INTD 497: Understanding land use and land cover change

INTD 497-003
“Understanding land use and land cover change”
Fall 2019

Class time: Fridays, 8:35am-11:25am
Room: Sherbrooke 688, rm 361
Instructor: Professor Yann le Polain de Waroux
Office hours: Fridays, 1pm-2pm, at Burnside Hall 311
Email: yann.lepolaindewaroux@mcgill.ca

Course description
Why are forests being cut in some places and growing back in others? How to protect the environment without harming local livelihoods and stifling development? What happens to agricultural land when half the population of a region migrates to the city? Land and its uses are at the core of many of today’s main development and environment challenges. Issues such as food security, biodiversity loss, or climate change are all, at some level, related to land use choices and their consequences. Now more than ever before, as the world becomes more and more connected, these choices are determined by factors at multiple scales and in multiple locations. In this course, we will look at different perspectives, theories and tools used to understand land use and land cover change and examine the growing challenge of land governance in a connected world. The themes and approaches broadly fall under the umbrella of “land system science”, a field of inquiry centered around a systemic view of land and a concern for sustainability. The course is structured around the main processes of land use and land cover change and will combine theoretical perspectives with multiple case studies and hands-on exercises. We will cover various issues, methods and geographic regions, but greater emphasis will be put on forests and deforestation in South America, and on quantitative approaches.

Learning outcomes
By the end of this course, students should be able to:
• Recognize the role of land in a variety of development and sustainability issues
• List and explain the main methods, conceptual tools and theories used to describe and analyze land use and land cover change
• Relate these methods, conceptual tools and theories to real-life examples
• Understand the main types of land use changes and the key processes driving them
• Conceptualize land as part of a system, and recognize its interconnectedness across space and scales
• Critically engage with land use literature and other materials related to land use
• Critically engage with land governance policies and their potential desired and undesired impacts
• Develop and present persuasive oral and written analyses of the topics under discussion
• Conduct independent research and writing that explores the themes of the course

The teaching methods used to achieve these objectives include:
• Lectures
• Class discussions
• Student presentations
• Audiovisual and web-based materials
• Guided reading and independent research

Required course materials
All papers used in the course will be provided on myCourses. The detailed list of readings per class is provided in the detailed outline below.
Course requirements

Attendance and participation (15%): Active participation counts towards the final grade and is expected of all students. Because this is a seminar rather than a lecture course, students are expected to come to class having closely read all the assigned texts and prepared to speak about them. Highlight interesting or unclear passages and write down questions you have. There will be a discussion of papers in each class.

Reading quizzes (10%): There will be five short unannounced in-class comprehension quizzes about the readings, each worth 2 points. Where relevant, comments on specific readings (e.g., parts to skip or focus on) will be attached to the article file in MyCourses. Readings in the list are subject to changes up to one week before the class - changes, if any, will be announced on myCourses. There are no make-up quizzes: for students who are absent for one of the quizzes, I will report their average over the other quizzes.

Group facilitation (20%): For classes 4 to 10, groups of 3-4 students (assigned by the instructor) will be responsible for organizing a one-hour presentation and discussion of additional materials related to the class. The students will find and present materials not included in the readings that explore a topic relevant to the class. Acceptable materials are for example: peer-reviewed academic papers, video or audio material, news reports, or “gray” literature. Audio and video equipment will be provided in the classroom. Students will present at least two pieces of material (e.g., one video and one paper) providing complementary perspectives on a common topic. Students will be expected to 1) present the topic engaging critically with the selected materials, and 2) lead a discussion and/or in-class activities. The presentations must include at least 30 minutes of facilitated class discussion and/or activities. Students must get in touch with the instructor one week in advance at the latest, so as to discuss strategies and minimize overlap with the themes covered by the instructor.

Question & answer papers (10%): Students will write two 1000-word (+ or – 10%) question & answer (Q&A) papers consisting of two questions about the weekly readings, and answers to these questions. The questions should not be clarification or factual questions, but rather critical inquiries into the materials. The first Q&A paper will cover the readings of classes 1, 2, 3 & 4, the second, those of classes 5, 6, 7 & 8. The first paper will count for 4 points, the second for 6 points. For each of these, students will be free to focus on one paper from the readings or to engage with several of them. Q&A papers are to be submitted on myCourses by 11:59pm on the Sunday after lectures 4 and 8 (see timeline below).

Practical assignments (10%): For classes 3 and 10, students will prepare assignments consisting of a written report based on the interpretation of publicly available data. The first assignment will be worth 4 points, the second will be worth 6 points. Instructions for these assignments will be available on myCourses two weeks before the assignment due date. Practical assignments are to be submitted on myCourses by 11:59pm on the Sunday after lectures 3 and 10.

Presentation of final paper (not graded): Students will present their ongoing papers in classes 11 and 12. It is understood that the papers will not be complete by then: the presentations will be an opportunity for students to get peer feedback (see below) that will help improve the final paper.

Feedback on final paper presentations (5%). Students will be asked to provide constructive and meaningful feedback on five presentations each (assigned randomly), the quality of which will be graded (one point per presentation). Suggestions on to how to provide meaningful feedback will be provided on myCourses. Feedback on presentations is to be submitted on myCourses by Nov. 24, 11:59pm.

Final paper (30%): Each student will write a literature review about a topic of their choice that engages with key ideas of the course. Papers should have between 3,000 and 4,000 words, excluding references, tables, figures, and abstract. The paper must have a clear focus, identify key terms, and draw on materials from the course. Topics must be different from those chosen for the group facilitation. Students are required to submit an abstract (approx. 300 words) of the paper on myCourses by Oct. 13, 11:59pm. The abstract is not graded, but failure to send it in time will result in a 2-point penalty on the paper grade. The final paper is to be submitted on myCourses on or before Dec. 8, by 11:59pm. Further instructions on both abstract and paper will be posted on MyCourses at the beginning of the course.
Grading and assessments summary:

15% Attendance and participation
10% Reading quizzes
20% Group facilitation of seminars
10% Two question & answer papers
10% Two practical assignments
5% Feedback on presentations
30% Final paper

More specific grading keys will be provided separately in the instructions for each assignment.

General instructions and policies

Absences: Each student is permitted one unexcused absence. Additional unexcused absences will lower the class participation grade by 3 points. Excused absences require advance approval and a letter of explanation. Students will be responsible for all work missed.

Announcements: Announcements will be made on myCourses exclusively. Students are expected to log in to their myCourses page and check announcements regularly. It will be considered that the information posted on myCourses is known to all.

Etiquette: Please use appropriate and respectful language with each other and with the instructor. Emails starting with “hey prof” and/or containing multiple grammatical errors will be ignored. Aggressive behavior, whether overt or passive, will not be tolerated.

Late policy: Assignments are due by midnight on the Sunday after class, unless otherwise specified. Late papers will be subject to a one-time penalty of 25%, plus a penalty of 5% per day starting two days after the due date. Thus, a paper handed a week late will be subject to a 50% penalty (25%+5*5%). Exceptions will be made for exceptional cases, with the professor’s prior agreement. Extensions will not be granted on the day an assignment is due, except in case of medical or family emergency, accompanied by appropriate documentation.

Format and style: All assignments are to be submitted through myCourses as Pdf documents. Students are required to type their text in 12-point font with standard margins and double spacing. Use single spacing for block quotations, footnotes, appendices and bibliographies. References and citations must follow a standard academic format. In-text citations are preferred: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citation_guide/citation-guide-2.html.

Special Needs: If you have a disability, you are welcome to contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. Please also make contact with the Office for Students with Disabilities.

Language: 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.

Academic integrity: 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). Any case in which the instructor suspects plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of Students.

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### Classes and assignments timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class title</th>
<th>Group facilitation</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Assignment deadline</th>
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<td>=== Block 1: Introducing land use change ===</td>
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-- BLOCK I: INTRODUCING LAND USE CHANGE --

Class 1 2019/09/06 Introduction

Key themes
- Main changes in global land use and land cover
- Globalization and its effects on land systems

Required readings

Class 2 2019/09/13 Land use change and social-ecological systems

Key themes
- What are social-ecological systems?
- Ecosystem services as a link between social and ecological systems
- Land use change and the distribution of ecosystem services

Required readings:

Class 3 2019/09/20 Analyzing land use change

Key themes:
- How are the causes of land use change analyzed?
- What are models of land use change?

Required readings:
## Block II: Land Use Processes and Issues

### Class 4  2019/09/27  Land use intensification

**Key themes:**
- What is land use intensification?
- What are the causes and processes of intensification?
- Intensification and nature conservation

**Required readings:**

### Class 5  2019/10/04  Land use expansion

**Key themes:**
- Main theories of expansion: land rents, institutions, livelihoods and peasant economy
- Tropical deforestation frontiers and their explanations

**Required readings:**
### Class 6  
**2019/10/11**  
**Land use spillovers**

**Key themes:**
- What are the indirect effects of land use change?
- Biofuels and indirect land use change
- Protected areas and land use leakage

**Required readings:**

### Class 7  
**2019/10/18**  
**Land use transitions**

**Key themes:**
- Nonlinearity and transitions in theory
- The forest transition: evidence and pathways
- Regime shifts and abrupt change

**Required readings:**
== BLOCK III: LAND GOVERNANCE ==

Class 8 2019/10/25  Area-based governance of land

Key themes:
- Land tenure and access to land
- Protected areas
- Payments for ecosystem services

Required readings:

Class 9 2019/11/01  Flow-based governance of land

Key themes:
- The rise of private regulations
- Main market-based policy instruments
- Adoption and effectiveness of private governance

Required readings:
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Class 10  2019/11/08  Telecoupling and land governance

Key themes:
- Distant causes of land-use change
- The concept of telecoupling
- Implications of global interconnectedness for land governance

Required readings:

== BLOCK IV: FINAL PAPER PRESENTATION AND PREPARATION ==

Class 11  2019/11/15  Student presentations I

No required readings. Students present their final papers in progress. All students must be present so as to be able to provide feedback.

Class 12  2019/11/22  Student presentations II

No required readings. Students present their final papers in progress. All students must be present so as to be able to provide feedback.

Class 13  2019/11/29  Consultation period for final paper

No required readings.