The web of life on earth, of which we are part and on which we depend for our existence, is in deep trouble—so much trouble that a catastrophic collapse of human civilization resulting from, for instance, a drastic decline in agricultural production (leading to massive migrations, wars, and uprisings) is seen by many analysts as a likely outcome of our present relations with the earth and with each other.

The earth is finite: in other words, it has limits. The oceans can produce only so many fish; there is only so much arable (farmable) land; only so much fresh water. Humans are pressing against those limits by, for example, taking too many fish from the sea—so many that there are too few fish left to reproduce themselves and re-stock the fisheries. The earth’s ability to absorb wastes and render them harmless is also limited, and human activities are threatening to overfill (or may have already overfilled) the atmospheric, water and soil ‘sinks’ for various kinds of human waste, including the carbon dioxide waste from fossil fuel burning. Over-filled sinks seem to be the most serious set of problems we have produced for ourselves. The 30+ billion tons of heat-trapping carbon dioxide per year that we pour into the atmosphere are destabilizing the climate in which humans—and many of the species on earth—evolved. Many of those species will not survive more than a degree or two of temperature increase—yet we are on track to experience as much as 8 degrees F or more by the end of this century unless we act fast. Unfortunately, however, the rules, institutions and practices that now govern the global and national political economies are designed to promote corporate profits even at the expense of the earth on which we all depend. For example, trade agreements like NAFTA and institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) have helped to create a global economy in which more and more goods are traded over long distances, leading to explosive growth in global transportation—and in climate-changing carbon emissions from all of the ships, planes and trucks that crisscross the earth. Those rules, institutions and practices are the main subject matter of this class.

The earth has been overworked to produce a cornucopia of goods, more than enough to provide everyone a decent life. But it hasn’t—most of the environmental damage has been done to provide some of the global population with a very comfortable life and a few with a truly extravagant life (multiple houses, private jets, 250-foot yachts, etc.). As Thomas Pogge points out in the article assigned, half of the world’s population still lives in severe poverty. Many, especially in the bottom 25%, suffer from hunger, but all in the bottom half live desperately hard and insecure lives that consist mostly of work and worry. We are told that the solution to the poverty problem is more economic growth—but that ignores two things: first, that the earth’s productive capacity is already at or beyond its limits; and second, that for the past three or so decades, the extra income from economic growth has gone mostly to the “haves”, not to the “have-nots,” so poverty is not primarily a growth problem; it’s a distribution problem.

As Pogge points out, this distribution (or mal-distribution) problem also results from the rules and institutions of the global political economy—for instance, rules that allow investors to invest everywhere they can earn the highest returns and consumers to get the best deal on any product from almost anywhere in the world. (But the rules don’t allow workers to freely move anywhere they can earn the highest wage, and they don’t allow communities to say to investors, “we don’t want your type of industry here.”) By institutions, Pogge means entities such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which exercise enormous influence over developing countries, in particular—and which play large roles in determining how the world’s natural resources are used or misused, and for whose benefit. These rules and institutions are shaped by powerful corporations whose primary goal is profit, so they do want freedom to make money—for instance, by paying rock-bottom wages—and they don’t want restrictions on fishing, timber harvesting, or fossil fuel use. Their money buys them a lot of influence with
policymakers, and it is policymakers who run national governments and dispatch diplomats to international conferences.

The environmental crisis and global poverty have been the subject of international conferences for several decades. International relations “institutionalists” claim that the common interests of most of humanity in dealing with these problems can result in international agreements that will solve them. But climate summits held every year since 1992 have notably failed to bring about reductions in carbon emissions, and global poverty is stubbornly persistent. Consequently, critical, or “social green” views are capturing increasing amounts of attention among scholars of international politics and environmental crisis. We will spend considerable time in this class on the critical claim that new agreements overlaying the existing set of corporate-driven rules and institutions are not likely to achieve meaningful results. Instead, the critics argue that what we need are reforms to the political economy itself—substantial ones. Because institutions like the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) reflect corporate interests, critical social greens believe that they are part of the problem, not—as liberal institutionalists believe—part of the solution. Social greens want a global political-economic system based on the recognition of environmental limits and organized to satisfy everybody’s needs rather than the wants of those who have money to spend.

What is expected from students:

1. **Regular class attendance and completion of the assigned reading.** This is fairly complex subject matter. You will have a hard time passing this class if you do not attend daily and do the reading. Readings and lectures complement each other, but reading doesn’t substitute for class attendance and *vice versa*. **I strongly recommend that you take notes during class. The act of note-taking helps to fix material in your mind and will be helpful for exam review.**

2. **Participation.** Questions and comments are welcome. You will learn more if you participate.

3. **Two in-class exams: midterm and final (combination multiple choice/short answer and essay); 30% of grade each.** TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM QUESTION, 10%.

4. **Short research paper (4 single-spaced pages in 12-point font), using—and citing—at least 3 appropriate references, for 30% of your grade.** Choose one of the prompts below. **NOTE THAT PLAGIARISM—the use of others’ words without appropriate citations and/or quotation marks—is easier to detect than you may think, and it may result in a failing grade.** If you are not sure how to quote and cite appropriately, please ask! Your grade will depend on the quality of your research (are your sources sufficient and well chosen), how well you support your conclusions, and the quality of your writing. You should evaluate and analyze, NOT just describe. Always keep in mind that you need to provide evidence to support claims that you make, and cite the sources of your evidence.

   a) The World Bank has expressed alarm about the threat of climate change, yet environmentalists argue that its actions do not match its words—that is, that the World Bank continues to lend for projects that will produce carbon dioxide emissions far into the future. Review the arguments and write an assessment. A Google search using the term “world bank fossil fuel lending” will get you started.

   b) Africa’s elephants are being slaughtered at an astounding rate. “Social green” thinkers argue that global inequality—poverty in Africa on the one hand; wealthy consumers elsewhere in the world on the other hand—is producing this tragedy. Explain.

   c) “Fair trade,” in which consumers in wealthy countries voluntarily pay more for fair-trade certified products, is claimed to be a way by which the incomes of commodity producers in developing countries can be improved, in exchange for their agreement to improve the sustainability of their agricultural processes and refrain from exploitative labor practices. Assess fair trade: how effective is this type of certification program, and in what ways? Has it improved the situation of participating farmers? The
environment? And how much of a contribution is it making to solving the overall problems of poverty and environmental destruction caused by commodity production?

d) Many “free trade” agreements, beginning with NAFTA but including others such as CAFTA and individual agreements between the US and other countries, allow foreign investors to sue governments. (The new Trans-Pacific Partnership also contains this so-called “investor-to-state” provision.) The government of El Salvador, which recently banned gold mining because it is environmentally destructive, is currently being sued by an investor using the “investor-to-state” provisions of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Describe the case, and use it to explain why many environmentalists and social justice advocates are hostile to these provisions of “free trade” agreements.

REQUIRED READING: Paul Gilding, The Great Disruption; Arundhati Roy, Capitalism: A Ghost Story; Peter Maas, Crude World: The Violent Twilight of Oil. All three books are available in the university bookstore, although you may buy them elsewhere if you wish. A number of online readings are assigned according to topic below; they are also required.

APPROXIMATE SCHEDULE

1/26 Introduction to course and assignments


2/25-3/9 Capitalism and the creation of the global economy. Watch “India: the Struggle for Independence,” segments 4-6, from Films on Demand (via SFSU library), and read “World Slavery and Caribbean Capitalism: The Cuban Sugar Industry, 1760-1868, by Dale Tomich (online; use Google Scholar or the library database). Also read “Unequal Protection: The Boston Tea Party Revealed,” by Thom Hartmann, which explains the role of corporations in the imperial conquest of the world. (Locate by typing article title into the Google search bar.) Read Maas, 2-4.

3/11 MIDTERM EXAM


3/23-25 SPRING BREAK

adjustment-a-major-cause-of-poverty). Also Maas, 8 and Roy, Ch. 1.


5/18 (Monday) FINAL EXAM, 1:30-4

POLICIES OF THE COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
PLEASE READ CAREFULLY!

Final Exam: According to Academic Senate policy F76-12 a time period is set aside at the end of each semester for a formal examination period. All classes are expected to meet during the final examination period whether an examination is given or not. The final examination schedule is published each semester in the Class Schedule. http://www.sfsu.edu/~acadres/final_exams/finals15.htm

CHSS Withdrawal Policy: The last day to drop a class is February 6, 2015 until 11:59pm. Starting February 7 – April 24, 2015 you must submit a withdrawal petition. Withdrawal from a class starting February 7, 2015 will be considered for serious and compelling reasons only and must have accompanying documentation. The following reasons are not considered serious and compelling: Changing your major, poor performance, class not required for graduation/major, or more time needed for other classes. If you wish to withdraw from class due to unexpected changes in your work schedule, illness or family emergencies, documentation will be required, along with a copy of unofficial transcripts. Submit your petition within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., within 2 weeks of a change in work hours.) From April 25 – May 15, 2015 you may not withdraw from a class or the University, except in the case of a serious documented illness or verified accident. Please refer to the following website for further information on withdrawal polices: https://chss.sfsu.edu/advising/

CR/NC Option: The last day to request CR/NC option is March 20, 2015 until 11:59pm. The Associate Dean will not approve requests if you miss this deadline.

Late Add Policy: The period to add classes via permit numbers is January 26 – February 6, 2015. The period to add classes by Exception is February 7 – February 20, 2015. It is your responsibility to procure a late permit number from your instructor and add the class. Faculty cannot add you into a class. Starting February 21, 2015, a Waiver of College Regulations form must be signed by your instructor, Chair and CHSS Associate Dean to add. This will be approved only if there was an administrative error.

Check your registration through SF State Gateway: Sign up for CR/NC, drop and add classes by the appropriate deadline online through SF State Gateway. ALWAYS check your registration after making any changes and BEFORE deadlines to be sure you are registered properly for your classes. Deadlines for all registration procedures, including withdrawals and requests for credit/no credit, are listed in the class schedule and will be strictly adhered to by the instructor, the Department Chair and the Associate Dean of College of Health & Social Sciences. It is ALWAYS the student’s responsibility to ensure their schedule is correct, even if the instructor indicates they will drop you.

This can be viewed on the Registration Calendar at the following website: http://www.sfsu.edu/~admisrec/reg/regsched.html

Disability Programs and Resource Center: Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC, located in SSB 110, can be reached by telephone at 415-338-2472 (voice/TTY) or by e-mail at dprc@sfsu.edu.