

**SOC 300L: *Environment and Society in Africa***  
**[First Year Seminar]**  
**M White Spring 2014 Wed 3-5:20**  
**Office: Maxcy Hall 210; Office Hours: Wed 1-3PM**  
**[Michael White@Brown.edu](mailto:Michael.White@Brown.edu)**  
**Overview and Topic List**  
**Update 21 Jan 2014**

**Philosophy and Organization**

This First Year Seminar is designed to actively explore contemporary issues environmental issues in Africa. The African setting is a key site for the world's environmental issues; Africa is on the one hand the site of a large number of highly visible and valued flora, fauna, and ecosystems. At the same time, African nations are severely pressed with competing social issues: poverty, economic development, health, refugees. How can these be reconciled? Is there an optimistic path forward that will satisfy the array of completing and concerned actors, from international environmental and development organizations, to national governments and ministries, to ordinary African citizens? This course is multidisciplinary in orientation and broad in scope geographically. Seminar discussion admits a variety of perspectives.

**Requirements**

Students from any disciplinary orientation (social science, natural science, humanities) are welcome to enroll. No prior coursework is required. Because of the nature of the work in this seminar, grading is mandatory S/NC.

The course calls for highly active student engagement throughout the semester. In addition to weekly reading and discussion as in other seminar settings, participants will develop presentations and discussion material for others. There will be a weekly roundtable (most weeks), both group and individual assignments, and a final presentation/paper on a topic of the student's choice. Most weeks have key readings, some determined in consultation with guest lectures. Books available from the Brown Bookstore include: James C. McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land* (Heineman 1999) and Wangari Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa* (Anchor 2010).

There will be guest speakers from Brown, African research universities, and the environmental community. (Dates are still being finalized.) Readings include a mix of scholarly articles, policy reports, and more general interest writing. Weekly discussion will include critique.

**Topics (All subject to change due to guest lecturer scheduling)**

**Weekly Reading list provided separately [most posted via Canvas/OCRA]**

**22 Jan Week 1:** Introduction & Perspectives; Course objectives

**29 Jan Week 2:** Setting the Stage: Development and Environment in Africa

**Assignment #1:** Country Profile

**5 Feb Week 3:** Landscapes of Change: Africa in Comparative view

**12 Feb Week 4:** Population, Poverty and Environment: Myth and Reality

**Assignment #2:** Actor Profile (GOV; NGO, etc)

**19 Feb Week 5:** thinking about Human Impact ([tentative Guest Lecture](#))

**Post Suggested reading**

**26 Feb Week 6:** Climate Change and Food Security in Africa ([tentative Guest Lecture](#))

**5 Mar Week 7:** Community-based Conservation in Africa

**12 Mar Week 8:** Human Environment Relationships in Rural Africa ([tentative Guest Lecture](#))

**19 Mar Week 9:** People at Risk: The Environment and Human Health

**Discussion of your recommended reading**

**\*\*Spring Break \*\***

**2 Apr Week 10:** Environment and Society in Africa: What do we do next?

**Group Assignment #5: Policy Position due**

**?? April Week 11:** -- Movie 7:00PM location & title TBA

**16 Apr Week 12:** Student Presentations 1

**23 Apr Week 13:** Student Presentations 2

**Other dates:**

**February 17-18**

**March 24-30**

**April 25-May5**

**May 6**

**Long Weekend (Presidents' Day)**

**Spring Recess**

**Reading Period**

**Final Paper DUE**