AMAZON SEMINAR:
ENVIRONMENT, PEOPLE AND OPPORTUNITY ON THE LAST FRONTIER
IDH 3990
Fall 2007 –SYLLABUS

Instructors:
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Enrollment: Limited to a maximum of 25 students

GENERAL INFORMATION
This is the first semester of an innovative and interdisciplinary Honors College course that culminates with a four-week field element in the Amazon rainforest of Peru. During this semester, students are introduced to various aspects of the Amazon, ranging from its geological and ecological history, its colonization and exploitation by Native Americans, its exploration by European “discoverers”, its biodiversity, and the current challenges facing the Amazon environment and its people.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Handouts and assigned films/videos

COURSE SCHEDULE
Classes will meet for a two-period session an average of every two weeks. This will allow for screening of films in addition to lectures and discussion of reading materials.

Anticipated Dates:
7 Sep (Fri): Origins/Definitions/Perceptions/Myths of the Amazon
21 Sep (Fri): Geology, Hydrology and Climate of the Amazon
5 Oct (Fri): Human History of the Amazon (the first colonizers – Native Americans)
19 Oct (Fri): Human History of the Amazon (Western “discoverers” and the colonial period)
2 Nov (Fri): Ecology of the Amazon
9 Nov (Fri): Initial project proposals due
16 Nov (Fri): Biodiversity and Natural History of the Amazon
16 Nov (Fri): DEADLINE for payment of non-refundable deposit of $400. If students later receive financial aid that covers their full program costs, personal funds will be returned when the financial aid comes through.
30 Nov (Fri): Final class for semester: Summary, discussion of preliminary project ideas
Christmas/New Years Break

MATERIAL TO BE COVERED
Amazon Background
1. What is the Amazon –physical boundaries, how it is defined, in what countries is it located.
2. Origins of the Amazon – overview events that led to the physical origins of the Amazon basin.
3. Climate of the Amazon –current climate patterns of the Amazon
MATERIAL TO BE COVERED CONT’D.

Biodiversity and Ecology of the Amazon
1. How the Amazon “functions” ecologically
2. Origins of the Amazon flora, fauna, and biodiversity in general
3. What are the primary groups of organisms that dominate the Amazon
4. Models for explaining patterns of biodiversity

Humans and the Amazon
1. Overview of the history of human occupation of the Amazon.
2. Comparison of pre-historic and modern patterns of land use in the Amazon.
3. Influence of pre-European peoples on the Amazonian landscape.
4. Diversity of pre-European peoples – culture, language, resource use.
5. Influence of European colonization on the Amazon.
6. Exploration of the Amazon by the West – primary figures and their accomplishments and contributions.
7. Exploitation of the Amazon by the West – successes, failures, and ecological impacts.
8. Current issues in management and use of resources from the Amazon.
9. Myths and legends of the Amazon at the time of discovery through the modern era.

The Future of the Amazon
1. Current ecological/social/political pressures on the Amazon environment
2. Proposed solutions to “saving” or “sustainably using” the Amazon
3. Examples of successful/failed projects.

GRADING & COURSE EVALUATIONS
Grading will be computed on the basis of 100 points as follows:

20 Participation – being at class and actively participating in class activities and discussion.
   This doesn’t mean you need to be talking/responding all the time, but it does mean that
   you should show active interest, ask questions, express your opinions and viewpoints, and
   stay for the full duration of the class period.
20 Reading quizzes – these are given at the beginning of each class, NO MAKE-UPS. These
   quizzes will be relatively easy if you’re keeping up with the material and readings. They
   will include general questions on the readings of the day. There will be 5 quizzes (4
   points each) for a total of 20 points. Quizzes may include the occasional bonus point. The
   objective of these quizzes is to encourage you to read class material before coming to
   class – for meaningful participatory discussion in class, it is essential for everyone to
   have read the material.
20 Reaction papers
20 Miscellaneous assignments and presentations TBA
20 Urban field experience – Latin American cultural events, biological exhibits, etc
   followed by reaction papers – some events may be pay events.

Grades are based on the following percentages (equivalent to numbers of points)

A = 94-100    A- = 90-93    B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86    B- = 80-82    C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76    C- = 70-72    D+ = 67-69
D = 63-66    D- = 60-62    F = 0-59
RESOURCES FOR USE IN THE COURSE

Films:
Anaconda
Fitzcarraldo
Pantaleón y las Visitadoras Nocturnas
At play in the Fields of the Lord
Aguirre, Wrath of God
The Medicine Man
Documentaries dealing with gold rush, dams, drugs, culture clashes, etc.

Books:
Identification Guides – for plants, birds, mammals, fish, insects, reptiles and amphibians, etc.

Articles/PDFs/Handouts/Other
As we develop lectures and discussions, we will compile a list of articles and handouts for students.