***Geo 340: The Geography of Oil***

**Fall 2018**

**Tues/Thurs 930-1050**

**Eggers Hall 032**

**Professor Matt Huber**

**Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 1230-130 and by appointment**

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**Course Description**

Oil is often imagined to contain incredible powers. It is fuels our economy; it’s a magical generator of wealth and prosperity. On the other hand, it is seen as a “curse” that inhibits democracy and causes poverty, and desire for oil is claimed to drive geopolitical conflict and war. If oil runs out, we are told industrial civilization will collapse. We understand that oil is fundamental to society, economics, and politics, but oil is also profoundly *geographical*. It only exists in particular local places, and its underground state makes knowledge about its whereabouts highly contentious. Its importance as a *global* commodity ensures that (geo)political groups situated at diverse geographical scales (local, national, global) will struggle over oil control and profit. Once it is extracted it must be transported through vast geographical networks of pipelines, ocean tankers, and refineries. Once it is refined it serves particular uses which themselves produce geographies (e.g., in the U.S., cheap gasoline is a critical basis for suburban sprawl and the reliance on auto-transport). Oil is also central to geographical concerns with the environment. Its extraction leads to water contamination. Refining consumes tremendous amounts of energy and water and produces toxic pollution. The combustion of motor fuel produces smog and air quality problems. Throughout oil’s global travels it also produces greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

In this course, we will use the topic of oil to explore the concerns of human geography with society, space, and the natural environment. By learning about oil we will cover themes and concepts important to environmental, political, cultural, economic and urban geography. We will also explore oil in diverse geographical contexts including Texas, Venezuela, and Nigeria.

**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

* Explore and critically reflect on geographic issues, concepts, and debates.
* Identify, locate, evaluate, use, and share information as it pertains to geography.
* Articulate what a geographic perspective brings to our understandings of a changing world and its human and environmental dynamics.
* Describe and explain the changing relationship between humans and the environment and its different form over time and across space.
* Describe and explain the dynamic relationship between people and places, and among places, over time and across space and scales.

**REQUIRED TEXT**

Timothy Mitchell. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011)

Almost everything you read for this course will be posted under “content” on blackboard. Please match the topic for the day on the syllabus with the appropriate folder. We will read one book in the middle of the semester.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Quizzes (5%)

There will be three quizzes throughout the semester totaling 5% of your final grade. These are basically meant to check your “pulse” in terms of how invested you are in class materials. The quizzes will not only test the reading due on that particular day, but they might ask what was covered in the previous day’s lecture. They also are meant to test your ability to come to class on time. There will be a short grace period, but if you are excessively late on a quiz day you lose the points.

**QUIZ MAKEUP AND LATE POLICY**

If you **ever** need to miss class for any reason please email me and explain the reason **before class starts**. If there is a quiz on that particular day, and you notify me with a legitimate absence, you will have the opportunity to make up the quiz. **If you fail to notify me of an absence on a quiz day you will lose points. If you are LATE to class, you will not be able to take the quiz.** The quizzes are meant to “test” both the reading *and* the basics of attendance and timely arrival to class.

Participation (10%)

This class is large and will have limited discussion. However, I will keep track of attendance and monitor classroom contributions.

Found Object (5%)

Every class day will begin with two or three of you presenting a 2-3 minute “found object” on oil and society. This could be a newspaper article, television/movie clip, or any other cultural image/media object that you can show/summarize to the class. You will be graded on the relevance of the “object” to class themes and your presentation effectiveness.

Mini-Exam (10%)

The goal of this exam is to make sure students are engaged and learning material early in the semester (the exam will be on September 18th). Unlike the two major exams, this one will only last 20 minutes.

Essays (3 total: 5% +10%+ 15%=30%)

There are three essays in this class. Each essay increases in length and percentage of your grade. If you improve your writing/analysis as the semester goes on your grade will show it. The final paper will entail a synthetic evaluation of the topic of oil using course materials throughout the semester. The prompts will be handed out at least two weeks ahead of time for the first two papers and 3 weeks for the final paper.

Exams (2 Exams: 20% each)

There will be two exams in the semester. These exams are meant to test your knowledge of the concepts and empirical material on oil covered in class lecture.

**EVALUATION**

Mini-Exam 10% A (93-100) C+ (77-79)

Quizzes 5% A- (90-92) C (73-76)

Overall Participation 10% B+ (87-89) C- (70-72)

Found Object 5% B (83-86) D (60-69)

Essays (3) 30% B- (80-82) F (0-59)

Exams (2) 40%

Total: 100%

**STATEMENT ON ADD/DROP POLICY**

It is the policy of the Geography Department that students must obtain FIRST the signature of the instructor and THEN the signature of the department chair if they wish to drop or withdraw from this course.

**SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

Students should review the University’s policies regarding: Diversity and Disability https://www.syracuse.edu/life/accessibilitydiversity/; the Religious Observances Notification and Policyhttp://supolicies.syr.edu/studs/religious\_observance.htm; and Orange SUccess - http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/

**DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you believe that you need academic adjustments (accommodations) for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), visit the ODS website– http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 or TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting academic adjustments. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic adjustments and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since academic adjustments may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. SU students are required to read an online summary of the University’s academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

**READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

Tuesday August 28th

*Course Introduction*

**PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO OIL**

Thursday August 30th – Oil’s Complex Geographies

* Bridge and Le Billon, *Oil* pp. 6-39
* “Dialectics,” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 157-158

Tuesday September 4th – The Formation of Oil and the Making of a “Resource”

* Black, Intro + Chapter 1, pp. 5-42
* “Resource” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 648-649

Thursday September 6th – Oil as a Commodity Chain

* Dara O’Rourke and Sarah Connolly, “Just Oil? The Distribution of Environmental and Social Impacts of Oil Production and Consumption”, pp. 587-617
* “Commodity Chain” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 101-2
* “Environmental Justice” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 201-202

**PART II: PRODUCTION**

Tuesday September 11th– Property I: Oil and Private Property in the United States

* Zimmerman, E.W. 1957. *Conservation in the Production of Petroleum*, pp. 91-113.
* “Property” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 593-594

Thursday September 13th – Property II: Sovereignty, Rent and the Landlord State

* Coronil *The Magical State*, pp. 42-56
* “Rent” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 644-645
* “Sovereignty” *The Dictionary of Human Geography* 706-707

Tuesday September 18th

* **MINI-EXAM**
* ***Documentary Sweet Crude***

Thursday September 20th - Petro-States and Nigeria

* Michael Watts, “Oil worlds: Life and death in Nigeria’s petro-state” pp. 341-354
* “State” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 722-724

Tuesday September 25th – The Politics of Extraction: Who Decides?

* Riofrancos, T. “Scaling Democracy: Participation and Resource Extraction in Latin America” *Perspectives on Politics*, pp. 678-696.
* “Democracy” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 150-152

Thursday September 27th – Life in a Boomtown – The Bakken Shale, North Dakota

* Kives, B. 2014 “Welcome to Williston, North Dakota: America's new gold rush city” *The Guardian*
* Becker, K. 2017 “The Paradox of Plenty: Blessings and Curses in the Oil Patch” *The Bakken Goes Boom*, pp. 11-30
* Tally, L. 2017 “Nowhere to Run: Impacts of the Bakken Oil Boom on Domestic Violence Survivors and Service Providers” *The Bakken Goes Boom*, pp. 131-142

**PART III: CONSUMPTION**

Tuesday October 2nd Oil Consumption I: Oil and Mass Consumption

* Huber 2013 *Lifeblood*, pp. vii-xxi; 27-60
* “Capitalism” The *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 59-64
* “Fordism” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 260-261

Thursday October 4th – Oil Consumption II – Gas Prices and American Politics

* Huber, M. 2013. *Lifeblood* pp. 129-154
* “Neoliberalism” *The Dictionary of Human Geography,* pp. 497-498

Tuesday October 9th Oil Consumption III: Eating Oil

* **ESSAY I DUE**
* Weiss, T. “The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture” pp. 315-341
* Webber, M. “More food, less energy” *Scientific American*, pp. 74-79
* “Agro-food system” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 20-21

Thursday October 11th – Oil Consumption IV – Debating Industrial Food

* Laudan, R. 2015. “A Plea for Culinary Modernism” *Jacobin*
* Bernstein, J. 2017 “On Mother Earth and Earth Mothers: Why Environmentalism Has a Gender Problem” *Breakthrough*
* “Modernity” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 471-474

**PART IV: POLITICS**

Tuesday October 16– *Carbon Democracy I*

* Mitchell, T. *Carbon Democracy*, Introduction, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-65
* “Geopolitics” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 300-302
* “Critical Geopolitics” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 121-123

Thursday October 18th – *Carbon Democracy II*

* Mitchell, T. *Carbon Democracy*, Chapters 3-5, pp. 66-143

Tuesday October 23rd – *Carbon Democracy III*

* Mitchell, T. *Carbon Democracy,* Chapters 6-7, pp.144-199

Thursday October 25th - *Carbon Democracy IV*

* Mitchell, T. *Carbon Democracy,* Chapter 8, Conclusion, pp. 200-254

Tuesday October 30th –**EXAM I**

Thursday November 1st - Climate Change and Oil: An Introduction

* Robbins et al. “Carbon Dioxide” pp. 139-162
* “Climate” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 90-91

Tuesday November 6th– Climate Change and Oil: Merchants of Doubt

* Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, pp. 1-9 (required); pp. 169-215 (optional)
* **Documentary *Merchants of Doubt***
* “Science/Science Studies” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 666-668

Thursday November 8th – Blockadia and the Climate Movement

* Kauffman, L.A. “In 1971 the people didn’t just march on Washington they shut it down” *Longreads.com*
* Holtaus, E. “The 1.5 Generation” *Grist*
* “Activism” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 5-6

Tuesday November 13th – Standing Rock and Settler Colonialism

* **ESSAY 2 DUE**
* Whyte, B. 2017. “The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, And U.S. Colonialism” *Red Ink*
* “Settler Society” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 679

Thursday November 15th – Radical Perspectives on the Climate Movement

* Aronoff K. “No Third Way for the Planet” *Jacobin*
* Parenti, C. 2015 “Why the State Matters” *Jacobin*
* Huber, M. “5 Principles of a Socialist Climate Politics” *The Trouble*
* “Socialism” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 700-701

Tues and Thurs November 20th and 22nd – **NO CLASS** – HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

**PART V – FUTURES**

Tuesday November 27th – Is Oil Running Out? Debating Peak Oil

* Bridge, G. 2011 “Past Peak Oil: Political Economy of Energy Crises” pp. 307-324
* “Limits to Growth” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 418-419.

Thursday November 29th – Beyond Oil

* Bridge and Le Billon, *Oil*, pp. 233-260
* “Energy” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, p. 139

Tuesday December 4th – Exam Review and Class Conclusions

Thursday December 6th –**EXAM II**

**Wednesday December 12th FINAL PAPER DUE**