

Day 1: Assessing values & privilege in conservation.

Prior to class: Load left-handed desks into the front row of the room & ask students to sit in the front row as they come in.

(Timing notes are in red. This class ran from 0800 to 0915 hours)

(0800) Discrepant activity: What is privilege?

-Example: Handedness (modified slightly from Activity Reference 1). Some right-handed students will probably switch out their desks. Use this as an opportunity to ask why. What thoughts did you have as you came in and saw the left-handed desk? What is the first thing left handed folks think about when they enter class, especially for an exam? How is this akin to other forms of privilege? (Activity reference 1 gives great examples of this.)

(0805) Goals: How can we examine our own values and privileges, so as to better understand people who have needs and values that are different from our own? (Also, as we explore the concept of privilege in conservation science, it's important to strongly note that privilege, alone does not make us personally responsible for oppression or lack of inclusiveness. Thus these discussions are not designed to make us feel guilty, but rather to understand our privilege so we can use that knowledge to bridge communication gaps/barriers for the purpose of effective conservation efforts.)

(0808) Safe space rule: Privilege can be a really uncomfortable topic for most people. Have students agree that this will be a safe space. This means that all will listen fully, and respond to people respectfully even to those with whom they disagree. And it means that all will support one another if we see one of our classmates having a difficult time today. Ask the class to agree to these rules.

(0810) Introduction: We have spoken a lot this semester about how values come into play when thinking about a number of things: when managers consider management goals, when we choose how to allocate resources among biodiversity hotspots for species versus endangered ecosystems versus areas with endangered genera, etc. *But do you think that values are involved in the actual scientific work in conservation biology? If so, when do those values come into play, and what are those values?*

(0811) Discussions

Group brainstorming activity: In groups of 3-4 students, groups brainstorm based on the preceding questions (italicized) & then lists are made on board.

Some examples that students might come up with include:

- deciding what is important to measure when assessing species or environment with respect to management goals (e.g. species diversity vs. ecosystem services).
- deciding what projects to take on/organisms to study in the first place (e.g. economic importance vs. charismatic species.)
- deciding where to study (e.g. developed v. developing nations, urban v. rural)

Some examples that students may come up with, of values generally shared among conservation scientists:

- long-term goals for how we want the world to look
- organisms/environments have value beyond what can be consumed for profit by humans
- long-term needs can outweigh short-term needs

(0822) Group brainstorming activity: Consider the types of values that you just said that many conservation biologists/scientists often share. Under what circumstances might someone not share these values, or at least not prioritize these values, even if they are able to understand the importance of conservation?

-List class answers on the board

-Discuss: what are some themes in our list? (examples students may come up with: lack of money; loss of money; different levels or forms of privilege)

(0836) Activity (modified from Activity Reference 2): Hand out the “Privilege Walk” worksheet, which begins on the next page. What does privilege have to do with conservation? Conservation scientists are overwhelmingly white and middle class. Since the state of the planet should be important to everyone, this begs the question: Why is conservation biology seemingly inaccessible for people of other backgrounds and economic statuses?

Conservation Biology Privilege Walk

Instructions: If a statement is “true” in your personal experience, put a “+1” next to it. If the statement is “false” for you, put a “-1” next to it. Add them up at the end. Possible range of scores: -x to +x.

[Educators can choose from the following statements for this activity, or make up examples of their own:]

1. If I nap on a bench in a public park, it is likely that no one will assume I am homeless.
2. It is unlikely that I would be asked about my immigration status while hiking through deserts of the Southwest USA.
3. I mostly choose to spend time outdoors only when the weather is agreeable.
4. My experience with the outdoors does not consist of, in all or part, having to work all day in the hot sun, harvesting crops or tending someone else’s lawn.
5. While in National Parks, I am not reminded of the forcible removal of my ancestors.
6. I have an uncompromising attitude about the protection of ecosystems.
7. Land conservation efforts (e.g., saving the rainforests) do not provoke me to worry that my own livelihood will be threatened.
8. I blame the whole human species for the ecological crisis we are in.
9. I don’t often think about how my lifestyle may be connected to ecological destruction or exploitation (of land, and people working on that land).
10. I have feelings of grief about the imminent loss of iconic species such as polar bears, African lions, and dolphins.
11. I don’t feel grief over the imminent loss of endemic cultures or languages.
12. I seldom wonder whether or not I am safe in my school, town or neighborhood.
13. I have adequate access to health care.
14. I seldom worry about the air quality (and its relationship to health problems like asthma) in my town or neighborhood.
15. I seldom worry about the water quality in my town or neighborhood.
16. I rarely think about the social impacts of the war on drugs.
17. I rarely think about the social impacts of the war on terror.
18. I have time and energy to think abstractly about ecology.
19. I choose to focus my energies on causes that appeal to me.
20. I think of conservation as an issue separate from racism.
21. I think of conservation as an issue separate from sexism.
22. I think of conservation as an issue separate from global poverty and wealth gaps.
23. I consider conservation as an issue more urgent than racism.
24. I consider conservation as an issue more urgent than sexism.
25. I consider conservation as an issue more urgent than global poverty and wealth gaps.
26. My decisions about which conservation issues to focus on have no direct or immediate impact on my financial or physical well-being.
27. When doing field work, if I encounter a man I don't know, I don't feel afraid.
28. If I use a pair of binoculars in a suburban neighborhood, no one is likely to call the police.
29. ...
- x. When I do fieldwork after dark, I don’t worry that people who encounter me may be frightened of me.

(0900-0915) Wrap-up / take home points:

1. Was there anything that you learned about yourself, or just in general, that you would like to share? (No need to share personal details, just general thoughts.)
2. How can one use knowledge about privilege in conservation science? Or to understand where we might, for example, try to make the conservation field/movement more accessible to all?
(And we will talk about this more next week.)

Day 2

Homework: Prior to today's class, each student should find one paper where scientists were working with local communities or wealthy industries/stakeholders to try to achieve a conservation goal.

Prior to class: Assemble desks in a way that is conducive to both small group & class-wide discussions.

(0800) Goals: To look beyond any kind of "us and them" mentality. To understand that there are many times during which we will need to work with local citizens or wealthy industries/stakeholders, to try to set and attain conservation goals with people who have different priorities than we do.

(0803) Review: During the last class, we learned about privilege in conservation science, but we also said that this was not a discussion intended to make anyone feel guilty. Rather, one may potentially be able to use knowledge of relative privilege to make conservation science a more inclusive field, and to bridge communication gaps/barriers. Can you recall which two main groups of people that you said were likely (not certain) to have different priorities than the average (not every) conservation scientist. (Example: people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; people who profit from environmentally unfriendly industries.)

(0807) Brainstorming activity: Us & Them cloud circle activity (in small groups; modified slightly from Activity Reference 3).

Purpose: This activity encourages reflection on how we all can create mental barriers between ourselves and those we see as "them", and how that lens can lead to communication problems.

Procedure (from Activity Reference 3):

1. Write "us and them" on the board in the center of one circle, and "communication problems" in another.
2. Discussion: In small groups, consider the question: Who is "them"? What are some examples in the field of conservation where you've witnessed what appeared to be an "in" group and there's an "out" group?
3. After a few minutes, come back together & write answers on the board.
4. Discussion: In your small groups, consider how "us and them" thinking influences our communication together. What happens to communication between individuals or groups when "us and them" thinking is perpetuated?
 - a. After a few minutes, come back together & write answers on board.
5. Discussion: Sometimes, being passionate about an issue makes it easy to become angry or frustrated at the people who are making choices or decisions that we believe to be wrong. But, as many have noted, this is often not very productive. So to that end, please think about the following questions in your small groups: "Is it possible to maintain an attitude of compassion, even and especially towards others with whom you disagree, from a conservation standpoint? How might one do this?" (Give students time to reflect, and then invite them to share & discuss. Write their answers on the board.)

(0840) Group research summaries & discussion (Keep answers from last question on the board!)

1. In small groups: Give a recap on, and discuss the papers that you and your group members found for homework. Then consider the following:

- a. What methods of cooperation among stakeholders worked well?
- b. What approaches didn't work so well?

2. As a class:

- a. Write answers on board in two columns: "what worked?" and "what didn't?".
- b. Ask students to scan the "what worked" column, along with the rest of the board. (They may notice similarities between the "what worked" column, and what we said we should do to maintain an attitude of compassion toward people with different priorities.)
- c. Ask students to scan the "what didn't" column and the rest of the board. (Again, they may notice any degree to which the "what didn't" column shares or doesn't share similarities with the methods of maintaining compassion that the students came up with.)

(0910-0915) Wrap-up

Use responses from previous two questions to fuel the wrap-up discussion.

Activity References:

Gilbert R. 2008. Raising awareness of class privilege among students. Retrieved 10/21/2015, from: <http://www.diversityweb.org/DiversityDemocracy/vol11no3/gilbert.cfm>

Pachamama Alliance. 2012. Race and class privilege in the environmental movement. Retrieved 10/21/2015 from: <http://www.pachamama.org/news/race-and-class-privilege-in-the-environmental-movement>

Rakestraw M. 2013. Beyond “Us and Them”: An activity for human educators, activists and changemakers. Retrieved 10/21/2015 from: <http://humaneeducation.org/blog/2013/12/09/us-them/>

A note on evaluation of student participation and learning goals:

Students were evaluated based on participation in this exercise, which included contributing a question or comment during class on both days, and remembering to bring the assignment for the second day (the peer-reviewed paper about a conservation effort that involved both scientists and stakeholders).

The learning goals were evaluated in post-course, anonymous student evaluations of teaching. Of ten graduate students, nine gave anonymous, written evaluations specific to these lessons on privilege. Students strongly agreed that the lessons provoked them to think differently about privilege in the context of conservation biology (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure/neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree; the average score was 4.67, the median was 5, and the range was from 4 to 5). Open-ended commentary was all aimed in the positive direction, including several statements that alluded to realizing that thinking about communication in the context of relative privilege differences was a topic that should be given more weight in the teaching of conservation biology.