This will be a graduate seminar focused on close readings of recent literature applying social theory to environmental questions. Readings will be selected in part based on the interests and backgrounds of seminar participants. As a reading seminar, the format and requirements will differ somewhat from those of most graduate seminars.

Readings and discussion
This is a reading-intensive seminar. We will read roughly the equivalent of one scholarly book per week, and devote the three-hour class meeting to a thorough discussion of the week’s readings. Accordingly, it is critical that everyone come well-prepared for discussions. You should do the reading thoroughly before class, and come prepared to actively participate in discussion every week. This will include critical appraisals of the readings, discussing points of agreement and disagreement among them, and exploring connections to other readings and materials from your own work. Read critically, comparatively, and cumulatively. This does not mean just criticizing readings, although that is certainly allowed: it means trying to understand what authors are doing and what they are contributing to evolving understandings, and comparing multiple approaches to the same or related topics as we move through the semester.

Response papers
In order to promote close readings and the exchange of ideas, each student will prepare a short one page critical commentary and circulate it to the entire class at 10:00 a.m. the morning of the seminar. The function of the commentary is simply to allow (and encourage) you to write a quick analytical response to the readings. It is not meant to be a finished piece of crystalline commentary, but a think piece to facilitate your own thinking and class discussion. There is no need to reiterate what the reading says: focus on what you think about it; what its conceptual strengths or weaknesses are, how it relates to other bodies of work/theory, and so on. You can either focus in detail on one or two sections or pieces from one or two readings, or focus on larger questions or points that span the week’s readings. Please send these around as close to 10:00 am as possible (we can discuss the precise logistics). The goal is to have people prepare their own comments prior to reading others, but to also have a chance to share these reactions prior to meeting for discussion.
Co-leading discussions

Each seminar participant will lead/chair two class discussions during the semester. We will have two presenters per week, who may either divide up the readings or each address all of the readings. The presenters will be responsible for reading the material in particular detail that week, preparing and presenting brief synopses of the key theoretical and conceptual issues in each, and raising several issues for discussion. Their presentations should take roughly 10 minutes each at the beginning of class. The presenters should seek to lay out some big questions and identify points of common interest, clear disagreement, and so on. The function is to say something provocative and lay the basis for a discussion – the subsequent discussion usually works better if the presenters have tried to shape and direct the questions and discussions to ensure some sort of continuity between pieces and with previous topics. Presenters should also be prepared to take an especially active role in that day’s discussion, stepping in to catalyze or reorient the discussion based on your in-depth consideration of the material in question.
Schedule:

1/19 Introduction

1/26 The political economy of nature and value

2/2 Climate change I

2/9 Climate change II

2/16 Are environmental politics post-political?

2/23 No class – AAG conference

3/1 No class – AAG conference aftermath (read Foucault lectures)

3/8 Spring break (read Foucault lectures)

3/15 Foucault, lectures

3/22 Biopolitics
• Theory, Culture & Society 2009; 26 (6) (special issue focused on biopolitics)

3/29 Biopolitics in geography

4/5 Reading ‘resilience’ critically

4/12 Enclosures and commons
• Jeffrey, A., C. McFarlane, and A. Vasudevan. (2011). Rethinking Enclosure:
Space, Subjectivity and the Commons. Antipode.

4/19 TBD (Possibly The Great Transformation)

4/26 TBD (Possibly 2003 special issue of Politics & Society on Polanyi)