

Ethnobotany
ENV2203.01, 2 credits
Fri 10:10-12:00, Dickinson 225
Bennington College
Spring 2013

Dr. Valerie Imbruce

Office hours: Tues and Thurs 1-2pm. Sign up on my office door.

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This course will be a cross-cultural study of the relationships between people and plants. We will focus on how indigenous peoples around the world today know and use plants for food, medicine, shelter, and spiritual healing. We will examine folk taxonomies, the role of plants in religion and cosmology, the conservation of genetic diversity, and the ethics of bioprospecting and scientific documentation of indigenous knowledge. The course will include basic botany as well as cultural studies.

Books

Balick and Cox. 1996. *Plants, People, and Culture: The Science of Ethnobotany*. New York: Scientific American Library

***all other readings will be available on the library e-reserves. The password for the course is **plant**. Please refer to your email for more detailed instructions.

Course Learning Objectives

- To understand the interdependence of biological and cultural diversity,
- To learn botanical methods for plant identification, collection, and assays for biological activity,

Course Organization, Attendance and Assessment:

The course meets once per week for 1 hour and 50 minutes. There will be one field trip when you will be asked to meet at 1pm. You are expected to be on time and prepared. Participation in class discussion and activities is a core requirement of the course. There may be course related events that will take place outside of our regular meeting time, documentary film screenings and community meetings that you will be asked to attend. Please inform me as soon as you know that you will not be able to attend a class, or soon after sickness or emergency. You may be permitted one absence that must be excused by me. Excessive lateness may be considered an absence. Class absences that are not excused may result in no credit for the course. Failure to complete assignments or plagiarism can also result in failure of the course.

Your evaluation will be based on the following criteria:

Course Evaluation
25% Class Participation
15% Essay #1
10% Chinese plant food
15% Brine Shrimp Lab
10% Herbarium Specimen
25% Final Project

Tentative Schedule

I. People and plants through time and space

Feb 22: Intro to ethnobotany

Mar 1: Ethnobotanical knowledge

- Balick and Cox, Chapter 1
- Smith, E. 2001. On the coevolution of cultural, linguistic and biological diversity, in Maffi (ed.) *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, knowledge and the environment*. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press.

Mar 8: Ethnobotanical exploration

- Balick and Cox, Chapter 2
- Moran, K. 1999. Toward Compensation: Returning Benefits from Ethnobotanical Drug Discovery to Native Peoples Ethnoecology in Nazarea (ed.) *Ethnoecology: Situated knowledge/located lives*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- **DUE, 3 page essay** addressing the questions: What is the significance of ethnobotany to western and non-western societies? What is the relationship between cultural and biological diversity?

II. Plants as Food

Mar 15: From Hunting and Gathering to Agriculture

- Balick and Cox, Chapter 3
- Tropical Nature Bugs and Drugs, Ch 8

Mar 22: Domesticating Plants

- Johns, T. 1990. Domestication as a Solution for Dealing with Plant Toxins, Chapter 4 from *The Origins of Human Diet and Medicine*, Tucson: U of Arizona Press.

Mar 29: Food as Medicine

- EN Anderson, 1988. Traditional Medical Values of Food, Chapter 11 in *The Food of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- **DUE, 2 page summary** about a Chinese food plant of your choice

Apr 5: Field Trip to Asian Supermarket in Albany ****meet at NOON at flagpole

- Read class summaries about Chinese food plants

Apr 12: Long Weekend – no class

III. Ethnobotany in a Global World

Apr 19: Plant morphology of local medicinal and edible plants

- Resources: Peterson Field Guide to Medicinal Plants and Herbs of Eastern and Central America, Ebrary book at Crossett
- Online botanical key: <http://gobotany.newenglandwild.org/simple>

Apr 26: Entering the Other World

- Balick and Cox, Chapter 5

May 3: Migration and Retention of Medicinal Plant Use, guest Dr. Ina Vandebroek

***Due – 2 page response essay to the two readings below**

- P. Muniz de Medeiros, Gustavo Taboada Soldati, Nelson Leal, Alencar, Ina Vandebroek, Andrea Pieroni, N. Hanazaki, and Ulysses Paulino de Albuquerque. 2012. The Use of Medicinal Plants by Migrant People: Adaptation, Maintenance, and Replacement. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. Volume 2012: 1-11.
- Vandebroek and Balick. 2012. Globalization and Loss of Plant Knowledge: Challenging the Paradigm. *PLoS ONE* 7(5):e37643

May 10: Botanizing field trip

- Familiarize yourself with FIVE plants that you would expect to find at the time of year in moist, deciduous woods, use Peterson guide and gobotany from Apr 19 and...
- Short Aldrich trail Spring Ephemeral Plants by Isabel Marlens '12
- Brill and Dean. 1994. Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal plants, on reserve at Crossett

May 17: Retention of Traditional Knowledge with Migration

- Nesheim, Dhillon and Stolen. 2006. What Happens to Traditional Knowledge and Use of Natural Resources when People Migrate? *Human Ecology* 34(1): 99-131.

May 24: Last Class – Towards a Bennington Ethnobotany

- Herbarium specimen preparation in class
- Bennington ethnobotany project due