ENVS 84 -2014
SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Socio-ecological study of the !Nara plant and its commercial and subsistence harvest.

!Nara

Gobabeb

Namib

Topnaar

Dartmouth

Desert

Desert

Hills

Namibia

This diagram represents some of the major components of the socio-ecological system (there could be others) that you will be entering in ENVS84. Note that “Dartmouth” (representing our FSP, you) is part of the system. So as much as any of the other components we want to be self-reflexive and aware of our position in this dynamic system. What we are asking you to do in ENVS84 is to engage in this system in a thoughtful, productive and scholarly way. In the broadest sense we are asking you to be curious about this entire system – all the components.

You can begin to reach a deeper understanding of the system by rigorously examining the relationship among any two (or more) of these components. What questions can you ask about the relationship between the Nara and the Namib, between Gobabeb and the Topnaar, between Dartmouth and the Topnaar, etc.? You can also deepen your understanding by investigating the complexity within each component.

As with ENVS 42 the great challenge of the FSP is to try to synthesize the theoretical with the empirical. Ask yourself what formalism can you bring to bear from your academic background to give you the means to describe and understand these relationships?

It’s important to consider the nature of this project. Just to be clear, this is a research project. It is not a service project, though it could be of service to some in the Topnaar community or at Gobabeb. This is not a development project, though it could inform those efforts also. It’s important to recognize that this is real research not a “canned” research experience. It will require that you all take ownership of this project. However, you also must recognize that, as with all research projects, there are constraints on what you can do. Some of those constraints are logistical and involve limitations in terms of time, manpower, money, facilities etc. Other constraints are intrinsic to working with partners. We will be working with our partners at Gobabeb and in the Topnaar community. We have to be sensitive to
their opinions and priorities. We will have to reach consensus with them about what activities are feasible, ethical and productive.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

- Learn about and practice conducting original research related to the themes of conservation and development
- Participate in community-based research
- Identify and reflect on ethical issues associated with engaging in community-based research
- Recognize opportunities for constructive engagement in complex, messy social-ecological systems,
- Collectively act on those opportunities by engaging in the system, with a balance of ambition and humility

At the conclusion of this portion of the trip, students will develop the following skills:

1. Ability to conduct original research, including problem identification, study design, data collection and analysis, and solutions development
2. Negotiation skills working with other actors in the system to identify research projects
3. Ability to identify ethical considerations of community-based research and action in novel cultures and contexts
4. Capacity to work collaboratively to accomplish goals, particularly dynamic and largely unfamiliar environments
5. Ability to analyze and develop solutions to/make progress on complex problems, particularly related to conservation and development
What are the products of your group effort:

1. **A final presentation** at Gobabeb. More on this later.
2. **Group papers or other products.** One objective is for you to help pave the way for future FSP groups and others interested in this system. In addition to future FSPers the audience for these papers includes Gobabeb and interested members of the Topnaar community. See the papers in the reader from the 2013 group. You will have access to the Gobabeb library and internet while there and internet access in Swakopmund for 3 days after our stay at Gobabeb to further contextualize and develop your ideas.

Individual products:

1. **Research journal.** The instructions you received for the ENVS42 journal apply here as well. Be sure that you set aside time each day to write in this journal. You should have an entry for each day from November 2 until I collect the journals near the end of the program. Go back to the ENVS42 syllabus and review the difference between “descriptive” and “reflective” entries. Be sure to place an emphasis on reflective entries in this journal.
2. **Subjective reflective essay.** Try to capture and elaborate on the interaction between your own experiences and observations in southern Africa and the theory and broader empiricism that you derived from reading the literature both on the program and back at Dartmouth. This essay can take many forms and is one of the creative expressions of your term long research effort. You can focus on any aspect of how you have made sense of these two different ways of acquiring knowledge. Do your best to capture your best thinking about how experience and abstract knowledge have interacted in your mind over the course of your research. The best essays will be true to your subjective experience and grapple with the complexity of this synthesis. Don’t feel you have capture all of your experiences on the trip. Instead focus on whatever is most relevant or important to the theme of the essay. Length: 2-3 double spaced pages, 700-1000 words. Due: Noon, November 16.
3. **A brief summary of your contributions to the group effort.** Concisely and specifically describe what your contributions were to the activities in Gobabeb, to the preparations of the final presentation and group papers. Due November 16. This need only be a paragraph or two.

Approximate contributions to final grade:

| Contributions to the group effort and final presentation | 40% |
| Journal | 35% |
| Final essay | 25% |

I want to re-emphasize that this is not a “canned” academic experience but rather an opportunity to engage constructively with a real socio-ecological system. So we must all remain flexible, fully engaged, good humored and alert to the opportunities for doing useful work.