

ENG 660 Commons Theory in the Environmental Humanities

Prof. Stephanie LeMenager

U. of Oregon/Spring 2021/Thursdays 5:30-8:30pm

*****Course Overview**

As Arctic territories and Pacific island states recede to sea level rise, as wildfires burn through suburban communities in the wealthy world, as global fresh water runs dry, a profound uncertainty shadows what it means to own, to use, and to inhabit—distinctions anxiously defended within colonialist capitalism. Enter the “commons,” a concept and praxis tied to sustainability in the form of stable subsistence in anthropological literatures, to Indigenous economies and sovereignties worldwide, and to historical European peasantries where “the essence of subjectivity” resided in “inhabitancy rather than entrepreneurship,” in Robert Marzec’s phrase. In the shadow of climate change, the commons is an age-old concept with handy meanings for a modernity buckling to neoliberal injury in the forms of privatization, deregulation, and runaway extraction. This seminar places the work of well-known commons theorists (Elinor Ostrom, Peter Linebaugh, Silvia Federici) in conversation with scholars of the environmental humanities and critical environmental justice (Anna Tsing, Laura Pulido, Rob Nixon, Jedidiah Purdy, Ramachandra Guha) and with scholar/activists in Black and Indigenous Studies (Fred Moten, Leanne Betsamosake Simpson, Winona LaDuke, JT Roane). We will ask what the commons can do and be, in this time of planetary instability and intensifying resource conflicts.

*****LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

*****CONTACT INFORMATION**

Prof. Stephanie LeMenager (call me Stephanie): slemen@uoregon.edu
(Office hours Tuesdays: 3:30-5:00pm and by appointment)

*****GRADES AND ASSIGNMENTS**

The course pivots around three assignments: weekly Participation, a team Presentation, and a 12-15pp. Final Paper.

Participation: 30%

Your weekly participation grade includes your contribution to the seminar Discussion Board, plus in-class discussion.

Discussion Board 20pts

Your Discussion Board contribution is due by 10pm each Weds (no late work is accepted) and includes two parts:

***Glossary Term/Explication 15 pts.** Each week, you will choose one term from the week’s readings to interpret in 250-500 words. By this means, we will create a seminar Glossary. You are expected to identify which reading/s include the term, define the term, offer a brief genealogy of it, to the best of your ability, and associate the term with something else that you are working on or that you care about in the world. For example, if your term is

“environmentalism of the poor,” where do you find this term in the readings, what does the term mean, where—so far as you can tell—does the term originate (which scholar or scholars are well-known for using and elaborating on it), and how does it connect with your own study and/or commitments.

***Question/Passage 5pts.** Each week, you will offer either a question for the seminar to consider, or a passage that you wish to discuss with the seminar (because it excites, confuses, infuriates you). For passages, please copy first sentence of passage and page number, where applicable.

In-Class Presence 10pts This rubric includes your willingness to think aloud with others, to listen, to respect, to move the conversation forward with new questions, to contribute your own knowledge to our collective consideration.

Presentation, with annotated bibliography: 30%

Our penultimate seminar will be a virtual symposium, including team presentations by approximately 4 teams of 4 students each. Each presentation will be 30-40 minutes long, with none to exceed 40 minutes. Teams must leave 7-10 minutes for interaction with seminar “audience”—either through Q and A at the end, brief group discussion in the midst, or some combination of the above.

Your project is to apply course themes and readings to a discussion of one example of the commons or commoning that you choose and find particularly: exciting, transformative, conflicted, or usable as historical precedent (a la JT Roane). Your case study can be inspired by readings for this seminar, or you may choose to consider an example that we have not even approached in our course materials. Be careful not to replicate specific cases offered by scholars whom we read. In other words, you might investigate some aspect of Latinx agricultural “commoning,” but you’re not to choose the Ganados del Valle as your case study, because that is Laura Pulido’s case study in the chapter of hers that we read. You *can* choose to make your work an extension of or homage to hers, insofar as her insights inform your choices.

The day of the presentation, every individual will turn in a 250-500-word description of their role in the team, in addition to an annotated bibliography that includes three sources discovered and used by that individual. In each team, a minimum of 2 students must actively present. Where applicable, the remaining students may build a multimedia tech presentation and contribute to research and scripting. All students must choose and agree on their roles by Week 5 of the term. Be sure that your presentation is Zoom compatible.

Teamwork 10 pts

- *Willingness to take responsibility/listen/self-reflect
- *Assuming appropriate percentage of total labor

Bibliography 5 pts

Performance 15 pts [all team members will share in this aspect of the grade]

- *Preparedness (aptness and quality of case study, tech, bibliography)

- *Clarity (avoidance of jargon, explanation of terms, scaffolding argument)
- *Ability to involve audience, generate interest and questions

Final Paper: 40%

The final paper must draw from course readings by incorporating a minimum of three course texts. The paper must speak to the course topic of the commons/commoning. Otherwise, it is intended to benefit the student's own course of study, professional aspiration, or artistic practice. The final paper may be crafted as 1) a draft of a conference paper which culminates—eventually—in submission of an abstract of said paper for conference presentation; 2) a white paper for an NGO, government entity, or activist collective; 3) a long-form journalistic essay; 4) a memoir. These are only some of the examples that your professor imagines. Because of the highly individualized nature of these final papers, please begin very early in the term considering what it is that you wish to write. We will stage a group consultation regarding final paper topics in seminar on Week 7. You also are welcome—and advised—to consult with Prof. LeMenager in office hours.

*Groundwork 10 pts (bibliography, consultation with group and professor, outlining)

*Structural scaffolding 20 pts (i.e. does essay unfold with deliberate transitions, as nested hierarchy of informing questions or as argument with clear demonstration, is citation apt—i.e. generous and germane, but not overwhelming)

*Style 10 pts (i.e. clarity of writing, force and/or beauty of writing, originality and/or compelling expression of insights)

*****COURSE SCHEDULE**

WEEK ONE (April 1)

Commons Theory within the Environmental Humanities

Reading (required)

Garrett Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons"

Rob Nixon, "Neoliberalism, Genre, and the Tragedy of the Commons"

Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism: A Third World Critique"

Reading (optional)

Elinor Ostrom, "Tragedy of the Commons"

Joan Martinez-Alier, "Environmentalism of the Poor"

WEEK TWO (April 8)

Environmental Commons within the Nation-State

Jedidiah Purdy, [This Land Is Our Land: The Struggle for a New Commonwealth](#)

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez et al., "Resolution for a Green New Deal"

Angelo Baca, "Bears Ears Is Here to Stay," [New York Times](#)

WEEK THREE (April 15)

Commons Histories within Euro-Modernities

Readings (required)

Peter Linebaugh, "Introduction" and "Two Charters" from The Magna Carta Manifesto
Robert Marzec, Excerpt from "Inhabitancy, Custom Law, and the Landless"
JT Roane, "Plotting the Black Commons"

Readings (optional)

JT Roane, "Towards a Usable History of the Black Commons"
British Library English translation of the Magna Carta (1215)

WEEK FOUR (April 22)

Commoning and Traditional Ecological Knowledges

Readings (required)

Laura Pulido, "Ganados del Valle: Resource Management as Contested Terrain" from Environmentalism and Economic Justice
Winona LaDuke, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Environmental Futures"
Elaine Gan and Anna Tsing, "How Things Hold: A Diagram of Coordination in a Satoyama Forest"

Readings (optional)

Yuki Masami, "Analyzing Satoyama"

WEEK FIVE (April 29)

Speculative Anti-Capitalism (The Black Commons II)

Readings (required)

Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower
Shelley Streeby, "Speculative Archives: Histories of the Future of Education"

Readings (optional)

Alondra Nelson, "Afrofuturism"
JT Roane, "Towards a Usable History of the Black Commons"

WEEK SIX (May 6)

Hydrocommons and Hydro-Sovereignties

Readings (required)

Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong, "Untapping Watershed Mind"
Rita Wong and Fred Wah, beholden: a poem as long as the river

Readings (optional)

Edward Valandra, "Mni Wiconi: Water Is [More Than] Life"

WEEK SEVEN (May 13)

Adjacencies and Provocations I: The Undercommons

Readings (required)

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study

Readings (optional)

Robin D.G. Kelley and Fred Moten, in Conversation

WEEK EIGHT (May 20)

Adjacencies and Provocations II: Indigenous Survivance and Thrivance

Readings (required)

Leanne Betsamosake Simpson, As We Have Always Done

WEEK NINE (May 27)

Seminar Symposium!!!!!!!

WEEK TEN (June 3)

Course Conclusion: The Commons and Public Intellectualism (with Silvia Federici and Guest Professor, April Anson)

Readings (required)

Silvia Federici, Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons

*****COURSE POLICIES/EXPECTATIONS**

- **Communication:** The primary means of communication outside of class in this course will be through your UO email account and Canvas. Please check your UO email account and Canvas regularly. Generally, you can expect an email response from Prof. LeMenager in two business days.
- **Syllabus:** This syllabus is subject to change during the term, if deemed beneficial to the class as a whole. Any changes will be clearly communicated by Prof. LeMenager, with an explanation, and in time for students to incorporate without adverse effects.
- **Late Work Policy:** Late work will be accepted without penalty in cases of documented emergencies. Please communicate with Prof. LeMenager asap if you become aware that you must submit an assignment late. Work that is submitted late without documentation or prior communication will be docked 1/3rd of a grade per day.
- **Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to adhere to the University of Oregon's standards of academic integrity. All work should be your own, and all sources should be appropriately acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, duplicate submission, cheating on examinations, and false citations. Please do not hesitate to speak to me if you have any questions about use of sources or citations. Please read the Academic Misconduct Code in full. It can be accessed at: [http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/ta bid/248/Default.aspx](http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/ta%20bid/248/Default.aspx)

***SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

- **Accessible Education:** The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please consult with Prof. LeMenager if aspects of the instruction or course design results in barriers to your participation. Students are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC) 541-346-1155; <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>. AEC helps provide services including sign language interpreting, computer-based note taking, classroom relocation, exam modifications, and alternative text conversion. Please request that the Accessible Education Center send Prof. LeMenager a letter outlining your approved accommodations.
- **Preferred First Name:** The University of Oregon has a preferred first name policy. According to this policy, a student or employee's preferred first name will be used in university communications and reporting except where the use of the legal name is required for university purposes. If you have reasons to believe your preferred first name may not be listed correctly in the roster or you do not feel comfortable taking advantage of UO's preferred first name policy, please communicate the name you wish to use to Prof. LeMenager. The preferred first name policy can be accessed here: <http://policies.uoregon.edu/node/216>
- **Preferred Pronouns:** Please communicate your preferred pronouns to Prof. LeMenager and feel encouraged to list your pronouns after your name in your Zoom account.
- **Responding to Bias:** You have the right to learn, work, and live in an environment free of discrimination and hate. UO has gathered resources for students, faculty, and staff to report bias incidents or find support following bias incidents here: <https://respect.uoregon.edu/>
- **Basic Needs:** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support. Furthermore, if you are comfortable doing so, please let me know about your situation so I can create accommodations for you, with the guidance of the Dean of Students Office.
- **Safe Ride:** (541)346-7433, extension 2. Safe Ride provides free, inclusive, and accessible alternatives to traveling home alone at night for UO students, faculty, and staff. It is a schedule-ahead service. Safe Ride is a feminist, 'for-the-students/by-the-students' organization and operates out of the Women's Center in EMU 12F. Safe Ride's spring hours are Sunday- Thursday, 7pm -midnight, Friday and Saturday, 7pm-2am. For more information: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/saferide/>
- **Sexual Assault Support Services:** 541-346-SAFE is a 24/7 hotline staffed by confidential, trained counselors. Students may also contact University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sass-lane.org/>) for confidential help.
- **Teaching and Learning Center:** You are encouraged to take advantage of the resources offered by the Teaching and Learning Center. They offer individual and small group tutoring, writing assistance, and a variety of other support programs. <http://tlc.uoregon.edu>, 541-346-3226, 68 PLC