Comparative Environmental Politics: United States and Canada.
Instructor: Pablo Toral (Beloit College)

“Good God, it’s really worth all this trouble, isn’t it?”
Senator Howard Metzenbaum as he looked down at the BWCA

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA) was the subject of one of the most heated environmental debates in recent U.S. history. Between 1906 and 1978, those advocating mining, logging and the use of motorized vehicles within the wilderness clashed with environmentalists, who called for the preservation of this area as a wilderness. The BWCA Wilderness Act of 1978 designated the area as a wilderness, banned mining and logging and restricted motorized use to only a few entry lakes, but tensions still remain today. Pressures to open up surrounding areas for mining continue to split the local community and many still advocate motorized use within the wilderness. The wilderness borders Quetico Provincial Park on the Canadian side of the border. Logging has been banned in Quetico since 1971 and motorized use restricted to a single lake since 1979.

The conflict around the BWCA Wilderness illustrates what political ecologists call a “politicized environment”, or how the environment becomes the site of struggles over resources. This course examines environmental politics at various levels, from the global to the local, taking the BWCA Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park as case studies. The proximity and parallel histories of the BWCA Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park provide a valuable opportunity to develop a comparative approach to our study of environmental politics. The course compares environmental politics in the U.S. and Canada and reviews the role of key actors involved in green politics in both countries, including Congress, the presidency, regulatory agencies, the states (called provinces in Canada), local governments, the party system, and civil society groups, especially native American communities (known primarily as “first nation peoples” in Canada), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses. This course pays close attention to the differences and similarities that exist between both countries and explores how both societies try to reconcile economic development with environmental protection. This tension is particularly serious today in the area surrounding the BWCA Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park due to the pressure from logging, mining and tourist interests.

This course has four major learning goals. The first goal is to introduce the students to field-based research in the social sciences. Students will become familiar with survey research by learning data-collection techniques such as participant observation and interviewing techniques. Students will also learn to record, analyze and present data. Students will interview key stakeholders on both sides of the border, including members of native communities (called “first nations” in Canada), business groups, environmental groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government. The second learning goal is to equip the students with methodological tools to do comparative analysis. They will conduct research from two different cases of wilderness preservation, the BWCA Wilderness in the United States and Quetico Provincial Park in Canada. Cross-national comparisons of political institutions, regulatory styles, and state-society relations will reveal different styles of environmental management and wilderness preservation. The third goal is to help the students develop an interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies. The course is grounded on a social science methodology and draws
heavily from political science and international relations, but also from economics, sociology, anthropology, history, religious studies, ethics and the natural sciences. The fourth goal is to help the students develop specific skills needed to conduct social research in the wilderness, such as canoeing, camping, cooking and survival.

The course is **structured** along four major sections, namely social research methods, policy-process, actors, and themes. First, we learn qualitative research methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, oral history and visual sociology. Secondly, we compare policy instruments in the U.S. and Canada at the local, state/provincial and federal level, including the role of environmental agencies and the court system. The course then focuses on the key actors involved in environmental policy-making in both countries, especially the role of science and the scientific community, native American/First Nation communities, businesses, environmentalists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government, regulatory agencies and the courts. Finally, students analyze the main environmental themes affecting the BWCA Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park, such as forest, mining and tourist policies, protection of species, air and water pollution, pesticides, sustainability and, most importantly today, climate change.

This course is **particularly useful for students considering graduate school** because many graduate programs in the social sciences require strong field research methods. Since few ACM students take a field research methods course in their home campus, no previous knowledge of research methods is expected. This course is also strongly recommended **for students with an interest in environmental studies**. While grounded on a comparative politics methodology, the course also draws from the natural sciences, economics, sociology, anthropology, history, religious studies and ethics to help students develop an interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies.

To conduct fieldwork and process data, students **need to bring the following**: a valid passport (non-US nationals should also obtain a visa to enter Canada if needed and should find out whether their current US visa allows multiple entry into the US), a laptop, a thumb drive, a small notebook, a pen, a digital camera and a waterproof plastic pouch (it should be large enough to protect your camera, notebook and one textbook while canoeing and camping.)
Required texts:


Assignments:

- Midterm (20% of final grade)
- Final (20%)
- Group report (50%)
- Final presentation of group report (10%)

The structure of the course and the assignments are subject to change due to weather conditions.

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Course outline.

Section I: Methodology

1-Research methods,
   Schutt chapters 8, 9, 10

Section II: The Policy Process

2-Environmentalism:
   US (Rosenbaum): chapter 1
   Can. (VanNijnatten & Boardman): chaps. 1-2

3- Environmental policy-making process:
   3.1. Context:
      US: chap. 2 (except section called “special place of science in policy making”)
   3.2. Process:
      US chap. 3 (except section called “the courts: the role of appraisal”)
      Can. chap. 6
3.3. Role of science:
   US: chap. 2 (section called “special place of science in policy making”)
   Can.: chap 5
3.4. Courts:
   US: chap. 3 (section called “the courts: the role of appraisal”)
   Can.: chap. 3
3.5. Policy instruments: CBA, command and control, risk assessment
   U.S.: chaps 4, 5 (read these first)
   Can.: chap. 4 (read last)

Section III: Case Studies
4-Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness-Quetico Provincial Park.
   Proescholdt, Heinselman and Rapson (*Troubled Waters*):
   Drafting “a bill” (pp. 1-106)
   Congress:
      Interior Committee/National Parks and Recreat. Subcom. (pp. 107-180)
      House floor (pp. 181-215)
      Senate (pp. 215-304)
   Searle (*Saving Questico Superior*):  
      Economic interests (chaps. 1-3)
      Legislative process (chaps. 4-6)
      Judicial process (7-10)
5-Forestry policy:
   US: chap. 9
   Can.: 13
6-Air and Water
   US: chap. 6
   Can: chap. 15
7-Energy and climate change
   US: chaps. 8, 10
   Can: chaps. 11, 12
8-US-Canada Collaboration
   Can.: chap. 7
9-Environmental policy at the local level
   Can.: chap 8
10-Role of Aboriginal people in environmental policy
   Can.: chap. 9
11-Extinction
   Can.: chap. 14