

**Community & Environmental Sociology 540**  
**Environmental Studies 402:**

**International Development, Environment and Sustainability:  
Studying Globalization through Commodity Chains**

Professor Jane Collins  
Spring Semester 2013

Agricultural Hall 10  
TR 1:00-2:15  
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International development, environment and sustainability are contentious terms that structure current debates about globalization. Each of these terms is value-laden: how we think about development, environment and sustainability is interwoven with our most basic assumptions about what is just, fair and desirable for our communities and the world as a whole. In this course, we will work to chart the key social processes that these terms seek to capture, the debates surrounding them, and the conceptual frameworks that we use to interpret them.

To accomplish this, we will take a somewhat unusual approach—one based on the concept of global commodity chains. Both scholars and activists have found the concept of the commodity chain useful as a way to think about complex global processes. It can help to simplify and illuminate connections among geographically distant locales and offers an alternative to models of development and sustainability built around the nation-state or the isolated local community. In fact, the idea of the commodity chain provides a means to bridge the local/global divide that troubles much of the research and activism surrounding globalization. We will use it to address issues of sustainable development in a way that addresses processes that span global north and south.

Course goals include: gaining an understanding of the key terms: “development” and “sustainability;” learning how they are implicated in contemporary debates over globalization; gaining a critical understanding of frameworks for discussing them; identifying important actors in processes affecting development and sustainability, including government, corporations, transnational institutions and social movements; identifying processes that are involved in securing or compromising sustainable development; learning how to conduct a commodity chain analysis; and gaining concrete knowledge of several global commodity chains and their implications for development and sustainability.

In order to accomplish these goals, the course is divided into four sections. In the *first*, we will develop definitions of our key terms (development, environment and sustainability) and will orient ourselves to debates surrounding them, as well as to the concept of the commodity chain. In the *second*, we will examine some of the debates surrounding “globalization,” including a consideration of globalization’s history, its ideological frameworks, and its contemporary institutional underpinnings. *Third*, we will turn to a series of case studies of commodity chains where issues of development, environment, and sustainability are “in play.” We will examine contemporary struggles over water, basic grains, fossil fuels, and coffee, ending with a consideration of the meanings of “fairness” in global commodity chains. *Finally*, in the last two weeks of the course, student working groups will present reports on their

independent research on a commodity chain and its implications for development, environment and sustainability.

**Note on participation:** The quality of our collective experience in this course depends on your participation. Participation means ATTENDING and keeping up with the readings and being able to discuss them thoughtfully in class. I encourage debate based on careful reading of materials and we will work to cultivate an environment of respect for one other's views

## Course Materials:

### Books:

McMichael, Philip, *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.

Goldman, Michael, *Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization*.

Jaffee, Daniel, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability and Survival*.

Course reader: available electronically through MyUW.

## Assignments (see descriptions below):

Midterm exam	20%
Critical responses to reading (5)	25%
Glossary of Key Terms (turned in twice)	10%
Commodity chain report & presentation	25%
Final exam	20%

**Accommodations:** I wish to include fully any students with special needs in this course. Please let me know (the earlier the better) if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction or evaluation procedures in order to enable you to participate fully. The McBurney Resource Center will provide useful assistance and documentation.

**Grade disagreements:** If you have questions about a grade, speak to me first. If the question is not resolved, speak with the Chair of Community and Environmental Sociology, Leann Tigges, who will attempt to resolve the issue and inform you of the appeals procedure if no resolution is reached informally.

## Description of Assignments

### Commodity Chain Report and Presentation (25% of grade)

For this assignment we will divide into groups of 3-4 students each. Each group will research a commodity chain of interest to its members. The group will develop: 1) a graphic representation of the chain; 2) a brief history of the chain, and 3) a description of key actors and any social movements involved. The group will present their findings to the class and each member of the group will turn in a

5-7 page (double-spaced) paper that summarizes these findings and reflects on the implications of the case for development and sustainability. I will evaluate the written papers individually. The final grade for this assignment will consider both the written work and participation in the group presentation. (See detailed instructions at end of syllabus).

### **Critical Responses to Readings** (25% of grade)

Each critical response will focus on a single reading. It should: a) briefly summarize the author's point of view; b) locate the author's perspective within larger debates (what ideas is s/he arguing against, explicitly or implicitly)? and c) assess the logic of the author's argument and the strength of the evidence presented. There are six "blocks" of reading from which you can choose an article. You are expected to produce a critical response for 5 of these 6 blocks. The response should be no longer than one single-spaced page and is due on the last day of the block. One substitution (film review) is possible. See below.\*

Block 1: Jan 22-Jan 30

Block 2: Feb 5-Feb 14

Block 3: Feb 19-Feb 28

Block 4: Mar 5-Mar 21

Block 5: Apr 2-Apr 9

Block 6: Apr 11-Apr 23

\***Film Review**-- For **one** of these 5 critical responses, you may substitute viewing and writing a brief (one page, single spaced) report on one of the following films, which you can check out from me during office hours.

1. "*Maquilapolis: City of Factories*"—Filmmakers gave video cameras to several women workers in Tijuana's *maquiladoras* (export processing factories) asking them to make video diaries of their life, community and work. 2006.
2. "*China Blue*"—Filmmakers had unprecedented access to the inside of a Chinese blue-jeans factory and tell the story of how a worker named Jasmine and her peers dealt with a production speed-up. 2007.
3. "*King Corn*"—Two college friends move to Iowa to learn where their food comes from. 2006.
4. "*Wal\*Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*"—This documentary interviews workers, business owners and members of communities where Wal-Mart does business to raise questions about its business model. 2005.
5. "*The NEW Age of Wal-Mart*"—a documentary produced by CNBC on the corporate giant. You can watch this free on Hulu <http://www.hulu.com/watch/98124/cnbc-originals-the-new-age-of-walmart?c=News-and-Information#s-p1-so-i0>. 2009.
6. "*A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash*"—Film argues that the era of cheap oil is past and raises questions about how the global economy will readjust. 2006.
7. "*Gasland*"—A film that criticizes the practice of hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" to extract natural gas, 2010.
8. "*Manufactured Landscapes*"—an artist's meditation on the scale and scope of industrialization and the problem of waste, 2006.
9. You can choose another film if you can convince me of its relevance to class goals

**Glossary of Key Terms** (10% of grade): Over the course of the semester, we will work together to develop a list of key terms—our shared vocabulary for discussing the topic at hand. We will add to it during each class session. I will take responsibility for keeping track of the terms and sending out copies of the list from time to time, but you must develop your own definitions from notes and readings. The mid-term and final exam for the class will be based in part on these terms. You will turn this in twice: once a week before the mid-term and once a week before the final. This way, I will be able to give you some feedback on whether you understand these concepts before the exam.

The **Mid-term Exam** (20% of grade) will be held in-class and will consist of identification and essay questions. You will have a choice of essays.

The **Final Exam** (20% of grade) will be held during the regularly scheduled final exam period. It will consist of identification and essay questions. You will have a choice of essays.

### **COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS** (\*indicates article on electronic reserve)

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>READINGS and READING QUESTIONS</b>
JAN 22	<b>Introduction to course</b>	
	<b>PART 1</b>	<b>DEFINING KEY TERMS AND DEBATES</b>
JAN 24	<b>Development</b>	Rist, Gilbert, "The Invention of Development," * McMichael, Philip, <i>Dev &amp; Soc Change</i> , ch. 1  <i>From whose perspective are we defining development? Is development the same as growth? How do relations among nations shape development?</i>
JAN 29	<b>Environment</b>	Robbins, Paul, "What is Political Ecology?"* O'Connor, James, "History and Nature"*  <i>What do we mean by "nature?" How are nature and society related? What is political ecology?</i>
JAN 30	<b>Sustainability</b>	Polanyi, Karl, "The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities"* Bruntland Commission, "The Concept of Sustainable Development"* Foster, John Bellamy, "Sustainable Development of What?"*  <b>Special Assignment (ungraded): Bring a definition of sustainability to class.</b>  <i>How does Polanyi understand the sustainability challenges posed by industrial capitalism? According to the Bruntland Report, what are the major challenges to sustainability? Is continued economic growth compatible with sustainability? What working definition of sustainability should we use in this course?</i>  <b>Block 1 Critical Response Due</b>
FEB 5	<b>Measuring Development and Sustainability</b>	Stiglitz, Joseph and Sen, Amartya, "Executive Summary--Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress"* Waring, Marilyn, "A Woman's Reckoning: An Introduction to the International Economic System"* Gertner, Jon, "The Rise and Fall of the GDP"*

		<p><i>What are the widely accepted measures of success in the global economy? How might they distort our understanding of social and economic well-being and sustainability? What alternative measures might we use?</i></p>
FEB 7	<b>The Commodity Chain as a Way to Study Globalization</b>	<p>Marx, Karl, "The Two Factors of the Commodity" and "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret"*  Smith, Adam, "Of the Real and Nominal Price of Commodities"*  Barndt, Deborah, "Across Space and through Time: Tomatl Meets the Corporate Tomato"*  <u>Film (short): <i>The Story of Stuff</i></u></p> <p><i>What is a commodity? What are use value and exchange value? How does labor enter into commodities? What is a commodity chain? How can a commodity chain approach help us study power and inequality in the global economy?</i></p>
	<b>PART 2</b>	<b>HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS</b>
FEB 12	<b>The Development Project: Colonialism and Its Aftermath</b>	<p>McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i>, ch. 2</p> <p><i>What do we mean by colonialism and why is it relevant to development today? What role did resources/commodities play in colonialism?</i></p>
FEB 14	<b>The Development Project: Post-WWII/Cold War</b>	<p>McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i>, ch. 3  Shiva, Vandana, "Science and Politics in the Green Revolution"*</p> <p><i>How did the developed nations structure ties to the developing world in the aftermath of WWII? What was the original purpose of food aid? What political choices were involved in the promotion of green revolution technologies?</i></p> <p><b>Block 2 Critical Response Due</b></p>
FEB 19	<b>The Development Project: Third World Industrialization and Debt</b>	<p>McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i>, chs. 4, 5</p> <p><i>What does McMichael mean by the "new international division of labor?" What goals motivated "import substitution industrialization?" How did the third world debt crisis originate?</i></p>
FEB 21	<b>The Globalization Project: The Theory and Practice of Neoliberalism</b>	<p>Harvey, David, "Introduction" to <i>Brief History of Neoliberalism</i>*  McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i>, chs. 6, 7</p> <p><i>What is neoliberalism? Where do neoliberal ideas come from? What are its key practices? What are the most important institutions regulating the global economy today? How are they governed? How transparent and accountable are they?</i></p>

FEB 26	<b>The Globalization Project's Institutions: A Case Study</b>	Goldman, Michael, <i>Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization</i> . chs. 1-2  <i>Why was the World Bank founded? How has that mission changed over the years?</i>
FEB 28	<b>Case Study, cont'd.</b>	Goldman, <i>Imperial Nature</i> , chs. 3-4  <i>What does Goldman mean when he says the World Bank is a producer of scientific knowledge? What does "green development" mean in the context of the Bank?</i>  <b><u>In class assignment:</u> Today, we will form teams for the commodity chain presentation. Come to class prepared with ideas for a project.</b>  <b>Block 3 Critical Response Due</b>
MAR 5	<b>Case Study, cont'd.</b>	Goldman, <i>Imperial Nature</i> , chs. 5, 7 and conclusion  <i>How do World Bank projects affect the governance of developing states? What does Goldman mean by a "hybrid state actor?"</i>  <b>Turn in glossary of key terms to date</b>
MAR 7	<b>Alter-Globalization</b>	McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i> , ch. 8 International Forum on Globalization, "A Better World is Possible"* Via Campesina, "The International Peasants' Voice"* Shiva, Vandana, "The Seed and the Spinning Wheel"*  <b><u>Special Assignment (ungraded):</u> Come to class prepared to debate (pro or con) the following proposition: "Development should consciously favor 'the local'" [from: "A Better World is Possible"]</b>  <i>What alternative visions do social movements critical of market globalization propose? How do these movements think about the relationship of globalization to development and sustainability? What is the "principle of subsidiarity?"</i>
MAR 12	<b>Alter-Globalization and Sustainability</b>	McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i> , ch. 9  <i>What is "the sustainability project"? What role do markets play in it? How do first and third world frameworks for sustainability differ? Do points of convergence exist?</i>  <b>Team proposals (for commodity chain presentation/report) due</b>

MAR 14		<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>
	<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Case Studies of Commodity Chains</b>
MAR 19	<b>Water</b>	<p>Olivera, Oscar, selection from <i>Cochabamba!</i>*  Bakker, Karen, "The 'Commons' Versus the 'Commodity': Alter-globalization, Anti-privatization and the Human Right to Water in the Global South"*</p> <p><i>What form does privatization of public resources take in the water sector? How do we go about deciding which resources should be held in common and which can be privately owned? Is there a human right to water?</i></p> <p><b>Schedule team meetings for commodity chain projects/presentations with Prof. Collins this week.</b></p>
MAR 21	<b>Water, continued</b>	<p>Goldman, Michael, <i>Imperial Nature</i>, ch. 6  Spronk, Susan and Jeffery Weber, "Struggles against Accumulation by Dispossession in Bolivia"*  <u>Film</u>: clips from <i>Blue Gold</i></p> <p><i>What is accumulation by dispossession? How are struggles over water and natural gas different? What role do transnational institutions like the World Bank play in reshaping the relationship of communities to their resources?</i></p> <p><b>Block 4 Critical Response Due</b></p>
		<b>SPRING BREAK</b>
APR 2	<b>Basic Grains</b>	<p>Pollan, Michael, "The Elevator," "The Feedlot," "The Processing Plant," "The Consumer" *</p> <p><i>What commodity chains does corn form part of? What is substitutionism? Why does corn now constitute so much of our diet? What federal policies and programs are involved in this change?</i></p>
APR 4	<b>Basic Grains, cont'd</b>	<p>Bello, Walden, "Manufacturing a Food Crisis"*  Henriques, Gisele and Raj Patel, "NAFTA, Corn and Mexico's Agricultural Trade Policy"*  Vallely, Paul, "Wish You Weren't Here: The Devastating Effects of the New Colonialists"*  "Nyeléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty"*</p>

		<p><i>How is market globalization affecting world hunger today? How is this like/different from the food aid/debt trap of the Cold War era? What are food sovereignty movements? What are the development/sustainability issues in the “food vs. fuel” debate? How are wealthy nations guaranteeing food security at the expense of poor ones?</i></p>
APR 9	<b>Fossil Fuels</b>	<p>Mitchell, Timothy, “Carbon Democracy”*</p> <p><i>How has fossil fuel extraction shaped international relationships? How is fossil fuel extraction related to democracy? How do legacies of fossil fuel extraction shape globalization today? What are the implications of fossil fuel dependence for peace?</i></p> <p><b>Block 5 Critical Response Due</b></p>
APR 11	<b>Coffee</b>	<p>Jaffee, Dan, <i>Brewing Justice</i>, chs. 1-3</p> <p><i>How do global market prices reflect power relations? Why are coffee prices so volatile and why does this matter?</i></p>
APR 16	<b>Coffee, cont’d</b>	<p>Jaffee, Dan, <i>Brewing Justice</i>, chs. 4-6</p> <p><u>Film</u>: <i>Black Gold</i></p> <p><i>How are coffee prices connected to livelihoods and community development in Oaxaca? Could reconfiguring prices change development and sustainability outcomes?</i></p>
APR 18	<b>Coffee, cont’d</b>	<p>Jaffee, Dan, <i>Brewing Justice</i>, chs. 7-9.</p> <p><i>How effective is fair trade as a development strategy? What are some ways it could be made to work better?</i></p>
APR 23	<b>Rethinking Development and Sustainability</b>	<p>McMichael, <i>Dev and Soc Change</i>, ch. 10</p> <p><i>What do you think are the prospects for increasing the influence of non-market values? For increasing common property arrangements? Is degrowth feasible?</i></p> <p><b>Block 6 Critical Response Due</b></p>
	<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Commodity Chain Reports</b>
APR 25		Student Presentations
MAY 2		<p>Student Presentations</p> <p><b>Turn in glossary of key terms</b></p>

MAY 7		Student Presentations
May 9		Student Presentations/Wrap-up and Review
May 15		<b>FINAL EXAM</b> 2:45-4:45, location TBA

## Commodity Chain Report and Presentation

For this assignment we will divide into groups of 3-4 students. Each group will research a commodity of interest to its members. The group will develop a report that includes: 1) a graphic representation of the commodity chain; 2) a brief history of the chain, and 3) a description of key actors and any social movements involved. The report should generate and provide evidence for a thesis. This thesis might say something about the implications of some aspect of the chain for development and sustainability. Your analysis must focus on at least two nodes (stages) in the commodity chain (i.e. design, production, consumption, marketing, recycling, etc.) and it should include at least two countries. You may discuss political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the commodity chain. Each group will present their findings to the class and each member of the group will turn in a 5-7 page (double-spaced) paper that summarizes these findings and reflects on the implications of the case for development and sustainability. I will evaluate the written papers individually. The final grade for this assignment will consider both the written work and participation in the group presentation.

### **Phase I: Team Formation. (February 28<sup>th</sup>)**

We will spend approximately ½ hour in class forming 3-4 person teams for the reports. You should come to class with ideas for a project and each team should adopt a preliminary idea.

### **Phase II: Project Proposals. (due March 12<sup>th</sup>)**

Each team will turn a proposal of 1-2 double-spaced pages, addressing the following issues:

- 1) What will you study? (What is your research topic?)
  - a) What commodity will you focus on?
  - b) What “nodes” of the commodity chain do you plan to study?
- 2) Why is this commodity of interest? What is its scholarly and/or practical significance?
  - a) How is this commodity involved in processes of globalization? How is it related to development? to sustainability?
  - b) What is your provisional thesis about this commodity chain?
- 3) What sources will you use?

### **Phase III: Team Meetings with Prof. Collins (Week of March 19<sup>th</sup>).**

Each team will sign up for a meeting time to discuss how their project is progressing.

### **Phase IV: Class presentations (April 25<sup>th</sup> - May 9<sup>th</sup>).**

Each team will have approximately 15 minutes of class time: 10 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for questions and discussion. You should divide up speaking responsibilities so that each team member speaks for roughly the same amount of time. You may use Power Point slides or other audio-

visual aids. Your audience is your fellow students. You need to educate and engage them, realizing they know far less than you do about this topic. Presentations will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) analysis; 2) organization and structure; 3) evidence and support; and 4) mechanics and style. The report will count for 50% of the grade for this assignment.

***Phase V: Individual Final Report (Due May 9<sup>th</sup>).***

Each report should be 5-7 double-spaced pages. It must include:

- 1) Introduction: lays out your goals and states your thesis
- 2) Background and Context: enough to enable an intelligent reader to understand your case, including information on the history of the supply chain and an overview of key actors.
- 3) Body of the paper: presentation of evidence in support of your thesis. This evidence should include information on at least two stages of the commodity chain in at least two countries. You should use specific evidence from your sources (properly cited) to support and build your arguments. The organization of this central section is essential, so think carefully about the points you wish to raise and the clearest order for these points.
- 4) Conclusion: brings together your biggest “take home messages” and explains the relevance of your paper’s argument.
- 5) Bibliography: You should use and cite at least 3 scholarly sources that are not on the class syllabus (you may also use class sources).

Like the in-class report, the paper grade will be based on: 1) analysis; 2) organization and structure; 3) evidence and support; and 4) mechanics and style. The paper will count for 50% of the grade for this assignment.