

# *Ethnoecology and Conservation*

LAS 6290/ANT 6930

Instructor: Richard Stepp  
Office Hours: 9-12 pm Monday or by appointment  
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## Course Description

Ethnoecology is the study of the dynamic relationships between people, biota and the environment. This seminar will provide an overview along with an emphasis on how indigenous and small scale societies know and utilize natural resources and the implications for conservation and development. It will also explore tensions between small-scale societies and big conservation and exclusionary protected areas. Additionally, the course will explore useful research skills and methods for students desiring to add an ethnoecological component to their existing or future research. Case studies will be examined from all over the tropics and world. Readings and discussions in the course will draw from both the social sciences and the biological sciences. The course is part of the interdisciplinary TCD (Tropical Conservation and Development) core curriculum, although students from any discipline are welcome and encouraged to take the course. There are no prerequisites needed.

## Texts

There are 3 required texts for the course:

- 1) Anderson, E. et al.(eds) 2011. *Ethnobiology*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- 2) Dowie, M. 2009. *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*. MIT Press.
- 3) Stevens, S. (ed.) 2014. *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights*. U Arizona Press.

Additional readings will be made available through the class email listserv as pdf files at least 1 week prior to discussion.

See the following journals for articles of relevance to this course: *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Economic Botany*, *Journal of Ethnobiology*, *Conservation Biology*, *Human Ecology*, *Human Organization*, *American Anthropologist*, *Current Anthropology*, *Ethnobotany Research and Applications*, *Ecology and Society*, *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, *Ethnobiology Letters*, *Ecosystems*

## Course Objectives

- Students will gain a good understanding of concepts and principles in ethnoecology
- Students will gain an understanding of, and appreciation for, the importance of plants and animals in sustaining human culture.
- Students will learn how to properly and ethically conduct basic ethnoecological field research.

- Students will learn how ethnoecological knowledge can both inform and strengthen conservation initiatives
- Students will learn skills and methods from this course that they can apply creatively to their own studies and research.

#### Course requirements and grading policy

Everyone in class is expected to do all of the readings before the class in which they will be discussed. Your fluency in the readings is essential for the success of this seminar and your participation will consist of 20% of your grade.

#### DISCUSSION LEADER

Students registered at the graduate level will also be responsible for leading the class discussion for topics of your choice as designated in the course outline below. Discussion leaders will bring a list of questions and points of interest, designed to facilitate dialogue and debate with reference to the assigned readings. Note: this is not a mere summation of the material; the goal is to *creatively* lead the class in the exchange of ideas. Your performance as discussion chair is a significant portion of your grade. You are free to choose which topic you would like to chair, and assignments will be made on a first come, first serve basis.

#### RESEARCH/REVIEW PAPER AND PRESENTATION

Participants will identify a particular topic involving ethnoecology and prepare a report between 2500-3000 words as well as make a 12-15 minute presentation in class. A one-page summary of the topic will be due 4 weeks prior. Additional details will be clearly explained during the class.

#### GROUP COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

This course involves actually *doing* ethnoecology. We will be working with a local NGO, the Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) and doing an ethnoecological evaluation of their protected areas. Students will work in groups of 3-4. The specifics of the report may vary depending on the protected area selected but should contain a list and description of useful flora and fauna; historical information about human use and occupation of the site; contemporary human interactions with the site and any other relevant information. The report will be submitted to ACT for use in their educational outreach and any other use they deem worthwhile. Each participant will be responsible for developing a particular component but the effort should be highly collaborative. Additional details will be clearly explained during the class.

No late assignments will be accepted.

Course grades are based on the following:

30% Research/Review Paper

10% Research Topic

15% Individual Oral Presentation

25% Group Research Project

20% Overall Participation and Leading Discussion

Grading Scale	
A = 90 or above	C = 70 - 73
A- = 87 - 89	C- = 67 - 69
B+ = 84 - 86	D+ = 64 - 66
B = 80 - 83	D = 60 - 63
B- = 77 - 79	D- = 57 - 59
C+ = 74 - 76	E = 56 or below

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

### SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Note: additional readings will be assigned that will be available electronically

Week 1:

Introduction to the Course

Week 2:

The Nature and Scope of Ethnoecology

Week 3:

Biocultural Diversity

Readings: Anderson Ch 1,2,6,9

Week 4:

Perspectives on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation, Epistemology and Local Knowledge

Readings: Dowie Ch. 1-6 Anderson Ch. 5

Week 5:

Field Trip to Prairie Creek Lodge and Forage Farms

Readings: Dowie Ch.7-12

**Individual Paper Topic Due**

Week 6:

Wild Plant Use, Agriculture, and Ethnoecology

Readings: Anderson Ch. 13, 14,15,18; Dowie Ch. 13-16

Week 7:

Cognitive Approaches in Ethnoecology

Readings: Anderson Ch. 19, 20, 21, 22, Dowie Ch. 17-19

Week 8:

Spring Break

Week 9:

Contribution of Ethnoecology to Understanding Human-Environment Interactions in the Past, Why the Past Matters, Historical Ecology

Readings: Anderson Ch. 7,10,11,16,17

Week 10:

Collaborative Research Workday, Site Visits

Week 11:

- Ethics, IPR related to TEK and Conservation  
Readings: Anderson Ch. 3,4,8, Stevens Ch. 1-4
- Week 12:  
Challenges in Ethnoecology and Conservation  
Readings: Steven Ch. 5-8
- Week 13:  
Advances in Conservation of Biocultural Diversity  
Readings: Stevens Ch. 9-12
- Week 14:  
Case Study Presentations
- Week 15:  
Collaborative Research Presentations  
The Future of Ethnoecology

**Final Paper Due**

**Statement of the Field:**

Ethnoecology is an interdisciplinary field that bridges approaches in the social and biological sciences to examine how humans use, know, experience, and interact with plants, animals, fungi and other life forms, along with abiotic environments. It primarily grew out of the field of ethnobiology and both have been heavily influenced by the field of ethnoscience, which seeks to understand the native/insider/emic perspective. While there may appear at first glance to be considerable overlap between ethnoecology and related disciplines such as environmental anthropology and environmental sociology, the field is distinguished by its own literature and a myriad of disciplines that form its core body of knowledge.

Ethnoecology in its broadest and most comprehensive sense implies a systematic attempt at understanding, cataloging, and describing local and/or traditional ecological knowledge and behavior as well as ontology. Ethnoecology connects adaptational (materialist) and ideational theoretical approaches in anthropology (Hunn 1989) by looking at both knowledge and behavior. Moreover, the domain of ethnoecology involves not just the so-called natural (i.e., biophysical) world but also supernatural realms. The role of belief systems in influencing, regulating, and even determining human interactions with the biophysical environment is a crucial element in a holistic approach to ethnoecology (Anderson 1996 Posey 1999; Stepp et al. 2003).

It is useful to parse the field of ethnoecology into three overlapping areas of inquiry. The first, economic, was dominant in the formative years of the field and explored how human societies used biota and how this affected social and cultural life. The real rise of ethnoecology came with the influence of cognitive approaches and exploring how human societies cognize the biophysical environment. A body of theory emerged within cognitive anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s that culture is as a shared system of knowledge and constructs. This approach came to be known as ethnoscience and proved to be influential in ethnoecology. A significant overlap with the field of ethnobiology occurs in this approach. Ethnoecology also began to distinguish itself with a broader conceptualization of human–environment interactions beyond basic sorts of atheoretical natural history approaches that were common in the mid-twentieth century. These efforts were sometimes derided as list making even though these data formed the building blocks for rich theoretical constructions that contributed to the identification of general cognitive principles and patterns (Berlin 1992). More recently, a holistic approach to ethnoecology has emerged. This trajectory is similar to one that Hunn (2007) suggested for the field of ethnobiology whereby early utilitarian research transforms into a goal of bridging knowledge with praxis and ultimately political concerns with indigenous rights and sovereignty. The ontological turn in anthropology and the rise of multispecies ethnography has influenced ethnoecology recently, although the field has long been attuned to such pursuits. An attention to scale, both temporal and spatial, in ethnoecology has also emerged under the mantles of landscape ethnoecology (Johnson and Hunn 2010) and historical ecology (Balée 2006).

One of the earliest efforts to use the term “ethnoecology” explicitly was Harold Conklin’s PhD research among the Hanunóo in the Philippines in the 1950s (Conklin 1954a, 1954b). Conklin found over 1,800 named specific plant taxa, with rice varieties constituting many of these names. He made a major contribution to ethnoclassification in this work while also demonstrating the sophisticated nature of shifting agriculture in small-scale societies, a practice that had previously been scorned as wasteful and inefficient. However, a smattering of works pre-date Conklin in the use of the term (see Dexter 1951; Speck 1941). Anthropological concerns with human–environment interactions have long existed, and

some of this work could arguably be considered as ethnoecology, even going all the way back to Frans Boas with his focus on various aspects of traditional ecological knowledge (Boas 1897). Even earlier, Western plant collectors tied to the colonial enterprise at times (and in ways that are woefully inadequate by today's methodological and ethical standards) studied or at least noted traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous communities they encountered (Baker and Nesbitt 1996; Bartram 1998; Spencer and Horn 1896). It is notable that the majority of researchers in ethnoecology today are from non-Western and/or global South countries, with the largest number working in institutions in China, India, Mexico, and Brazil. Many scholars have formed important and lasting partnerships in the indigenous communities where much of the ethnoecology research is focused. Institutional acceptance of the field as a distinct intellectual pursuit remains out of reach, so researchers have found a home department in a number of more formal academic disciplines in the social or biological sciences. The total research output of the field has grown considerably since the turn of this century, with a number of new journals and book series publishing ethnoecological works.

#### **University of Florida Policies**

##### *Honesty:*

As a result of completing the registration form at the University of Florida, every student has signed the following statement: "I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University."

##### *UF Counseling Services:*

Resources are available on-campus for students having personal problems or lacking a clear career and academic goals which interfere with their academic performance. These resources include:

1. University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575, personal and career counseling;
2. Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling;
3. Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual counseling; and
4. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.

##### *Software Use:*

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

##### *Disabilities Accommodations:*

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

##### *Attendance Policy:*

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationattendance.html>