Ecosystems and Human Health

Graduate Reading Seminar
Fall Semester 2012
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Is nature good for our health? Scientists have begun to document the monetary values that forests, wetlands, coral reefs, and other ecosystems hold for people. Less well understood are the contributions these ecosystems make to human health.   A growing number of intriguing case studies has explored these connections, involving Lyme disease, malaria, asthma, malnutrition and more. Learning from the best of these cases studies and expanding them will help us understand whether and when conservation is a good public health strategy.

Framing questions for the semester:
- *What is the state of the evidence linking ecosystem degradation and health outcomes?*
- *What is the most convincing approach to documenting these links?*
- *How best to connect results to improved policies and decisions?*

Students will:
- gain solid sense for evidence linking nature conservation to human health.
- get valuable practice in reading journal articles critically.
- help to identify future directions for the Gund Institute's work in this area.

How the course will work:
- Read 1-2 recent reviews for first discussion. From these, agree on papers to read for rest of semester.
- Each week 2 related papers assigned: 1 required, 1 optional
- Leadership of discussion rotates among students each week.
- Grade based on participation and contributions to discussions

Role for weekly discussion leader:
- Read papers carefully – consult with Taylor if confused
- Summarize paper at beginning of meeting – 5 minutes
- Lead discussion
  - keep it on important aspects, not details or tangents
  - make space for everyone to talk
- Summarize the important points made in discussion – 5 minutes

Useful discussion questions for each paper:
- What is the main contribution/advance of this work?
- Is the evidence convincing? What would make it more so?
  - Is ecosystem change measured well?
  - Are health outcomes measured well?
  - Are the causal links strong?
- How could these results inform public health policy?
- How would you extend or build on this paper?