Seminar on Amazonia
GEA 4465/GEA 6466
LAS 4935/LAS 6938
Fall Semester 2019

Monday periods 6-8 (12:50-3:50)  Rm: Turlington 3006
roberttwalker@ufl.edu

Office Hourse
Thursdays 1:00-3:00PM or by appointment
313 Grinter

Robert Walker

Description: This course addresses the region in northern South America variously referred to as Amazonia, “The Amazon Basin,” or simply “The Amazon.” For the past several decades, world attention has often focused on Amazonia as a region under assault by the forces of development. But even with the vast transformation that has occurred here, the region still shelters an expansive ecosystem of critical importance to global biodiversity and biogeochemical cycles. Thus, Amazonia remains an important arena in which development and conservation come into contention, and have yet to find an equilibrium or resolution. This course attempts to fully explicate this confrontation, and to equip students with the knowledge they will need to understand the issues at stake.

Consequently, the course takes a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary view of the region, touching on its cultural heritage, its colonial history, its ecological function, and its ongoing agricultural and industrial development. That is, we address Amazonia from a variety of angles, formulating our understandings and drawing our conclusions on the basis of an inter-disciplinary reckoning. We will be reading in both the social and biophysical sciences, and therefore exposing ourselves to a transdisciplinary mix of vocabularies and paradigms. A student should not be intimidated by this, but excited and challenged. As necessary, the instructor will use class time for brief technical accounts, so that the readings can be digested to maximum effect.

Course Materials: The course materials are assigned readings, to be completed prior to each class.

Class preparation: You are expected to be prepared for each class session. Preparation includes not only reading the assigned materials, but also reflecting upon the readings and being able to discuss them intelligently. The instructor will solicit class participation both by calling on students and by asking for volunteers.

Office hours: The instructor would like to get to know as many of you as possible, and encourages you to drop by during office hours (posted outside my two offices).

Announcements: Class announcements (if any) will be made in class and distributed electronically. You are responsible for remaining informed.
**Incompletes and Deferrals:** Final grades will be submitted for all students during finals week. No grades of incomplete or deferral will be submitted for students without a medical excuse or family emergency.

**Grading-Components**

The grading scale is:

96-100%: 4.0  
91-95.9%: 3.5  
86-90.9%: 3.0  
70-85.9%: 2.5  
less than 70%: let’s talk

A. **Attendance and Participation (40%)**

Attendance and participation are mandatory. There is an expectation that each student will be prepared and will participate in class. You should not miss more than one class for any reason. Students should expect to be called on to answer questions in every class. Excessive absences and poor participation will result in final grades being lowered. Points in class will be assigned on the basis of discussions of the readings. Each week, a couple of students will be selected to lead these discussions. This will involve a set of typed notes, prepared by the students, to be distributed in class, with at least five discussion points. The expectation is that the student team will prepare about two pages of notes touching on and highlighting the five discussion points; they, in turn, will lead the class discussion. I want a joint, collaborative product, i.e., one set of notes, and will pay attention to the extent to which students spark exchange and comprehension.

If you choose to present in power point, it is your responsibility to be sure to have the computer up and running, and your data ready to go. The instructor is not an audio-visual technician.

**Undergraduates**  
Undergraduate students will be paired with graduate students for the weekly discussion.

B. **Class Paper (60%)**

There will be one (1) research paper required for the course. The elements of this paper include an outline (5%), draft (5%), presentation of outline and final paper (10%), and final paper (40%). These elements are due at specified dates throughout the semester.

The class paper should be based upon a topic of interest to the student, somewhat familiar to them, and relevant to class materials. The paper should be at least 15 pages in length (double spaced, 1” margins, Times New Roman with 12 point font) **excluding endnotes, references, figures, tables, etc.,** which should follow the 15 (or more) pages of text.

The instructor expects the students’ class paper to be written and organized at a level sufficient for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. The class paper should be comparable to the first part of a full manuscript excluding data collection, analysis, and discussion.
Outline. Students’ draft outlines (due week 6) must show that students have selected an appropriate topic, and have begun to organize their thoughts and to write logically. They must be at least 2-pages in length and should not be restricted to simple outline format; rather phases, complete sentences, paragraphs, etc. are required.

Draft. I expect a version of the paper that is basically “done.” This will enable me to make comments that truly advance the organizational and conceptual abilities of the students, without getting lost in copyediting and in premature thinking. A bibliography is required.

Presentation. A professional quality presentation is required, with PowerPoint. Length of presentation should be 15-minutes, plus 5 minutes of questions and answers. This will be conducted like a mini-conference, and people will be invited to attend, including other faculty and graduate students.

Note to all, especially non-native English speakers: your final paper will be graded on content AND form. You are strongly encouraged to make use of peer review, university resources, and other resources, to ensure your paper reads well and is free of grammatical errors. If grammatical errors persist in the final draft, you will be penalized.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND PAPER

For undergraduate students, the requirement is 8 pages. Plus, the required draft is not due in advance, although the professor will read if desired.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the appropriation of the words, ideas, or thoughts of another and representation of them as one’s own original work. Notice the breadth of that definition. You must cite another author not only for direct quotations, but also for the use of ideas and for the paraphrasing of another’s work. To do a proper job of crediting you sources, it is not uncommon to have one citation for every two or three sentences of your paper.

Submission of work: Due dates for all assignments are in the syllabus. Papers are to be submitted electronically. Late papers will not be accepted without medical excuse or family emergency.
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READINGS

Why Should We Care?

Required:


The Amazonian Water World:
http://ragazine.cc/2014/03/robert-walkerthe-amazonian-water-world/

Additional Resources:


Week 2 Ecosystem Services

Required:


**Week 3 Cultural Resources and Riches**

*Required:*


*Additional Resources:*

Map of Curt Nimuendajú


**Week 4 Amazonia as an Ecosystem 1: LBA Science, Climate and Precipitation**

*Required:*


Week 5 Amazonia as an Ecosystem 2: Teleconnections and Tipping Points

Required:


Week 6 Outline Presentations and Discussion

Week 7 The Development Story: The Early Days & Rubber

Required:


Additional Resources:


Week 8 The Development Story: Military Regime & Aftermath
Required:


Additional Resources:


**Week 9 Theories of Environmental Change**

Required:


Additional Resources:


**Week 10 An Evolving Economy**
Required:


**Week 11 The Deforestation “Issue” 1**

Required:


**Week 12 The Deforestation “Issue” 2**

Required:


**Week 13 The End of Deforestation?**

*Required:*


**Week 14 Does Amazonia Have a Future?**

*Required:*


http://www.iirsa.org/

**Week 15 Student Presentations**

*Just for Fun:*
Candice Millard. *The River of Doubt*

David Grann. *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon*

Joe Jackson. *The Thief at the End of the World: Rubber, Power, and the Seeds of Empire*