INTL 4610: Environmental Politics
University of Georgia – Fall 2023
MLC 250/Founders Memorial Garden
Tuesday/Thursday 14:20-15:35

Prof. Gregory M. Thaler (he/him)
International Affairs Building (202 Herty Drive), Room 311
gthaler@uga.edu
Office Hours (in-person or Zoom): Thursday 11:00-12:00 and by appointment
Sign up for scheduled office hours at least 12hs in advance at:
https://calendly.com/gregorythaler
Join Office Hours Zoom Meeting: https://zoom.us/j/91833626268
Meeting ID: 918 3362 6268

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’ 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.

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* Learn more from the Muscogee Creek Nation (https://www.muscogeenation.com/) and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (https://ebci.com/).
† Learn more about slavery at UGA: https://digihum.libs.uga.edu/exhibits/show/slavery.
NB: This course satisfies UGA’s Environmental Awareness requirement. This course also forms part of the Social Sustainability sphere for the UGA Certificate in Sustainability (https://sustainability.uga.edu/certificate/about/) and is eligible for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) credit.

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 unforeseen events 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.

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.

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“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 Public Health:

In order to learn together, we must care for each other. 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. Public health is both a personal and collective responsibility, and we must do what we can to minimize risks for ourselves and for each other.

Respiratory infections such as COVID-19, influenza, and the common cold spread more easily indoors than outdoors, and outdoor activities are generally safer than indoor activities with respect to these diseases.**

In light of these considerations, we will adopt the following practices for this class:

1. I will at times wear a mask indoors to protect my health, the health of the class, and the health of my family and community. You should feel comfortable wearing a mask in class at any time, whether indoors or outdoors.

2. I will hold class outdoors when possible.
   a. Please always prepare for class with the expectation that we may hold class outside. I will attempt to give 24 hours’ notice before an outdoor class session. Consider what you need to be comfortable outside in terms of temperature, sun protection, and so forth. If you have any concerns about accessibility in outside spaces, please let me know.
   b. Because of technology needs or inclement weather, we will nonetheless often spend time indoors.

3. If you experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or any other contagious respiratory disease, **DO NOT ATTEND CLASS**. Take time to rest, care for yourself, and protect others from infection. Email me as soon as possible to notify me of your absence. Absences due to illness will always be excused.
   a. UGA follows Georgia Department of Public Health guidance on COVID. If you test positive for COVID-19, you are expected to self-isolate for 5 days. If you have no symptoms or your symptoms are resolving after 5 days, you may leave

isolation, but you should continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days.

4. 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.

5. Office hours will be held in-person or via Zoom. Office hours sign-up details are provided in this syllabus.

6. I welcome your suggestions on how to lower public health risks for our class meetings, and I encourage you to reach out to me with any questions or concerns related to these matters. I will ask for your input before changing any of the practices that I have outlined here.

7. If as a result of illness or personal health risks you experience any hardships or welfare concerns related to your responsibilities with this class or with other programs or facilities affiliated with the Department of International Affairs, please do not hesitate to reach out to me, to the Department’s Undergraduate Coordinator Prof. Andrew Owsiak (aowsiak@uga.edu), or to another member of the International Affairs faculty.

**Reading Groups:** You will participate in reading groups consisting of five to seven 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 ~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.

Generally, reading group discussions will occupy roughly 35 minutes of our class discussion time, and will be followed by full class discussions. The role of discussion leaders is to review group members’ reading responses and suggested questions prior to class, to begin and direct group discussion, and to be prepared to report to the full class the main topics or questions engaged with by the group. A handout with suggestions for group discussion is located in the “Syllabus and Handouts” folder in the Content section of our eLC course page.

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 reading group 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, Civil Discourse, and Respect for Diverse Viewpoints:** 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. In matters of politics, everyone speaks from a unique standpoint and there is no single ‘correct’ or ‘neutral’ position. We should all feel comfortable questioning, disagreeing, or challenging ideas in a sensitive manner, using well-reasoned arguments backed by evidence. As a community, we can support each other to grow, learn, and change our understandings through discussions that respect diverse perspectives. 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.

Your participation grade will consist equally of my evaluation of your participation in the course and an evaluation of your reading group participation. For the reading group evaluation, you will anonymously assess your own participation and the participation of your group members at the end of the semester.

**Attendance:** The mode of instruction for this course is in-person, and you are expected to attend all classes, except in the event of illness, emergency, religious observance, or unavoidable conflict related to your academic, personal, and professional responsibilities. Please remember that my primary commitment to you is care for your well-being. You may always take an excused absence for any serious and legitimate reason. If you are at all sick, please do not come to class. Your reading group members and I will always work with you to get you caught up on any missed material. If you are going to be absent, please notify me as early as possible ahead of class time via email. In the case of sudden illness or emergency, please notify me as soon as you are able after the missed class session. Attendance is integral to your participation in this course. Absences for which you do not communicate a serious and legitimate cause are considered unexcused. Unexcused absences detract from your participation grade and are not eligible for accommodations with regard to assignments or other coursework. If you have poor attendance at lectures and discussions, you will not do well in the course. In short, I am asking you to be safe, care for yourselves, communicate with me, and take class seriously.

**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 (but go substantially beyond our class discussions), 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 the Undisciplined Environments blog (https://undisciplinedenvironments.org/category/short-essays/) or the Africa Is A Country ‘Climate Politricks’ series (https://africasacountry.com/series/climate-politics). Your op-ed must be posted to the web platform on or before 02 October.

**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. Do not include tables or figures unless they are of your own elaboration.

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

On or before **14 September**, 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 **16 October**, 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 **13 November**, you will upload to eLC a five-page **executive summary or extended outline** of your paper. Executive summaries may be double-spaced and extended outlines may use a bulleted or numbered format. You will workshop your summary or outline with your reading group on **16 November**. I am available during office hours to give feedback on
executive summaries that are sent to me at least 24 hours in advance of your office hours appointment.

Theoretically-informed academic writing is difficult to master. This assignment is a learning experience to develop a set of skills, and you will get out of it what you put into it. In addition to taking advantage of peer feedback, library resources, and office hours, I strongly encourage you to take advantage of the UGA Writing Center (https://www.english.uga.edu/writing-center), which offers free appointments for writing support.

Your final paper must be submitted in .doc or .docx format via eLC by 15:30 on 07 December. 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 07 December cannot receive a grade higher than 90. A paper submitted after 15:30 on 08 December cannot receive a grade higher than 80. Note that I maintain full discretion over granting extensions and assessing penalties for late assignments.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op-ed blog post</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading group portfolio</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

- **A**  94-100
- **A-** 90-93
- **B+**  87-89
- **B**  84-86
- **B-** 80-83
- **C+** 77-79
- **C** 74-76
- **C-** 70-73
- **D** 60-69
- **F** 59 and below

**General Considerations**

**Laptops and Phones:** Use of laptops is **prohibited** during lectures. Exceptions to this policy require my approval. Slides will be posted to eLC following lectures, and note-taking by hand is superior for comprehension and retention to note-taking by laptop.†† During lectures, you may take notes using pen and paper or a flat-lying electronic tablet. If you use a tablet, you must handwrite notes with a stylus rather than typing. Laptops are permitted during discussion solely for referring to course materials. Cell phone use is **always** prohibited during class time. Cell phones must be silenced and out of sight during class. If I see your cell phone during class time, I will ask you to put it away.

Those of you unaccustomed to note-taking by hand or those looking to improve the effectiveness of their note-taking may wish to consult “The Cornell Note-taking System.” A handout describing this system is located in the “Syllabus and Handouts” folder on eLC.

**Eating:** Please refrain from eating during class. Exceptions to this policy require my approval.

**Recording and Course Materials Policy:** All course handouts and assignments are for educational use by students in this class only and may not be otherwise copied, shared, or distributed. Video and audio recording by students of class interactions is not permitted, except with the express consent of the instructor as an accommodation for students with disabilities. Such recordings may not be reproduced or shared.

**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](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/](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/](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.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Use of generative artificial intelligence-based technologies, such as ChatGPT, is prohibited for any research or assignments related to this course. There is substantial evidence that AI chatbots are products of widespread copyright infringement and their outputs may constitute plagiarism.‡‡ Use of these technologies is considered unauthorized assistance in this course and therefore violates the University’s academic honesty policy.

**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](http://drc.uga.edu).

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**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 706-542-8479 or visit [https://sco.uga.edu](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 well-being and mental health services ([https://well-being.uga.edu/](https://well-being.uga.edu/)) or crisis support ([https://healthcenter.uga.edu/emergencies/](https://healthcenter.uga.edu/emergencies/)).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA ([https://healthcenter.uga.edu/bewelluga/](https://healthcenter.uga.edu/bewelluga/)) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.

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) 24/7 Mental Health Support: 706-542-2273
- Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention – 706-542-SAFE (advocates at RSVP can provide student confidentiality)
SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

17 Aug    Lecture: Politics, ecology, and the human condition


Week 2: What is ‘Nature’?

22 Aug    Lecture: The human-nature dichotomoy

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

24 Aug    Discussion

Assignment of reading groups and sign-up for leadership weeks


Recommended


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§§ 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?

29 Aug  Lecture: The production of ecological knowledge

- Upload first reading response to eLC by 19:00 on 30 Aug.

31 Aug  Discussion


Recommended

Week 4: First Approach – Commons Governance

05 Sep  Lecture: Institutionalism and the socio-ecological system

07 Sep  Discussion


Recommended


Week 5: Second Approach – Political Ecology

12 Sep  Lecture: Ecological distribution conflicts

- Email proposed paper topic to Prof. Thaler with subject “INTL 4610 Paper Proposal” by 19:00 on 14 Sep.

14 Sep  Discussion


**Recommended**


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

**19 Sep**  
**Lecture:** Sustainability and hegemony

**21 Sep**  
**Discussion**


**Recommended**


**Week 7: Fourth Approach – Ecological Marxism**

26 Sep  **Lecture:** The capitalist world ecology

28 Sep  **Discussion**


**Recommended**


**Week 8: Environmentalism and Conservation**

• **Post op-ed to web platform by 23:59 on 02 Oct. 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 04 Oct, and 2) read and react to other posts that interest you.**

03 Oct  **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 05 Oct.

05 Oct Discussion


Recommended


**Week 9: Theory Workshop / Indigenous Environmental Politics**

10 Oct Workshop: How To Use Theory

12 Oct Indigenous Environmental Politics Lecture & Discussion


Berta Cáceres


Recommended


Week 10: Gender and Environment

- Upload annotated bibliography to eLC by 23:59 on 16 Oct.

17 Oct  Lecture: Gendered environments

19 Oct  Discussion

Recommended


Week 11: Environmental Justice

24 Oct  Lecture: Racialized environments

26 Oct  Discussion


Recommended


**Week 12: Multispecies Politics**

**31 Oct**

**Lecture:** Beyond humans

**02 Nov**

**Discussion**


**Recommended**


Week 13: Political Ecology of Pandemic Disease

07 Nov  
Lecture/Discussion: Health as an ecological relation

09 Nov  
Debate


Recommended

Week 14: Guest Speaker and Paper Workshop

- Upload five-page research paper executive summary or extended outline to eLC by 23:59 on 13 Nov. Read and prepare feedback on your group members’ outlines.

14 Nov  Guest Speaker

16 Nov  Workshop Outlines with Reading Groups

Week 15: Thanksgiving Week

21 Nov  Film: Albatross, USA, 2017
https://vimeo.com/264508490
Watch prior to discussion on 30 Nov.

23 Nov  THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 16: The Anthropocene

28 Nov  Lecture: Beyond nature

30 Nov  Discussion


Recommended


*Final Paper due by 15:30 on 07 December.*