Course Description

This research seminar primarily adopts historical inquiry to interrogate the issue of water privatization, accessibility, and affordability that have been witnessed in the global south in recent decades. Specifically, we will engage theories of political ecology and environmentalism of the poor to examine how the ecological and general health of vulnerable populations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has been compromised by persistent water scarcity. The class is designed for students interested in topics including the interplay involving power contestations between the global south and the global north, globalization, and the politics of environmental governance.

In particular, we seek to understand why the marginalized peoples of the global south (socially,
economically, and politically) suffer the most due to water scarcity. What is the connection between their socio-ecological problems to the coerced neoliberal policies adopted by their respective governments in recent decades? Are these problems manifested in issues of water scarcity and unaffordability? Can we root contemporary problems in drinking water supply and sanitation to speculative profit-driven market dynamics by local and multinational individuals and corporations? These and other questions will inform our class discussions.

Students will also be introduced to crucial material, socio-political, and cultural relationships to water among the many peoples across Africa, Asia, and Latin America down to the present. Our discussions will closely analyze these changing relationships, the interplay between the social and environmental factors, and how these are manifested in both national and international policies and the politics relating to water access, availability, and affordability. At least two-thirds of our class meetings will be dedicated to discussions. Each student will write an independently designed research project, concentrating on any particular area of interest.

**Course Goals**
- Students will learn essential research skills such as where and how to locate topic-specific historical information; and how to assess and categorize types of primary and secondary sources;
- Students will use historical inquiry to question common assumptions, develop an argumentative thesis, and develop and support plausible historical interpretations;
- Students will develop effective writing and communication skills.

**Class Format & Writing Assignments**
- As an advanced undergraduate course, we will use a combination of focused group discussions, readings, peer-to-peer reviews, and documentaries to present and analyze course content. Beyond the historical content of the course, students will be given experience in library research, expository writing, and group discussion skills.
- This is a writing-intensive course. Outside of our class discussions and instructor-student meetings and communications (office hours and email), you will be expected to take responsibility for directing your own learning and meeting the writing benchmarks: paper proposal, book reviews, drafts, and the final research term paper.
- Weeks 3-9 (Each Monday before Midnight), I expect each of you to post two questions relevant to the readings on Blackboard (more information on my expectations on these questions at the beginning of class). [NB: You are to read at least three of each week’s readings and be ready to engage in class discussions]
- I will provide further guidelines on my expectations for the book review assignments, peer critiques, term paper proposals in class.

**Other Class Information**
- I seek to respond to course-related emails within the shortest time possible.
- I am happy to discuss your assignments with you as you prepare them—the earlier the better. Email or come see me during office hours to talk about paper outlines, thesis paragraphs, or drafts (sent at least 48 hours before the deadline).
• Late papers will be penalized 3 points each day it is late. With the exception of the final term paper, I reserve the right to allow extensions on a case-by-case basis.

• Because participation is a significant part of your grade, and since the lectures complement the readings, attendance is mandatory and will be registered.

• I encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources Oberlin offers to you. The writing center located at Mudd Library offers individual assistance at any stage in the writing process.

• **Honor Code: Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated.** I presume your familiarity with the college’s policies on cheating and plagiarism. Consequences can be dire and range from a failing grade on the assignment to expulsion. For more information on academic conduct familiarize yourself with the Student Honor Code available at: [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-reg.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-reg.html). Accordingly, the College requires that students sign the honor code for all assignments that reads: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”

• Cell phones, laptops, iPads and other technological *distractions* are not welcome.

• Appropriate accommodation will always be granted to students with documented disabilities or those who feel they may have physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities. Please let me know early in the semester so that your learning accommodations can be taken care of. Any questions about the necessary process of documenting disabilities should be addressed to Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters Hall).

• It is disruptive to your peers to arrive late to class or leave early. Please be unobtrusive if you really must do so.

• **Please note that I would prefer to answer questions concerning grades during office hours or by appointment.**

**Required Texts/Readings/Films**

The following books are available for purchase online and at the Oberlin bookstore. These texts may also be available electronically [ER] through Mudd Library. In addition to these texts, the required readings include both scholarly articles on specific topics and primary sources. All other readings are available on Blackboard (designated with [BB] under “Materials & Assignments” unless otherwise indicated. For the most part, we will use class time to view the course-related films and documentaries. It is, however, only by attending seminar that you will get the organizing chronological and thematic framework for the course as a whole.


**Evaluation/Grading/Course Requirements**
• Regular attendance and engagement in class discussions (20%)
• Leading section (10%)
• Peer Review (5%)
• Research Proposal (5%)
• Book Reviews, (2-3 pages)
  o The Meaning of Water (10%)
  o A Long Walk to Water (10%)
• Research Term Paper (using mostly primary sources). You will write one research paper (circa. 15 pages), with penultimate draft version submitted through individual consultation with instructor. (40%)

NB: All course assignments must be completed to pass this course.
• Grading will be as follows: A+ 100-97; A 96-93; A- 92-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 82-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 72-70; D 65-69; F below 65.

Due Dates:
• Preliminary Research Paper Topic: [Week 4]
• 1st Book Review: The Meaning of Water [Week 5]
• Paper Proposal: Week [Week 6]
• 2nd Book Review (A Long Walk to Water): [Week 7]
• First Paper Draft (4-6pp): [Week 10]
• Peer Review of First Draft: [Week 11]
• Second Paper Draft: [Week 12]
• In-class research paper presentation (15 minutes): [Week 14]
• Final Paper: [Week 15]

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introductions
2/2: Introduction; Course expectations etc.
• Watch Documentary: Water Rising. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAR8eVqwUpw

Week 2: Water & Human Rights
2/9:
Read

Please note that course readings may be subject to minor changes. I will let you know at least a week in advance through email and/or class announcements. Please refer to Blackboard for up-to-date information.
http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0016718506001382/1-s2.0-S0016718506001382-main.pdf?_tid=fb2c496-c950-11e5-a39a-00000aacb361&acdnat=1454378723_c00b6b9317d2427234476602c35353c4. (BB).


**Week 3: Environmentalism of the Poor: Analytical Tools**

2/16:

**Read**

- Nixon, Slow Violence, Ch. 1.

**Week 4: Meeting with the University Librarian**

2/23

**Read**

- Rampolla, pp. 1-19

*Please prepare a preliminary paper topic.*

**Week 5: Globalization, Environmentalism, & Power**

3/1

**Read**


- Book review due [The Meaning of Water] (2-3 pp.)

**Week 6: Water Issues: Latin America**
Read

- Oscar Olivera, "The Water War," in *Cochabamba* pp. 1-23 (BB)

**Week 7: Water Issues: Asia**

3/15

Read


*Book review due: A Long Walk to Water (2-3 pp.)*

**Week 8: (Spring Break, No Class)**

**Week 9: Water Issues: Africa**

3/22

Read


Week 10:
4/5
• (First Paper Draft), 1-2 pp.

Week 11: Writing/Meeting with Instructor
4/12
• Peer Review Critiques

Week 12: Writing/Meeting with Instructor
4/19
• Second Paper Draft

Week 13: Writing/Meeting with Instructor
4/26

Week 14: Research Paper Presentations
5/3

Week 15: Reading and Finals
• Final Research Term Paper Due [Time: TBA]