UVM in Nepal
Changing Communities - The Forbidden Kingdom of Mustang

May 20- June 21, 2013
HST 095/ANTH 095/GEOG 095/GRS 095 - 6 credits
Instructors: Abigail McGowan and Lisa Conlon

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this off-campus program, we will explore the history of the Mustang region of Nepal to understand how global forces are affecting geographically isolated communities. Based in one of the most remote sections of Nepal on the border with Tibet, the program will introduce you to a community undergoing profound transitions—culturally, socially, politically, linguistically, and religiously. Through a ten-day initial orientation in Burlington, and then four weeks in Nepal, we will examine how this Tibetan Buddhist area has adapted to those changes, and what strategies have emerged for facing further changes in the future.

During the course, we will have three main thematic areas of focus. First, we will look at the various ways in which Mustang is and has been connected to the outside world historically through trade, migration, national policies, and more. To do this, we will visit families whose sons and daughters have migrated to the US and elsewhere for work, explore state education policies to see how the state is promoting a single Nepali identity among diverse linguistic and ethnic groups, and analyze the profound effect that took place when China took over Tibet and closed the previously open border to trade. Second, we will explore environmental changes in the region, where 2” of annual rainfall leave very little margin for weather variations or human mistakes, analyzing how adaptations to landscape have changed over time. Finally, we will assess cultural responses to change, from conservation efforts to preserve historic monuments led by groups like the American Himalayan Foundation, to educational initiatives to promote the use of dying languages, to the conflicts that arise when tradition and modernity compete.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course requirements include five components, worth the following portions of your grade:

- Three short papers (2 pages/10% each) 30%
- Pre-departure presentation 10%
- During trip writing notebook 20%
- Participation 20%
- Post-trip paper 20%

NOTES ON REQUIREMENTS

1. **Three short papers**: As you will on the syllabus, there are three short papers listed in all, due every other day during the initial orientation. The short papers are designed to familiarize you with the four key thematic topics on which the course focuses and to get you thinking critically about the readings assigned for class. You obviously can’t work out in full detail all your ideas in two pages or less, which is the limit for these papers. You do, however, need to do three things.
First, each paper must have a thesis that answers the question posed in the assignment. Second, the paper must present evidence from the readings to support your argument. And third, that evidence must be properly cited using Chicago style footnotes.

Since these papers are designed to help you get ideas on paper and work out your evidence, I will not be giving them extensive feedback. Rather, I will use a grading rubric indicating areas of success or weakness; I will give you a copy of this ahead of time, so you know my expectations. Overall I will grade papers with only a 0-4 scale, with a 1 corresponding to a 65 (or a D), 2 = 75 (or a C), 3 =85 (or B), and 4 = 95 (or A); papers that fail to meet the expectations at all (in terms of either not addressing the assigned question or not including adequately cited evidence) will receive a zero. NOTE: Since the short papers are designed to prepare you for discussion, I will not accept them after class at all. Period. No excuses, no exceptions.

2. Pre-departure presentation: **TUESDAY MAY 28TH:** On the final day of the UVM-based orientation, you will be responsible for a group presentation summarizing what we have learned so far about one of the four themes of the course. This will be your chance to draw together all the orientation materials on that theme, as well as to highlight what you think are the key issues that we as a group should focus on related to that topic as we leave for Nepal. This presentation is also the foundation for your post-trip paper, which will ask you, after our time in Nepal is over, to reflect back on how your ideas on your theme have changed by being in country.

3. Trip writing assignments: During the trip, you will keep a notebook recording written responses to topics/questions assigned for each day. (For specific writing prompts, see below on the daily schedule.) This notebook will be turned in at the end of the trip, and will be graded for thoughtfulness of responses. We will set aside time at the end of each day for you to write up your reflections on the day’s events and activities.

4. Participation: You are expected to participate in all program activities and events, except in cases of illness. This includes the initial two-week orientation at UVM, which will run five days a week, eight hours a day. The orientation is an integral part of the course, so you MUST participate in the full two weeks to go to Nepal.

5. Final paper: **DUE DATE JULY 5th, 5 pm (via email):** After the completion of the trip, you will revisit the topic on which you made the group presentation on the last day of orientation in Burlington, and submit a 7-8 page reflection paper explaining how your ideas about that topic changed during your time in Nepal. **NOTE:** This paper must be turned in by the assigned time and day. Late papers will be penalized a full letter grade per day. In other words, if you submit an A paper a day late, it will now be B paper. If it is two days late, it will be a C.

**READING MATERIALS**

All readings will be available on Blackboard; there are no books necessary for this course.

**POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

**Academic Honesty:** Please be advised that I take academic honesty seriously and personally, and will expect you to uphold the highest standards of honesty in this class. Plagiarism or other offenses against the university’s policies will result in an F for the class. We will discuss plagiarism in class, but for a full explanation of the university’s policies regarding academic honesty, see: [http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/pbg/student/acadintegrity.pdf](http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/pbg/student/acadintegrity.pdf)
Special needs: I am happy to accommodate students with specific learning needs; please let me know if you are entitled by the university to special provisions or assistance.

SCHEDULE FOR ORIENTATION

May 20th, Monday
Morning session: Introduction
  9-10: Welcome and overview of course themes
  10-11: Film: “Mustang: A Kingdom on the Edge”
  11-12: Discussion of film
Afternoon session: Subsistence in Nepal
  1-2: Lecture: Basic subsistence in the hills
  3-5: Gear check and health overview
EVENING EVENT: Group dinner at Nepali Kitchen, College Street, Burlington, 5-7
Need to choose your topic area by the end of the day today: one of the three themes.

May 21st, Tuesday
Morning session: Religion and society in Nepal
  9-10: Religious traditions in Nepal: Hinduism, Buddhism, Bon
  10-11: Film: “Cave People from the Himalaya”
  11-12: Lecture: Religion institutions in Nepal: Monasteries & monastic life
Afternoon session: Power and authority in Nepal up to 1951
  1-2: Lecture: Political authority: the challenge of integration up to the 1960s
  2-5: Introduction to Nepali language
    GUEST SPEAKER: Members of local Nepali community

May 22nd, Wednesday
READING:
Peter Bishop, The Myth of Shangri-la, 1-24
Orville Schell, Virtual Tibet, 3-49
FIRST PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: In what ways does Western popular culture distort the image of the Himalayan region?

Morning session: A brief history of Nepal
  9-10:30: Politics and power down to the 1960s
  10:30-12: US Development in Nepal
    GUEST SPEAKER: Scott Skinner, Former Peace Corps volunteer to Nepal
Afternoon session: Western perceptions of the Himalayas
  1-2: Discussion of readings
  2-2:45: Himalayas in popular culture
  2:45-5: Film: “Lost Horizons”
May 23rd, Thursday
Morning session: Politics and governance in Nepal, 1960s to present
   9-10: Integration and cultural identity down to the 1990s
   10-11: Film: “The CIA in Tibet: The Shadow Circus”
   11-12: State failures, popular and armed resistance

Afternoon session: Violence and revolution in contemporary Nepal
   1-3: Film: “Sari Soldiers”
   3-5: Everyday effects of violence, state failures
       GUEST SPEAKER: Jay Niroula

May 24th, Friday: Preservation and Tradition
READING:
Broughton Coburn, Nepali Aama: Portrait of a Nepalese Hill Woman, selections
SECOND PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: What, from these selections, do you think are two of Aama’s core beliefs—about how the world works, what is good and proper, or what is wrong with the world?

Morning session: Cultural preservation efforts
   9-10:30: Discussion of reading
   10:30-12: Preservation efforts: language and culture

Afternoon session: Social change
   1-3: Preservation institutions: American Himalayan Foundation
   3-4: Film: “Lost Treasures of Tibet”
   4-5: Preservation assignment

May 27th, Monday
READING:
THIRD PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: How significantly have humans changed the landscape of the high Himalayas?

Morning session: Environmental degradation
   9-10: Discussion of readings
   10-12: Adapting landscapes to human use: water project

Afternoon session: Global connections
   1-2: New connections, new relationships
   2-3: Lecture: Sex trafficking and labor migration from Nepal
   3-5: Nepalis in Vermont
       GUEST SPEAKER: Pablo Bose, UVM Geography Department

May 28th, Tuesday
Morning session: Managing change: ngos in Nepal
   9-11: Ngos as agents of social change
       GUEST SPEAKERS: Leigh Williams, UVM
   11-12: Film: “Journey of a Red Fridge”

Afternoon session: Final themes and Presentations
   1-3: Film: “Unmistaken Child”
   3-5: Group Presentations
SCHEDULE FOR NEPAL

May 29th: fly to New York, then depart for Kathmandu

May 30th: En route to Kathmandu
Theme: what to expect when you arrive in Kathmandu

May 31st: Arrive in Kathmandu, fly to Pokhara
Introduction to Nepal: Review of expectations for group travel
Informal writing assignment question: What is the most surprising thing about Nepal, upon arrival?

June 1st: Pokhara
Activities: Visit Himalayan Mountaineering Museum and the Pema Ts’al Sakya Monastic Institute; dinner with students from Mustang attending schools in Pokhara.

June 2nd: Flight to Jomsom
Activities: Visit local boarding school, eco-museum, and local monastery.
Daily investigation: Talk to students to see how far they have come to attend this school, what challenges they have faced in pursuing their education.
Informal writing assignment question: What are the major challenges facing someone who wants to get a college degree in Nepal? Knowing those challenges, do you think you would have made it to college? Why or why not?

June 3rd: Trek to Kagbeni
Activities: Visit Kagbeni Gompa and ACAP museum; guided tour of water supply.
Daily investigation: Pay close attention to where water is coming from, who controls it, and what different demands are put on the supply.
Informal writing assignment question: Why does this water system work? What factors work for and against its future success? Do you think that this system is sustainable, both ecologically and socially?

June 4th: Trek to Muktinath
Activities: Visit to the sacred pilgrimage site of Muktinath
Daily investigation: Interview at least three different pilgrims in order to determine why they have come to Muktinath, how far they have traveled, and what they think of the pilgrimage. Also find examples to demonstrate what you think the economic impact of pilgrimage is on this area.
Informal writing assignment question: Why do people come to Muktinath as pilgrims? What sacrifices do they make to come here? Are those sacrifices and motivations similar to yours, as a tourist here, or different?

June 5th: Trek to Tsailay
Activity: Visit farms along route, including a new community apple orchard and organic farm.
Daily investigation: Explore what is grown locally, what resources are necessary for the production of food, where that food goes (to local or distant consumers) and how land is allocated for different purposes.
Informal writing assignment question: What does it take to be a farmer here? Given the rise of imported goods, does it make any sense to grow food here at all?
June 6th: Trek to Shyangmochen

**Daily investigation:** On the trek today, keep track of the nature and construction of the trail we are on. What resources would it take to build and maintain this? Then, when we are on the new road, note what resources are involved in building that.

**Informal writing assignment question:** How do the resources used for and authority over the trail compare to those of the new road?

June 7th: Trek to Tsarang

**Activity:** Visit to the longest mani wall in Nepal in Ghami; visit a local Japanese fish farm.

**Daily investigation:** Pay attention to the various religious symbols or expressions visible along the path, at people’s houses, or at stops along the way.

**Informal writing assignment question:** How central is religion to daily life in these communities? How can you tell? How does that compare to the role of the religion in everyday life in the US, or in your own life at home?

June 8th: Day in Tsarang

**Activities:** Visit to monastery and palace; attend afternoon religious ceremony at monastery

**Daily investigation:** Explore the nature of religious practice at this monastery and school; what are the key elements of worship? Who participates? What is the goal of the ceremony we attend?

**Informal writing assignment question:** Compare the role of monks in the local community to that of religious leaders in your communities in the US. Do they play the same role, or not?

June 9th: Day in Tsarang

**Activities:** Visit to local daycare center, nun’s school and local houses

**Daily investigation:** Examine and then create a floorplan of the layout of a traditional house; then do the same for a house that was constructed in the last 10 years.

**Informal writing assignment question:** How is the traditional house organized differently than the more modern one? What do you think has prompted those changes?

June 10th: Trek to Lo Manthang

**Activities:** Visit to one of the monasteries in Lo, explore walled city; visit local hydro project

**Daily investigation:** As we approach and enter Lo, note the evidence of Chinese presence in the area, both material and cultural. Specifically, pay attention to how new access to Chinese goods has changed the area, and to how a local Tibetan population is reacting to the increased Chinese influence. Why might some Lo residents welcome the Chinese, and why might others oppose their presence?

**Informal writing assignment question:** What evidence of Chinese influence can you see in Lo? How significant is that influence, as compared to elsewhere in Mustang

June 11th: Lo Manthang

**Guest lecture:** Cultural preservation efforts of the American Himalayan Foundation

**Daily investigation:** As you explore Lo, come up with a list of all the projects you might undertake to preserve cultural heritage in the city; these might include foodways, domestic architecture, monastic education, monastic buildings, the palace building, language, traditional farming practices, clothing or more. Be prepared to defend why that project is important to the cultural fabric of the city.

**Informal writing assignment question:** If you were responsible for the cultural heritage of Lo, what would your top priorities be, and why?
June 12th: Lo Manthang
Activities: Visit to cave residences of Chosar, cave monastery; meeting with Youth of Lo
Daily investigation: In our conversations with the Youth of Lo, discuss with them the possibilities and problems of preservation, development, and local control as compared to national politics. What are their goals, and what is their vision for Mustang?
Informal writing assignment question: If you were 20 years old and living in this part of the world, would you stay, or leave?

June 13th: Trek to Ghami
Activity: Visit to Lo Gekar monastery
Daily investigation: Compare the Lo Gekar monastery to the ones we have visited before; in addition, compare the experience of today’s trek solely on paths, with earlier days when we were also on roads.
Informal writing assignment question: How did you experience the Lo Gekar monastery, as compared to the ones in Lo and Kagbeni? Was it primarily a spiritual, visual, cultural or intellectual experience for you? Did one monastery affect you more than others? If so, why?

June 14th: Trek to Shyangmochen
Daily investigation: Back on the road again, note the different provisions made for security in houses and communities along the way.
Informal writing assignment question: How would you, if you were a member of a local community here, address the issue of increased theft brought on by increased travel on the road?

June 15th: Trek to Chuksang
Daily investigation: On the trail today, note what the major environmental challenges of the area are, and try to figure out possible conservation ideas to address those. What stresses do local people put on the environment, in terms of water, fuel, etc.? What stresses do tourists add? How might you address those?
Informal writing assignment question: If you were to design an environmental conservation plan for the Mustang region, what would your priorities be?

June 16th: Trek to Jomsom
Daily investigation: As we return to Jomsom after two weeks, pay attention to the ways in which outside agencies are involved in development work in this region; specifically, try to assess what motivates that involvement, and how much local populations might be able to shape aid programs.
Informal writing assignment question: What do you think about development aid in Mustang? Would you provide aid to this region? Under what conditions would you do so, and under what conditions would you not?

June 17th: Fly to Pokhara
Day off!

June 18th: Pokhara
Day off!

June 19th: Fly to Kathmandu
**Informal writing assignment question:** Think back to the reasons you gave for choosing to go on this trip. Were those reasons fulfilled? What do you think your three most lasting memories and impressions of this trip will be? Why those?

**June 20th: Kathmandu**

**Activities:** Visit to Bhaktapur

**JOURNALS DUE**

**June 21st: Kathmandu**

**Activities:** Visit Kathmandu Durbar Square, Thamel

**Late evening:** Flight back to US departs around midnight