



S F S THE SCHOOL
FOR FIELD STUDIES

Political and Socioeconomic Dimensions of Environment SFS 3040

Syllabus
4 credits

The School for Field Studies (SFS)
Center for Climate and Sustainable Futures (CCSF)
Paro, Bhutan

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

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COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that they may present. In other words, this is a field program, and the field can change.

Course Overview

Bhutan is internationally known for its development concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). GNH is the guiding principle of development in Bhutan and is understood to have four pillars: sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development, environmental conservation, cultural promotion and preservation, and good governance. The Buddhist principle of The Middle Path, integrating people and nature as well as traditional knowledge and modern science, is at the core of the country's development approach and practices. Sustainable management of natural resources, including land, water, and biodiversity, is critical for Bhutan, as these resources are fundamental to the national identity as well as the economy.

In 2008, Bhutan's government shifted from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democratic monarchy, part of a longer trend of devolution of authority from an absolute monarch to the people and communities. Since most of the population reside in rural areas, sustainable management of natural resources is critical for achieving the dual goals of rural development and biodiversity conservation. In this course, we examine the socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions of Bhutan's approach to development, with a focus on environment. We will use the interdisciplinary lens of political ecology to frame lines of inquiry and define research questions on the nature-society nexus.

In this course, we focus on human interactions with and impacts on local ecosystems, and vice versa. By using Bhutan as an example, the course provides a conceptual framework for understanding how nature-society interactions, such as agriculture, water management, biodiversity conservation and utilization, and rural development shape both the natural landscape and the social and economic conditions in rural and urban areas. Because these interactions can be simultaneously social, cultural, economic, and ecological, holistic critical thinking is essential to understand these systems to enable us to propose solutions that make sense. The course provides the conceptual and practical skills and tools to critically examine and assess the human-environment nexus in the field. We also consider the theories and ethics of sustainable and unsustainable development and the need to view these issues in ways that are inclusive and just.

Learning Objectives

The objective of this course is to provide students with a learning experience in which they can gain deep understanding of a set of locally relevant topics and their wider resonance through the application of field observations and development of analytical skills. Classroom and field lectures will provide core concepts and tools for inquiry, while field exercises will reinforce concepts and present students with opportunities to apply their knowledge and tools to real problems.

In this course, students should be able to:

- 1) Describe key actors and events in Bhutan's history and environmental policy development;
- 2) Understand and apply multi-disciplinary concepts related to rural development, conservation, and national development to Bhutan;
- 3) Identify challenges and opportunities in The Middle Path approach to development;
- 4) Connect culture to society and both to the natural landscape. Understand and critically evaluate the role of economics, politics and culture in environmental issues including climate change impacts;
- 5) Clearly communicate what they have learned through analyses and explication;
- 6) Employ an array of social science research methods for field research and data handling

Assessment

Our goal is to conduct ongoing assessment of student learning throughout the course and provide timely and constructive feedback. Some assignments encourage students to work together, to share ideas and knowledge. This allows students to take advantage of the range of backgrounds within the group. Assessment will be conducted on an individual basis, unless otherwise stated. The final course grade will be based on the following:

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Participation (including ungraded FEXes)	10
Student Led Discussion (SLD)	15
Graded FEX 1: Embodying Cultural Landscapes	15
Graded FEX 2: Mapping Livelihoods	15
Graded FEX 3: Religion & the Environment – Research Methods in Social Science	15
Final Exam	30
TOTAL	100

Participation (10%)

During this program we will travel through many eco-regions and rural communities. We expect that you will be an active observer, constantly observing the landscape, livelihoods, and culture and participating in discussions regarding these observations. Active participation includes constructive engagement with the full range of course activities, respectful awareness of Bhutanese cultural context, and responsible behavior as a group member who is involved in others' learning. There will be opportunities throughout the semester for constructive feedback.

Student Led Discussion (15%)

This course has a strong emphasis on critical thinking and discussion of different theories and concepts. Many modules will end in a discussion section, led by a small group of students. You will be asked to provide two short readings for the class based on that thematic topic, make a short presentation on a related topic, moderate the discussion section and deliver a short peer-reviewed essay. The objective is for students to sharpen their presentation abilities, powers of observation, critical thinking, and to connect concepts to realities. Students will be assessed for their ability to clearly articulate concepts and their thoughts in writing, to notice discrepancies between claims and realities, and to stimulate critical discussion. Discussion section topics: (1) Development and Alternatives, (2) Gross National Happiness and The Middle Path, (3) Tourism and Sustainability, (4) Debates in Climate Change, (5) Anthropocene

Graded Field Exercises (FEX) (45%, 15% each)

Embodying Cultural Landscapes (15%)

Here, we are introduced to the significance of cultural landscapes and experiential ways of moving through them. Students will walk to and visit pilgrimage sites in Thimphu valley, including Tango Monastery and Pangri Zampa College of Astrology. You will learn about the intimate relationships between symbolism and physical bodily practices and reflect on experiences of immersion and non-textual ways of reading or mapping a landscape. We also ask what do maps conceal as they reveal?

Mapping Livelihoods (15%)

We will geolocate ourselves, explore the local area, note development indicators, and examine changes in the landscape and livelihood strategies based on proximity to town. In small groups, students will survey routes and create a rough map of land use and livelihood strategies and

note the ways that these change in relation to distance from Paro town. Students will learn basic mapping skills and alternative ways to approach mapping as a geographical tool. What are some of the roles played by mapping in conservation and development initiatives?

Religion and Environment – Research Methods in Social Science (15%)

We will build our field data collection skills by conducting semi-structured interviews in small groups with monks at the Sangchhoekhor Buddhist College or the Tara Monastery in Paro. Students will seek to understand the relationship between Buddhism and the natural environment. What are some of the philosophies/thinking behind their views? How strong are the beliefs/views and are they changing with time? Students will review the data collected and revise questions for future qualitative research.

Ungraded Field Exercises (FEX)

Life Cycle Assessment (Ungraded)

We will visit an industrial estate in southern Bhutan to learn about the processes involved in the production of a popular consumer product. This FEX gives you an opportunity to observe and record how and where the raw materials needed for the production are sourced from, what goes into the production and processing of the product, and what happens to the product produced. The aim of the visit is to follow an everyday product from its inception to its end in order to appreciate its carbon footprint.

Wildlife Documentary – Discourse Analysis (Ungraded)

The wildlife film industry is big business. What is the role of media in conservation? What are the cultural productions of nature evident in programming, and what are the politics of representation? We engage in a discourse analysis exercise to address these questions.

Final Exam (30%)

One final comprehensive final exam will be administered, at the end of the course. You will be examined on what you have been exposed to in class (lectures, discussions, etc.), the field, and readings. The exams will challenge students to draw on multiple concepts and experiences, and to synthesize information.

Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

General Reminders

Readings – You are expected to have read all the assigned articles prior to each class, and can expect to be tested on required reading. All readings are available as PDFs. Readings may be updated or changed during the course of the semester.

Plagiarism – Using the ideas and material of others without giving due credit is cheating and will not be tolerated. A grade of zero will be assigned if anyone is caught cheating or aiding another person to cheat actively or passively (e.g., allowing someone to look at your exam). All assignments unless specifically stated must be individual pieces of work and follow academic conventions of citation and referencing.

Deadlines – Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated for several reasons: They are a part of working life to which students need to become accustomed and promote equity among students. Deadlines allow faculty enough time to review and return assignments before others are due. Late assignments will incur a 10% penalty for each day that they are late. No assignment will be accepted after three days. Assignments will be handed back to students after a one-week grading period.

Participation – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the course is mandatory, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and class activities, and simply get involved.

Course Content

Type- L: Lecture, **FL:** Field Lecture, **GL:** Field Lecture, **FEX:** Field Exercise, **FV:** Field Visit, **D:** Discussion

***Required readings are in bold**

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Readings
PS 1	Course Overview What are some approaches to understanding environment, society, and development in Bhutan? Here, we review the syllabus, course topics, learning objectives, and assignments.	L	1:15	
PS 2	Terrain, Religion, and Sovereignty Setting an historical foundation for understanding Bhutan, we will discover key people, events, concepts, and processes. How have governance structures and processes evolved, and in what contexts? What big ideologies helped shape the larger Bhutanese belief systems?	L	1:15	Phuntsho, 2013 pp. 365-395, 595-599
PS 3	A Country in Transition We begin our course with a lecture from one of Bhutan’s foremost historians on why and how Bhutan is a country in transition. The place of tradition in contemporary Bhutan, how developed Bhutan considers itself and what the road ahead looks like for the country will all be explored.	GL	1:30	Phuntsho 2013 pp. 565-599
PS 4	Textile Museum Visit The objective of this visit is to learn about regional variations in Bhutanese textiles. What influences regional styles? How have development and modernization changed the way Bhutanese produce and wear the kira and gho. We will reflect on fast fashion and sustainable consumer practices.	FV; FL	2:00	
PS 5	FEX 1: Embodying Cultural Landscapes Here we are introduced to the significance of cultural landscapes and experiential ways of moving through them.	FEX	4:00	Allison 2015, pp. 439-459

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Readings
	Students will walk to and visit pilgrimage sites in Thimphu valley, including Tango Monastery and Pangrizampa College of Astrology.			Kuyakanon & Gyeltshen 2017, pp. 8-25
PS 6	Dev. I: Promises and Realities We examine just what is (and was) meant by (international) development, its history, and trajectories.	L	1:15	Mancall 2004, pp. 1-50 Rist 1997, pp. 1-24 Cowan & Shenton 1995, pp. 27-43 Peet & Hartwick 2009, pp. 1-19
PS 7	Dev. II: Development Indicators: a brief introduction What is the history of development indicators, and how have they come to matter so much? Using key critical concepts, we will attempt to deconstruct development indicators as a social construct with dramatic implications.	L	1:15	Gupta 2010, pp. 13-16 Crewe & Axelby 2013, pp. 88-106
PS 8	Doughnut Economics Kate Raworth explains what a sustainable, universally beneficial economy would look like. How do we create regenerative, distributive economies that would work within the planet's ecological limits.	L	1:15	Raworth Ted Talk (2018)
PS 9	The Himalayan Dilemma and Political Ecology What is the Himalayan Dilemma? What is THED and why do narratives matter? Political ecology and its relevance to understanding environmental problems is introduced.	L	1:15	Robbins 2012, pp. 11-24 Orlove 2016, pp. 227-242
PS 10	FEX 2: Mapping Livelihoods We will explore local areas, note development indicators, and examine changes in the landscape and livelihood strategies based on proximity to town. In small groups, students will survey routes and create a rough map of land use and livelihood strategies and note the ways that these change in relation to their proximity to Paro town.	FEX	4:00	Paro Dzongkhag Profile, RGOB
PS 11	Globalization, Production Chains, and Life Cycle Assessments (LCA) What is globalization, how does it influence the environment and economies, where are we positioned in the production chain, and what might our roles be as producers and consumers? How 'green' is green?	L; D	1:15	Kopnina 2017, pp.24-33 Goleman 2009
PS 12	EIAs and Himalayan Hydropower We'll learn about the EIA process and discuss why it is important in context of Himalayan hydropower development. What are the political-economic roles of regional actors in the development and function of Bhutan, and Bhutan's role in regional and global development?	L	1:15	McCullough 2017 Hayden 2015

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Readings
PS 13	Chhukha Hydropower Plant Visit We will travel to Chhukha Hydropower Plant (CHP) and learn about its history and inner workings. Hydropower is still one of the largest economic drivers of the country. Often termed 'blue gold,' the rivers of Bhutan have been harnessed to produce electricity, both for domestic consumption and for export. This is a rare opportunity that allows students to observe and learn firsthand how the production of this renewable energy is carried out in Bhutan.	FL	4:00	
PS 14	FEX 3: Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) We will visit an industrial estate in southern Bhutan to understand the processes involved in the production of a consumer product. Observe and record how and where the raw materials are sourced from, what goes into the production and processing of the product (input), and what happens to the product once produced. The aim of the visit is to follow an everyday product from its inception to its end to appreciate its carbon footprint. How 'green' is green? And what does it mean to be part of a global economy?	FEX	3:00	Goleman 2009
PS 15	Role of institutions in Environmental Governance What comprises global environmental governance, and what are some of the roles played by the international community, NGOs, development partnerships and civil society?	L	1:15	
PS 16	Role of institutions in Environmental Governance What is meant by the Middle Path of Development and how does this relate to GNH? How developed does Bhutan consider herself within the GNH framework? How does Bhutan's development compare to the rest of the world?	L	1:15	Ura, et al 2012 Boniwell 2017, pp. 1-20 Short Film: Tshering Tobgay TED Talk
PS 17	Environmental Governance in Bhutan We learn about Bhutanese environmental policies and their evolutions. Here, issues involved with natural resources / protected areas governance will also be addressed. How to balance conservation and development? What policies promote/hinder this balance?	GL	1:15	NEC 2016, pp. 1-29, 49-57
PS 18	Critiques of Development and Alternatives What are some of the problems with 'development?' You are to look at alternative definitions and readings on development. You will be asked to provide two short readings for the class on the theme 'Alternative Development.' Make a short presentation on a related topic, moderate the discussion section, and deliver a short peer-reviewed essay. The objective is to sharpen your presentation abilities, powers of observation, critical thinking, and to connect concepts to realities.	D	1:15	Peet & Hartwick 2009, pp. 197-239

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Readings
PS 19	Tourism – Eco-tourism What are the challenges and opportunities offered by the tourism sector to various stakeholders? What is ecotourism in the Bhutanese context? What is the role of culture and the natural environment in tourism?	L	1:15	RGOB 2012 RSPN 2017
PS 20	GNH – A lived experience You will be asked to provide two short readings for the class on the theme – GNH and development - give a short presentation, moderate a discussion, and deliver a short peer-reviewed essay. The objective is to sharpen your presentation abilities, powers of observation, critical thinking, and to connect concepts to realities.	D	1:15	Phuntsho 2013, pp. 595-599
PS 21	Caterpillar Fungus and Sustainable Development What is "summer grass, winter worm" and what has its role in Bhutan's regional economic development been? What are unanticipated environmental, political, and economic consequences of its marketization, and how are they being addressed? How do national-level policies play out on the ground?	L	1:15	Wangchuk & Wangdi 2015
PS 22	Gendered Natures We will deconstruct ideas surrounding gender and environment through a feminist political ecology perspective. We will look at women's roles in environmental conservation and management.	L	1:15	Torres & McElwee 2017, pp. 133-145 Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari 2006, pp. 14-40
PS 23	Sustainable Development Trade-Offs: Mechanization and Technologies in Agriculture What does the mechanization of labor mean for sustainable development, and what are the resultant gains and losses to environment and human wellbeing? We embark on a field lecture in Paro to see technological transitions in progress.	FL; GL	4:00	White, Jr. 1967
PS 24	Sustainable Tourism: Realistic or A double-edged sword? You will be asked to provide two short readings for the class on the theme - sustainable tourism - give a short presentation, moderate a discussion, and deliver a short peer-reviewed essay. The objective is to sharpen your presentation abilities, powers of observation, critical thinking, and to connect concepts to realities.	D	1:15	
PS 25	FEX 4: Buddhism & Conservation The objective of this FEX is to understand how Buddhists regard their place in the world vis-à-vis nature. What are some philosophical arguments supporting their beliefs. Students will interact with the monks of Sangchhoekhor Buddhist College and will be introduced to the semi-structured interview method of social science research.	FEX	4:00	Kuyakanon 2014, pp. 183-205 Allison 2015, pp. 197-226

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Readings
PS 26	FEX 5: Discourse Analysis (Wildlife Documentary) The wildlife film industry is big business. What is the role of media in conservation? What are the cultural productions of nature evident in programming, and what are the politics of representation? We engage in a discourse analysis exercise to address these questions.	FEX	2:30	
PS 27	Debates in Climate Change Discourse You will be asked to provide two short readings for the class on the theme – climate change - give a short presentation, moderate a discussion, and deliver a short peer-reviewed essay. The objective is to sharpen your presentation abilities, powers of observation, critical thinking, and to connect concepts to realities.	D	1:15	
PS 28	Ecology in Spiritual Writing We will read a translation of a 14th century poem about Bumthang, a district in central Bhutan, by the Tibetan Buddhist master Gyalwa Kuenkhen Longchen Rabjam. How physical landscapes/environment aid the development of spirituality will be explored as we appreciate the role of poems as repositories of ancient landscape information	D	1:15	Ura 2016, pp. 35-64
PS 29	Development Histories of Local Landscapes A lecture from a local resident and entrepreneur for an understanding of local development and livelihood histories	GL	1:15	Helvetas (2015) 40 Years On film.
PS 30	Cultural Productions of Nature We deconstruct a few dominant cultural narratives about the environment. We expand upon how knowledge is constituted, legitimated, and reshaped. Case studies may include traditional knowledge systems, indigenous histories, and religion & environment.	L	1:15	Williams 1976 Kuyakanon 2014, pp. 183-205
PS 31	Environmentality: The Environmental Citizen? We discuss what it means to be an environmental citizen and use historical, sociological, and anthropological lenses to analyze how environmental citizens are created.	D	1:15	Robbins 2012, pp. 215-230 Agrawal 2005
PS 32	Capstone: The Hatchet and the Seed We review what we've covered in class, and explore the role of political ecology in various fora. How can we use this lens to influence change in knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions for socio-ecological sustainability?	L	1:15	Robbins 2012, pp. 98-100
PS 33	Exam Review		1:15	
PS 34	Final Exam		2:00	
	Total contact hours		61	

Reading List

*Required readings are in bold

1. **Agrawal, Arun (2005)**. Environmentalism: Community, Intimate Government, and the Making of Environmental Subjects in Kumaon, India. *Current Anthropology* 46(2): 161–190.
2. **Allison, Elizabeth (2015)**. "Religion Inscribed in the Landscape: Sacred Sites, Local Deities and Natural Resource Use in the Himalayas" in Stanley D. Brun, ed. *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics*. New York: Springer Publishing.
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4. Ballet, Jérôme, Nicolas Sirven, and Mélanie Requier-Desjardins (2007). "Social capital and natural resource management." *The Journal of Environment and Development* 16:355-374.
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15. Gupta, A. 2010. "The Construction of the Global Poor: An Anthropological Critique," *World Social Science Report*, Ch. 1. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 13-16.
16. **Hayden, Anders (2015)**. "Bhutan: Blazing a trail to a postgrowth future, or stepping on the treadmill of production" in *Journal of Economic Development* 24(2) 161-186.
17. **Helvetas Bhutan (2015)** 40 Years On. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=40&v=0gM3LW8XMOE, accessed August 28, 2017.
18. Holmes, George, Thomas Aneurin Smith, and Caroline Ward (2017). *Fantastic Beasts and Why to Conserve Them: Animals, Magic and Biodiversity Conservation*. Oryx: 1–9.
19. **Kopnina, Helen (2017)**. Commodification of Natural Resources and Forest Ecosystem Services: Examining Implications for Forest Protection. *Environmental Conservation* 44(1): 24–33.
20. **Kuyakanon Knapp, R. S. (2014)**. Contemplations on a Bhutanese Buddhist Environmental Narrative. In S. Kumagai (Ed.), *Bhutanese Buddhism and Its Culture* (pp. 183–205). Kathmandu, Nepal: Vajra Publications.

21. **Kuyakanon Knapp, R.S., and Dorji Gyeltshen (2017).** Propitiating the Tsen, Sealing the Mountain: Community Mountain-Closure Ritual and Practice in Eastern Bhutan. *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 37(1).
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37. Phuntsho, Karma (2002). On the two ways of learning in Bhutan. *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 96–126.
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39. **Rist, G. 1997.** *The History of Development: from Western Origins to Global Faith*, London and New York: Zed Books.
40. **RGOB 2012.** *Ecotourism Development in the Protected Areas Network of Bhutan*
41. **Robbins, Paul (2012).** *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, Malden MA. 2nd Edition.
42. Rocheleau, Dianne, Barbara Thomas-Slayter and Esther Wangari (2006). 'Gender and Environment: A Feminist Political Ecology Perspective', pp.14-40.

43. RSPN 2017 Carrying Capacity Assessment report for Haa and Phobjikha
44. SNDP 2013. Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm: Report of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Thimphu: Secretariat for a New Development Paradigm and the Royal Government of Bhutan.
45. Thesbjerg, Marie Veno (2008). Women of Buddha: Nuns in Bhutan. Art Stock Books Ltd.
46. Torres, Maria Luz Cruz- and Pamela McElwee (2017). Gender, Livelihoods and Sustainability: Anthropological Research, pp.133-145.
47. Uddin, S, R Taplin, and X Yu (2007). "Energy, Environment and Development in Bhutan." Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews 11, no. 9: 2083–2103.
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