

Anth 338: Economic Anthropology

Syllabus - Fall 2007 Kathleen Saunders

Course Description

Required Texts

Richard H. Robbins. 2008. *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 4th edition. (Comes bundled with a reader at no additional cost.)

Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset. 1998. *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*.

Vandana Shiva. 2000. *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*.

Course Description

Economic anthropology examines the relationships between systems of production and distribution of material goods and services and the socio-cultural matrix in which economic life is embedded. The course begins with delineating the entailments of four theoretical approaches to understanding economic life: formalist, substantivist, Marxist, and culturalist. After this introduction to theoretical perspectives, attention turns to specific relationships between global capitalism and such topics as the nation-state, population growth, hunger, poverty, environment, consumption, disease, religion, and the condition of indigenous peoples. The course concludes with inquiry into the concept of "capital" which is expanded here to include natural, political, and social capital.

"Economics" has a bad reputation as a dry, boring, arcane subject beloved by dusty old professors with a penchant for charts, graphs, and formulas. It simply isn't so. It is the vital stuff of everyday life. Economic practices help us understand that mysterious thing called "human nature." Economic life informs our notions of the abstract values we hold dear such as justice, autonomy, and freedom. The discipline of economics is the intellectual offspring of moral philosophy. None of us can "opt out" of the economy any more than we can opt out of breathing. Economic anthropology is not dry – it is very, very juicy. Provocative. Absolutely scandalous in some cases.

Course Objectives

1. To provide conceptual tools to recognize and articulate the underlying assumptions about human nature that adhere to economic theories, policies and practices. Specifically, to become familiar with formalist, substantivist, and Marxist approaches to economic analysis.
2. To develop a critical facility in the evaluations of discourses and practices surrounding globalization and development.
3. To make the conceptual links between global economic processes and local economic conditions and consequences.
4. To provide the opportunity for students to experience and facilitate citizen activism in the struggle against hunger.

Course Structure

This course depends on all involved – students, instructor/TA, and community partners – being committed to the idea that we are a community of scholars. We will all learn from each other and we are all responsible for our own learning. No passive note taking and regurgitation!! Your enrollment in this course serves as agreement to these terms of engagement which includes fulfilling service-learning hours, sharing your findings during service learning with the class, carefully and thoughtfully reading the assigned texts, and contributing to class discussion of those texts.

Service Learning Rationale

Much of economic life seethes beneath the socio-cultural matrix in which it is embedded and thus operates concealed and naturalized. In this course students will be given the opportunity to un-cover and de-naturalize economic practices. Our service learning component will unpack what abstracts "hunger" from "hungry persons-in-community". Service learning is not doing volunteer work for credit. In the best tradition of anthropological methods, it is getting out of the armchair and into the

field (in this case, quite literally) to produce knowledge from experience as well as from scholarly literature and theory.

Service Learning Project

The Whatcom County Extension of Washington State University is conducting a Whatcom County Community Food Assessment Project. This is a comprehensive assessment which will take many kinds of expertise. Such an undertaking provides a wealth of experiential learning. You will have the opportunity to be part of something important to the citizens of Whatcom County. This isn't "practice" – it is the real, nitty gritty work. The specifics of how students will participate will be detailed in another document. The service component of this course is required. The minimum participation for each student is 12 hours of service learning.

Meaningful Participation

Weekly reading assignments are appended to this document. Class time will often be devoted to discussion, either with the entire class or in small groups. Keeping current with the reading assignments is crucial for meaningful participation. You are encouraged to bring in additional information on topics of interest to you.

Meaningful participation includes: attendance, obvious preparation, and participation in group and class discussions and projects. We will routinely do reflections on our service learning project in class and it is important that everyone contribute.

Please note that in a class in which participation is central to learning:

- Simply "being there" is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition. The instructor should be notified by email if a student is too ill to come to class or has an emergency situation. More than three unexcused absences will result in an F for the course.
- Timely preparation, including notes and questions, is essential.
- Not all commentary is "meaningful."
- In the spirit of justice, students should monitor their own contributions to avoid "free-riding" (no contribution) or "dominating the floor" (more than one's share).

Evaluation

(Tentative – to be discussed in class – room for negotiation!)

5 Essays at 100 pts each 500
Service hours (12 hrs @ 10) 120
Meaningful class participation 100
Total 720

Note: each of these components will be described and discussed more fully in separate documents under Assignments.

Blackboard

Blackboard is Western Washington University's online system for course information and communication. The course syllabus, reading and assignment schedule, supplementary materials and reminders will be posted on Blackboard. Breaking news will be sent via Blackboard email. If you use another email account (e.g. hotmail) set your University account to automatically forward messages so you do not miss important information. You are responsible for checking Blackboard messages and email regularly. I will set up research/production groups on Blackboard also to facilitate communication within your work groups.

Specific Needs

Western and the instructors are committed to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in education. The Office of Student Life, x3844, assists students who require accommodation or assistance to maximize their educational potential. Please advise the instructor during the first week of the quarter if you have specific needs to facilitate learning.

Academic Honesty

Standards of academic honesty will be rigorously upheld. Consult your student handbook for WWU policies concerning academic honesty. As a rule of thumb, any five consecutive words not of the student's original composition must be cited and punctuated as a quote. All material must be attributed as to source unless original with the student or "common knowledge."
(Online at <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~osl/js/jsacdish.html>).

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