McGill University Department of Geography

Environmental Management for Developing Areas
Panama Section
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DRAFT

Introduction: a human ecology perspective

All organisms influence their environments. We are no exception, and should see ourselves as ecological beings regardless of what else we might consider ourselves to be. But late 20th century *Homo sapiens* may be unique in having acquired tools for conscientiously "protecting" their environment. Efforts to increase environmental utility or decrease environmental hazard are called environmental management, and as we advance into the 21st century, it is clear that we need to make these tools work.

Environmental management is, both philosophically and practically, a complex subject area, and part of what we will do while we have access to the remarkable resources of the Panamanian field study location, is to explore these complexities.

The course offers practical, hands-on, exploration of the concepts of sustainable development and conservation, as well as consideration of two specific tools for environmental management: Impact Assessment and Situation Analysis (Sustainability Assessment).

The overall intent of the course is to develop a familiarity with these concepts and tools and, at the same time, to develop the capacity for informed critical assessment of the tools, their application, and the relations amongst stakeholders involved in situations where the tools are used.

Course activities

The title of the course can be interpreted practically as referring to any of three levels: technical, site-specific (micro-scale) concerns; administrative and institutional (meso-scale) concerns; and systemic, social and political (macro-scale) concerns. The third level will be addressed in the introduction to the course, specifically in terms of taking into account the broad political economic context within which micro and meso scale processes are occurring. In order to take full advantage of being "on the ground" in Panama, the rest of the course will focus at the first and second levels.

What we will try to do in this course is to understand how "environmental management" fits into the "development" process and how it can (or could) be used to enhance the quality of human life. We will examine the particular situation in Panama, considering both the ways in which traditional and modern land users interact with the environment, and with each other, and the ways in which the processes of modernization have affected local communities and the environment and the prospects for sustainability.

It should be noted at the outset that this is not a course in which packaged, proven principles or techniques are taught. There are few, if any. We can only probe the issues and hope to acquire a functional knowledge of opportunities and limitations that are known, and to gain some insight into

those that are emerging. Disappointing as this may sound, it may be that there is now no more important activity!

Required Reading

Readings will be available in the field for each section:

Grading

Participation:	10%
Reading presentation:	20%
Group Project:	40%
Analytic Essay:	30%

The Fine Print

1. "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).(approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)
   "L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)."

2. "In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)
   "Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."

3. Text-matching Software: In light of the policy on integrity, we reserve the right to use text-matching software for written assignments in this course, or, if plagiarism is suspected, to provide the student with the right to choose an alternative way of attesting to the authenticity of their work.

4. For information on university and department policies for student assessment, please go to http://www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment.

5. Instructor generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

6. "As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009."

7. Guidelines for the use of mobile computing and communications (MC2) devices in classes at McGill have been approved by the APC.

8. "End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available on Mercury, the online course evaluation system. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students."

9. "McGill has policies on sustainability, paper use and other initiatives to promote a culture of sustainability at McGill." (See the Office of Sustainability.)

10. In keeping with McGill's preparedness planning strategies with respect to potential pandemic or other concerns: "In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change."

11. "Additional policies governing academic issues which affect students can be found in the McGill Charter of Students' Rights"