

Power, Politics and Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon

LAS/GEO 480 and 580 ---- Spring term 2012 ---- Tuesdays 10:00 to 12:30

Instructor: Sylvia Tesh, PhD

Almost 20 percent of the Brazilian Amazon has now been cut down and despite the alarm of most Brazilians and of environmentalists across the globe, deforestation continues. Why is this happening and what can be done about it?

This seminar examines the wide variety of causal explanations and policy proposals offered by Latin American and North American geographers, ecologists, economists, political scientists, historians, anthropologists, journalists and environmental activists. In this thicket of information we will pay close attention to such things as the authors' theoretical assumptions (explicit and implicit); the ways they frame their information, and the possible effects of their analyses on the deforestation dilemma.

Some questions the course addresses:

Why save the Amazon? For whom? For what?

Who is cutting down the trees?

What Brazilian laws aim to protect the Amazon forest? What limits their effect?

Would it work to pay people to leave trees standing?

How strong are Brazilian environmental organizations? Can foreign environmentalists affect Brazilian policymakers?

How big a role does Amazon deforestation play in global climate change?

Are hydroelectric dams, mining, paved roads, and petrochemical plants in the Amazon forest OK if they reduce poverty in Brazil even though they increase deforestation?