





Environmental Studies (ENVS) 461

“Hatchet and Seed” – Tools of Political Ecology (Revision 2)

Status:

Replaced with new revision, see the [course listing](#)  for the current revision 

Delivery mode:

Individualized study online 

Credits:

3

Areas of study:

Arts or Social Science

Prerequisites:

None. However, a second-year course that includes critical social science analysis is recommended. Students who are concerned about not meeting the prerequisites for this course are encouraged to contact the course coordinator before registering.


Precluded:

None

Challenge:

ENVS 461 has a challenge for credit option.

Faculty:

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences 

Overview

This course introduces students to key concepts, debates, and analytical tools in political ecology. It begins from the premise that all environmental “problems” are political: how they unfold, how they affect people, and the stories we tell about them are all a product of contestation and struggle. Students will explore the ways in which environmental problems are intertwined with systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, and other dominant social and political processes. By paying attention to underlying assumptions and worldviews, students will also critically examine a variety of responses to these problems, what they reproduce, and what they leave behind. Finally, students will consider a diversity of responses to contemporary issues and crises, including commoning, decolonization, mutual aid, and climate justice.

This course aims to support students in directing their own learning by focusing on the activities and themes that they find most compelling and relevant to their lives. To do this, ENVS 461 is supported by tutor conferences and an ongoing reflective learning diary, which play multiple roles as part of the learning process and as assessable outputs of the course that are aligned with student-selected learning activities.

**Note: The phrase “hatchet and seed” in the course title is borrowed from Paul Robbins’s work Political ecology: A critical introduction (Wiley, 2020).*

Outline

ENVS 461 is divided into ten units.

- Unit 0: Course introduction and (un)grading
- Unit 1: What is (a)political ecology?
- Unit 2: Property
- Unit 3: Social constructions of nature and wilderness
- Unit 4: (Un)natural disasters and (a)political responses
- Unit 5: Anthropocene, Capitalocene
- Unit 6: The politics of neoliberalism

- Unit 7: Gender, enclosure, and subsistence
- Unit 8: Environmental racism, violence, and (in)justice
- Unit 9: Settler colonialism and decolonization
- Unit 10: Climate justice and just transitions

Learning outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and critically examine the assumptions, values, and implications that underlie the dominant responses to environmental problems.
2. Deploy course concepts to develop an analysis of the linkages between political and ecological systems.
3. Explore and articulate the potential of non-dominant worldviews, movements, and practices.
4. Analyze the ways that contemporary environmental problems are shaped by colonialism, white supremacy, neoliberalism, and other dominant systems.
5. Demonstrate a self-reflexive relationship to their own values, commitments, and relationships to the non-human world.
6. Assess and take responsibility for their own learning by reflecting on their learning process, actively seeking support, building on strengths, and grappling with challenges or difficulties.
7. Develop and follow their own standards to inform their writing and composition in relation to the specific audience(s) they seek to reach.

Evaluation

This course has a flexible, student-centered assessment structure. Rather than fixed assignments and corresponding grades, students are encouraged to focus on coursework that feels meaningful to them, and set aside anything that feels like busy-work. Students are empowered to play a role in determining what sorts of feedback they receive, and their final course grade. At the end of the course, students present a portfolio of work and explain how they've met the course objectives.

To **receive credit** [↗](#) for ENVS 461, you must complete four tutor check-ins and the “Hatchet and Seed” project. Your portfolio of evidence must demonstrate your achievement of all Course Learning Outcomes. You must achieve an overall grade of at least **D (50 percent)** [📄](#) to pass this course.

To learn more about assignments and examinations, please refer to Athabasca University’s **online Calendar** [↗](#).

Materials

Robbins, P. (2020). *Political ecology: A critical introduction* (3rd ed.). Wiley.



All course materials for ENVS 461 are available online.

Challenge for credit

Overview

The challenge for credit process allows you to demonstrate that you have acquired a command of the general subject matter, knowledge, intellectual and/or other skills that would normally be found in a university-level course.

Full information about **challenge for credit** [↗](#) can be found in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Evaluation

The challenge assessment for ENVS 461 involves the production of a portfolio and an online oral exam based on the work submitted.

The evaluation will be based entirely on evidence presented in the portfolio and the oral exam, mapped to the intended Course Learning Outcomes. There is no explicit weight given to any particular component: grades are given based on evidence of achievement of the Course Learning Outcomes.





To **receive credit** [↗](#) for the ENVS 461 challenge registration, students must achieve a minimum grade of **D (50 percent)** [📄](#) on the portfolio and the oral exam.

Activity	Weight
Portfolio and Oral Exam	100%
Total	100%



Challenge for credit course registration form

Important links

- > [Academic advising](#) 
- > [Program planning](#) 
- > [Request assistance](#) 
- > [Support services](#) 

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery methods may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

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Updated October 8, 2024

View **previous revision** 
