

Commodities, Conflict, and Cooperation

Fall 2016, Winter 2017 and Spring 2017 quarters
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This program examines how the capitalist drive to extract commodities stokes divisions among cultural communities and deepens their differences and conflicts, as well as how those communities can and have come together to defend common ground. In our inquiry we will use multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses, including political economy, geography, ethnic and racial studies, political science, sociology, political ecology, feminist economics, literature, and cultural studies.

The program will explore the creative tension between particularism (which emphasizes the autonomy of different identities such as race, ethnicity, or religion) and universalism (which emphasizes unity around similar identities such as social class or the environment). The class will also examine the related interaction between corporate globalization from above (involving cultural homogenization and dividing communities) and grassroots globalization from below (stitching together place-based social movements and cultural communities).

The program will review case studies where the quest to control commodities such as crops, minerals, energy, and labor contributes to ethnic, racial, or religious conflicts as well as cooperation. Fall quarter we will focus on North American cases, such as the origins of racial slavery and the white race in relation to early colonial tobacco plantations; treaty rights struggles of indigenous nations over access to fish and water; and the use of migrant labor from Latin America in fruit fields and orchards. We will review examples of conflicts that led to unlikely alliances between former enemies and redefined the meanings of commodities beyond mere economic purpose.

Winter quarter we will compare and contrast North American case studies in other parts of the colonized world, such as the ethnic and sectarian conflicts that divide the oil-rich Middle East, the forested tribal territories of South Asia, and the heartland of corn and chocolate in Mexico. We will draw parallels between domestic and overseas resource wars generated by the same global capitalist systems and link processes of decolonization at home and abroad. We we examine how changing labor markets have shifted gender roles and relations.

Spring quarter students will embark on in-program internships, field studies, or research and service projects to apply their skills and knowledge, focusing on our local Pacific Northwest region or a location of a student's choice. In general the program will stress community-based learning both within and outside the walls of academia through group work and the use of field trips, field work, guest speakers, and visual depictions of people and places. Students will also participate in workshops on social movement tactics, community engagement, humor, cultural respect, counter-mapping, and social media.

Program Details

Fields of Study

[community studies](#), [consciousness studies](#), [cultural studies](#), [environmental studies](#), [field studies](#), [gender and women's studies](#) and [political economy](#)

Preparatory for studies or careers in

non-governmental organizations, community-based advocacy, public policy, law and legal rights, education, public health, alternative justice systems, graduate school in social science, history, law, cultural studies, feminist economics, geography, and political economy.

Campus location Olympia

Offered during: Day

Online Learning Enhanced Online Learning

Internship Possibilities

Spring quarter students will embark on in-program internships, field studies, or research and service projects to apply their skills and knowledge and focusing on our local Pacific Northwest region or a location of a student's choice. Students must complete an in-program Internship Learning Contract in consultation with the faculty and Academic Advising. Please go to [Individual Study](#) for more information.

Research Possibilities

Spring quarter students will embark on in-program internships, field studies, or research and service projects to apply their skills and knowledge and focusing on our local Pacific Northwest region or a location of a student's choice