This course is an advanced interdisciplinary seminar that examines the commodification of nature from a range of theoretical approaches, and incorporates the policy literature as well for critical evaluation. The focus on this course is mainly on attempts to create markets for new kinds of commodities in nature, such as ecosystem services and carbon credits, rather than on the traditional forms in which nature has been appropriated as a material stock of inputs into production. The course readings will focus on the way that nature is brought into market relations in new ways in late capitalist society, specifically for exchange on markets. One emphasis will be on critical understandings of the very nature of commodities and markets themselves. A second emphasis will be for students, in their papers, to examine existing policy initiatives and engage with the on-the-ground practicalities of elaborating new markets in ecosystem service commodities, carbon credits, and biodiversity.

This is meant to be a policy-relevant course, even as it plumbs the depths of critical theories of nature and knowledge. Policies on ecosystem service commodification are rapidly-developing, and the subject has the attention of politicians, economists, bureaucrats and managers from the United Nations on down to local resource management agencies. As an arena of practice, it describes an incredibly potent venue for exploring critical questions of value, the objectivity of nature, and the creation and reformulation of economic relations. The mix of readings is designed to explore the tension between critical social theory, mainstream economic theory, and policy implementation in the rapidly-changing world of ecosystem service commodification.

The main objective of this course is to give students an understanding of the theoretical roots of market environmentalism, the principle criticisms made of it, and the perils and opportunities it presents.

Students are expected to complete all readings and to come to class prepared with notes and discussion points. As explained below, this preparation and participation is the primary component of the class. I expect your participation to be active, civil and respectful of the different experiences and interests of seminar students.

*Use theory only as a periscope or a trampoline, never a panopticon, a crib sheet or a license to kill.*

John Leonard

**Course requirements and grading**

The emphasis in evaluation will be on the weekly readings and a high level of engagement in the seminar meetings. Each participant will lead two weekly discussions, and for each they will prepare a paper of around 1000 words each, in reaction to and elaboration of the week’s readings. The
students will sign up for these papers at the beginning of the semester, and come prepared to lead discussion on the day they have written the reaction papers. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings, whether or not they have written a paper on the weekly readings. Late papers will not be accepted.

Students will be required to submit a research paper on a case of, or issue in, market environmentalism, of no more than 5000 words. Should students decide to use the end of the semesters for presentations, students will give short (20 min) presentations on their research papers in the form of a conference session.

Your final grade will reflect your performance in class, the weekly papers, the final paper and presentation. The breakdown of your grade will be:

1) Weekly engagement: completion of reading assignments, in-class participation at a high level, and quality of weekly papers. 50%
2) Peer reviews of paper first drafts DUE FRIDAY APR 25: 10%
3) Final paper DUE FRIDAY MAY 9: 30%
4) Presentation: 10% (should the class elect not to do presentations, this component of the grade will be combined with the final paper).

Readings and Schedule of classes

PDFs of weekly readings will be made available online on the class Learn@UW site each week, with the exception of the following books that students should order:


**Week 1 (1/24): From Theory to Practice**


**Week 2 (1/31): Commodity theory**
Week 3 (2/7): Value, utility and price

Week 4 (2/14): What is a market?

Week 5 (2/21): Commodification of nature
Week 6 (2/28): NO CLASS – Dimensions of Political Ecology Conference

Week 7 (3/7): Neoliberalism and Nature

Week 8 (3/14): Ecosystem Services I

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (3/28): Ecosystem Services II
Shapiro-Garza, E. 2013. Contesting the market-based nature of Mexico’s national payments for ecosystem services programs: Four sites of articulation and hybridization. Geoforum.
Kosoy & Corbera 2010 Payments for ecosystem services as commodity fetishism
**Week 11 (4/4): Enclosing the new commons?**


**Week 12 (4/11): NO CLASS – AAG Conference**

**Week 13 (4/18): Measurement**


**Week 16 (5/2): Presentations or Finance II**

Pryke, Randalls, MacKenzie, Svetlova

**Week 17 (5/9): Presentations or Biocapital and Materiality**

Collard & Dempsey 2013, Rajan, Cooper, Collard Annals 2014