

GEOG 4420: Capitalism, Nature & Climate Change (Spring 2026)
Tuesdays and Thursdays 9.30 am to 10.50 am.
ENV 345

Instructor: Dr. Waquar Ahmed

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11 am to 12 pm and by appointment.

Office location: ENV 310C

Email: Waquar.Ahmed@unt.edu

Overview:

GEOG 4420: Capitalism, Nature & Climate Change is a course offered by the Department of Geography, University of North Texas at Denton. The purpose of this course is to provide students a roadmap through the important literature on theories and empirical research on political economy of capitalism, relationship between population and resource, and climate change.

Readings:

Required books:

Harvey, David. 1996. *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Saito, K. 2022. *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Additional readings are posted on Canvas.

Course Requirements:

- 1. Mid-term exam**
- 2. Abstract for term paper** – Each student must write a 1-page (excluding references) abstract (1-inch margin on all sides, font size not less than 11.5, and line spacing of 2). Your abstract must also clearly identify your database and methodology. At the top, the proposed title of your term paper must be provided. At the bottom (after the abstract), 5 keywords pertaining to your proposed term paper must be provided.
- 3. Research Term paper** – Students must write a 12-page term paper (based on the abstract that they have already written). The term paper should have a good balance of theory and empirical evidence. The evidence should demonstrate that qualitative or/and quantitative data have been processed based on one or more methodologies.
- 4. Presentation of term paper**
- 5. End-term exam** – This will be a take home essay. You will need to answer, in not more than 8 pages, the question(s) that will be made available a couple of weeks before the end of classes.
- 6. Attendance**
- 7. Participation** – You are expected to participate in class discussions.

Late submissions and presentation of research paper or change in date of exam is not allowed unless there is a documented case of illness, family emergency or/and university event for which UNT provides documentation or special excuse. Attendance in class is mandatory.

Grading:

Abstract for term paper: 2 percent

Mid-term: 20 percent

Presentation of term paper: 10 percent

End term exam: 25 percent

Term paper: 18 percent

Class Participation: 10 percent

Attendance: 15 percent

Your points will be added up at the end of the semester and grades will be awarded as follows (or adjusted based on a curve):

A	85 to 100
B	75 to <85
C	70 to <75
D	65 to <70
F	< 65

Points for attendance

<i>Attendance Percentage</i>	<i>Points (out of 15)</i>
95% and above	15
90 % and above but less than 95%	13
85 % and above but less than 90%	10
75 % and above but less than 85%	8
70 % and above but less than 75%	5
Less than 70%	0

Grades are important, get a good one.

I reserve the right to make reasonable and responsible changes in the syllabus based on our progress, and any special requirement that may arise as the semester progresses. You will be notified about these changes well in advance.

Important Dates:

February 20: Abstract due

March 5: Mid-term exam

April 17: Research paper due

April 30: End term Exam

Section I: Introduction to course

January 13 and 15: Resource and Scarcity

Sayre NF (2017) Scarcity. In: Richardson D, Castree N, Goodchild MF, et al. (eds) *The International Encyclopedia of Geography*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Section II: Relationship between population, economy and the environment:**January 20 and 22: Classical political economy of population and environment**

Smith, A. 1776. *The Wealth of Nations*, Book I: Chapter 8; Book 2: Introduction, chapters I and V. Bantam Classics. (electronic book available in library: <https://iii.library.unt.edu/search~S2?aSmith+Adam/asmith+adam;T=Wealth+of+Nations/1%2C28%2C0%2CB/frameset&FF=asmith+adam;T=Wealth+of+Nation&s%2C28%2C>)

Malthus, T. 1998 (1798). *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Chapters 1 through 7. Electronic Scholarly Publishing Project. [cited January 8 2010]. Available from <http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf>.

January 27: The specter of Malthus – conceptions/misconceptions on population and environment

Harding, G. 1968. The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science* 162 (3859): 1243-1248. Available from: <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/reprint/162/3859/1243.pdf>

January 29 and February 3, 5, 10, 12, 17, 19 and 24: Re-conceptualizing relationship between capitalism, population and the environment.

Marx, K. 1887. *Capital Volume 1*. Chapters 1 (commodities: particularly sections 1, 2 and 4), 7 (The labor-process and the process of producing surplus value), 25 (The general law of capitalist accumulation), 26 (The secret of primitive accumulation), 27 (Expropriation of the agricultural population from the land), 33 (The modern theory of colonization). Available from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive Marx/works/1867-c1/>

Harvey, D. 1996. *Justice, nature, and the geography of difference*. **Part II**: the nature of environment (pp. 117- 204); **Part IV**: justice, difference and politics (pp. 329-438) Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Section III: Capitalism and commodification of nature**February 26, and March 3 and 17: Political economy of accumulation and sustainability**

Anderson, P. (2023) The Standard of Civilization. *New Left Review*, 143, 5-29.

Demeritt, D. 2011. The Antinomies of Sustainable Development: Sustaining What, How,

and For Whom. In *The SAGE Handbook of Economic Geography*, eds. A. Leyshon, R. Lee, L. McDowell & P. Sunley, 231-241. London: SAGE.

Smith, N. 2007. Nature as accumulation strategy. *Socialist Register* 43:17-36.

March 5: Mid-term Exam

Section IV: From Self-destruction to Self-realization

March 24, 26 and 31, April 2, 7, and 9

Fraser, N. (2021). Climates of Capital: For a Trans-Environmental Eco-Socialism. *New Left Review*, 127(Jan/Feb), 94-127.

Saito, K. 2022. *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Part I: Marx's Ecological Critique of Capitalism and its Oblivion

Part II: A Critique of Productive Forces in the Age of Ecological Crisis

Part III: Towards Degrowth Communism

April 14 and 16: Consumption and Technology

Foster, J. B. (2023) Planned Degrowth: Ecosocialism and Sustainable Human Development — An Introduction. *Monthly Review*, 75. <https://monthlyreview.org/2023/07/01/planned-degrowth/> (last accessed January 12, 2024).

Hickel, J. (2023) On Technology and Degrowth. *Monthly Review*, 75, 3. <https://monthlyreview.org/2023/07/01/on-technology-and-degrowth/> (last accessed January 15, 2024).

Presentation of research papers: April 21, 23 and 28.

April 30: Final Exam