 

*Presents:*

A BROWN BAG SEMINAR IN THE

WATER RESOURCES SEMINAR SERIES

**“Why is Water so Hard to Conserve?”**

*by*

Matthew R. Sanderson

Randall C. Hill Distinguished Professor of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work

Professor of Sociology, Kansas State University

Visiting Research Fellow, Hugo Centre for Population Research, University of Adelaide, Australia

12:00 – 1:00 pm

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Rm 701, Kelly Hall

UTEP Campus

ABSTRACT

Cultural factors – values, beliefs, and norms – have been shown to provide insights into environmental attitudes, risk perceptions, and behaviors among the general public. Little is known, however, about the ostensibly complex relationships linking cultural factors to farm-level decision-making. This presentation explores the role of culture in agricultural contexts, focusing especially on groundwater depletion in the U.S. High Plains-Ogallala Aquifer region. One of the largest aquifers in the world, the Ogallala supports a highly productive agricultural region generating over $20 billion dollars per year, and approximately 10% of total agricultural production in the U.S. In many areas of the region, however, depletion has persisted for over 40 years despite widespread recognition among producers, managers, policymakers, and the public, myriad conservation strategies, and several decades of research. Incorporating culture into our understanding of farmers’ risk perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors might open new pathways for addressing depletion, which is increasingly seen as an intractable, ‘wicked’ problem.

SHORT BIO

Dr. Sanderson is a social scientist with interests in population, environment, and development. Most of his work is international in scope, and longitudinal and comparative in design.  On the population side, he is investigating international migration as both a cause and consequence of development dynamics in an increasingly inter-connected world. On the environment side, he is exploring social drivers of natural resource use.  This work concentrates especially on the High Plains (Ogallala) Aquifer region of the U.S., and examines: how social structures influence groundwater management at multiple scales (from community to global); how social networks shape participation in group decision-making within common pool resource settings; how social factors affect adoption of irrigation technologies; and how culture influences perceptions of the science, knowledge, and information used to make decisions about agricultural adaptations. Dr. Sanderson’s work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, USDA, and the USEPA. At Kansas State University, he leads courses on international development, environment and society, international migration, rural development, and principles of social science. Through research, teaching, and outreach, his work explores means of developing more regenerative, socially and ecologically resilient communities.