



Sierra Institute

Wilderness & Cultural Field Studies

Office of Extended Education • Humboldt State University

BIOREGIONALISM AND SUSTAINABILITY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Natural Resource Planning and Interpretation *(GO R 480)

3 semester units/4.5 quarter units

Instructor: Willow Abel

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION

The focus of this course is the development of the perception and skills that enable one to live a more sustainable, ecologically aware and engaged existence. Bioregionalism – as theory, historical movement, and practice – will be studied primarily through direct experience as a resident of the wilderness and a permaculture homestead. We will address how to meet humans’ needs for water, food, shelter, energy, community, creative engagement and a sense of belonging to a home.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Weeks 1-2: The course will begin with focused study in knowing one’s bioregion through natural history. Local native Californian culture will be studied for both philosophical and practical contributions to a bioregional ethic. We will begin an ongoing inquiry into the qualities of a sustainable community.

Weeks 3-7: Discussion and readings will focus on how bioregions are defined by biotic communities, physiographic features, and cultural patterns. Techniques of bioregional mapping will be studied and practiced. Studies in the natural and cultural history of Round Valley will begin. A historical overview and critical analysis of the elements of bioregionalism will be presented through lectures, readings, and interaction with local, long-term members of the movement. We will participate in local watershed restoration, preservation, and education projects.

Permaculture design theory will be introduced. Hands-on classes in ecological design, organic gardening, water systems, natural building, and renewable energy will begin and continue throughout the course, along with work on individual, self-chosen bioregional project.

Discussion and readings will consider the relationship of bioregional theory to other ecological and social movements such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, and environmental justice. In order to understand the contemporary cultural and ecological conditions to which bioregionalism proposes alternatives, we will examine the impacts of globalization, utilitarian resource management, and industrial agriculture on biotic and cultural diversity.

The relationship of ecological sustainability to lifestyle choices and economics will be explored. Consumerism will be contrasted with voluntary simplicity. Various alternative, local economic systems will be presented and discussed. The practice of bioregionalism in an urban context will be considered.

Weeks 8-9: On our closing wilderness journey, we will give our attention to ways of bringing our knowledge, skills and passions back into our communities. Our role and tasks as educators will be envisioned. Individual bioregional projects will be completed and presented.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to participate actively in his/her bioregion, with the following skills:

1. familiarity with the evolution of bioregional philosophy and practice
2. familiarity with the strategies that a variety of contemporary bioregional organizations and activists employ to foster and maintain community cooperation in restoration and localization projects
3. the ability to articulate personal definitions of bioregion and sustainability
4. familiarity with the natural and cultural history of the northern California bioregion, which inspires and empowers the student towards greater awareness of their own bioregion
5. an awareness of the impact of his/her consumption on natural and cultural resources, partnered with knowledge of ways to reduce, localize, and “green” one’s consumption
6. the ability to relate to his/her bioregion as a key element of personal identity
7. the ability to design and construct permaculture systems in urban, suburban, and rural environments
8. the ability to assess the need for bioregional activism in his/her local communities—to identify what is lacking and envision what is possible

COURSE OUTLINE

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| I. Defining Bioregions | A. Grassroots organizing |
| A. Biotic boundaries | B. Watershed restoration |
| B. Physiographic watersheds | C. Localization of production and consumption |
| C. Mythic, historical and cultural boundaries | D. Wilderness preservation; land trusts |
| | E. Historical land use |
| II. History of Bioregionalism | F. Natural history |
| A. Indigenous perspectives | V. Permaculture |
| B. Roots in regionalism, anarchism, utopian socialism | A. The facets of permaculture |
| C. Links and contrasts to environmentalism | 1. nature/land stewardship |
| D. Bioregionalism as a social movement | 2. culture and education |
| E. Critiques of bioregionalism | 3. human-built environment |
| | 4. health and spiritual well-being |
| III. Theoretical Influences on Bioregionalism | 5. land tenure and community governance |
| A. Alternative social movements | 6. tools and technology |
| 1. deep ecology | 7. finance and economics |
| 2. ecofeminism | B. The design process |
| 3. social ecology | 1. principles |
| 4. environmental justice | 2. site assessment |
| B. Critiques of contemporary culture | 3. zones and sectors |
| 1. local control vs. globalization | 4. functional analysis |
| 2. strategies for land and resource management | C. Sustainability |
| 3. how modern technology shapes our relationship with self, other humans, and the earth | 1. ecological aspects: laws of thermodynamics; energy cycles; biodiversity; carrying capacity; ecological niches; symbiotic relationships; ecotones; natural succession |
| IV. Elements of Bioregionalism | 2. social aspects: cultural diversity; consumerism versus voluntary simplicity; size, scale, and intentions of community; emotional and spiritual needs |
| A. Ecological knowledge, respect, stewardship | |
| B. Decentralized governance and economy | |
| C. Spiritual Development | |
| E. Case Studies: Round Valley, CA | |

VI. Personal Relationship with Place

- A. Assessing and adjusting one's ecological footprint

- B. Creative and spiritual engagement with place
- C. Ecological literacy

REQUIRED TEXTS

House, Freeman. *Totem Salmon*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999.

Course Reader: selections from a variety of books and journals including primary texts and commentary (available from instructor):

Anderson, M. Kat. *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. (selections).

Berg, Magilavay & Zuckerman. *A Green City Program for San Francisco Bay Area Cities and Towns*. SF, CA: Planet Drum Foundation/Wingbow Press, 1989. (selections).

Dodge, Jim. "Living By Life: Some Bioregional Theory and Practice", from *Coevolution Quarterly*, Winter, 1981.

Kennedy, Joseph. "An Overview of Natural Building Techniques", from *The Art of Natural Building*. Kennedy, Smith and Warek, eds. New Society Publishers, 2002.

Kimbrell, Andrew, ed. "The Seven Deadly Myths of Industrial Agriculture" from *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*. Covelo: Island Press, 2002.

Mollison, Bill, with R.M. Slay. *Introduction to Permaculture*. Tyalgum, New South Wales, Australia: Tagari Publications, 1991. (selections)

Smith, Michael. "The Case for Natural Building", from *The Art of Natural Building*. Kennedy, Smith and Warek, eds. New Society Publishers, 2002.

Snyder, Gary. *The Gary Snyder Reader*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998. (selections)

Taylor, Deva. "Real Mattole Meals", from *The Mattole Restoration Council Newsletter*, Winter 1998-99.

Walker, Laura. "More Mattole Meals", from *The Mattole Restoration Council Newsletter*, Winter 1998-99.

Various readings on permaculture gathered by instructor from friends in the permaculture design community and distributed to the students as handouts

In addition to the text and reader, the instructor's personal library is available and used by students throughout the course, particularly for the bioregional project.

EVALUATION

1) *Class participation (40%)*: consisting of 1) class attendance; 2) preparation (thorough reading, as demonstrated primarily through bringing, to each class meeting, questions of clarification and larger questions that take group discussion more deeply into the material); and 3) involvement: focused contribution to the group discussion and to hands-on learning projects, demonstrating a mature awareness of how to listen, respond to and build on others' ideas, and facilitate equality of participation.

2) *Bioregional Project (40%)*: a focused exploration of an aspect of bioregional practice that the student feels will allow them to deepen their relationship to place and live more sustainably. This project is worked on throughout the course (topics are chosen by week three) and presented to the class in the final week of the program. Criteria for self-designed topic are: 1) a personal relevance that extends beyond the duration of the course; 2) a research component and a hands-on creative component; 3) interactive component in presentation of project to class. Previous student projects include: high school curriculum in sustainability; permaculture homestead design; construction of a microhydro system; book of writings and paintings on trees; herbal first aid kit; writing and illustrating a children's book; guidebook in urban sustainability; writing and performing a play; construction of wilderness shelters; book of poems on each place visited; green building design for college campuses.

3) *Essay (20%)*: A 1250-1750 word paper addressing one of the essay questions provided by the instructor; essay topic may also be self-designed with instructor approval. Paper should include reference and citations to one or more authors; avoid loose generalities, clichés, platitudes, the obvious, and unsubstantiated sentiments; paper should be focused and intense, staying close and aware of your thesis at all times; first person perspective ("I") is welcome,

especially if using it encourages you to push your limits a bit; write with authenticity and passion; because you will have no computer to edit your work, some concession is made for misspellings and cross outs, but the final product should be as tidy as you can make it.

The grades used in this course will be as follows:

A+	98-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A	93-97			D	63-66
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D-	60-62
		C	73-76		
B+	87-89	C-	70-72	F	Below 60
B	83-86				

COURSE SCHEDULE

The general structure of the Reclaiming Your Place program is that there are 2 separate backpacking segments (weeks 1&2 and weeks 8&9). Weeks 3–7 are spent in residence at the Hinterlands, a permaculture homestead in the Yolla Bolly mountains.

The following table indicates the planned class meetings for this course:

<i>weeks</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Class hours</i>
1 & 2	Local natural & cultural history Foraging, wildcrafting	Taylor Walker Anderson Field guides		3
3 – 4	Local natural & cultural history Exploring definitions of bioregion, sustainability, home Principles of permaculture Site assessment & zonation Functional analysis Organic gardening Hydro & solar power Grassroots organizing	Dodge House Mollison Snyder Simon Field guides & local periodicals	Begin bioregional project	15
5-7	Local natural & cultural history Organic gardening, continued Water systems Natural building Localization & restoration projects in the Eel watershed/Round Valley Wilderness preservation Sustainable agriculture Economic localization Urban sustainability	Simon House Pollan Kimbrell Kennedy Smith Readings chosen by students from our library as needed for bioregional project	Continue bioregional project Bioregional project presentations	29
8 & 9	Local natural & cultural history Living what we've learned	Readings chosen by students from our library as needed for bioregional project	Bioregional project presentations	6
				Total: 53