocene

20 Apr  
Lecture: Beyond nature

22 Apr  
Discussion

Recommended


Week 16: Life in an Age of Extinction

27 Apr  Film: Albatross, USA, 2017
https://www.albatrossthefilm.com/watch-albatross
Watch prior to discussion on 29 Apr.

29 Apr  Closing Discussion

*Final Paper due by 3:30pm on 06 May.*