

ENVS 203: Environmental Humanities

MWTRF 12:00-1:50, 142 COL

Instructor: Tim Christian Myers, tcc@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: MF 2:00 – 3:00 (or by appointment), 75A COL

Course Description:

What is environmental humanities? We might have a sense of medical ethics, business ethics, and perhaps animal ethics, but what are the ethical dimensions of how we relate to “the environment”? We typically think of ethics in terms of standards of conduct or moral principles of “right action.” And yet, for the most part, modern Western culture does not have an agreed-upon set of standards or principles about how we *ought* to treat the natural world. The very idea of relating to the environment (as opposed to people) in an *ethical* way is largely foreign to the modern mind. Environmental ethics is therefore something culturally new to us, and very much a work in progress.

As modern societies struggle to confront the gravity of environmental crises, radically new ways of thinking and living are increasingly called for. This course, while predominantly philosophical in content, is meant to offer a variety of inter-disciplinary perspectives and approaches to this end. Before we can begin to think clearly about how we *ought* to relate to nature, however, we must first come to terms with how we (moderns) *actually* relate to it. So we begin with the modern relationship to nature usually taken for granted, followed by an exploration of environmental alternatives to modernity as informed by indigenous ways of life, environmental movements like deep ecology and ecofeminism, as well as contemporary issues such as wilderness preservation, climate change, sustainability, and food/agriculture. The aim is to encourage you to reflect on your life by inviting you to think carefully and critically about environmental issues.

Required Texts:

Silko, *Ceremony*

All other reading materials are available on Blackboard.

Course Requirements:

You are expected to *carefully read* the materials offered in this course with the intention of comprehending the ethical—whether philosophical or political—issues involved in each. This is not a light-reading course. Each day’s readings average out to about 35 pages—less if the reading is difficult, more if the reading is easy. Some of these readings will be quite challenging, so it is of the utmost importance that you not only attend the lectures, but read *before* each one. Plan to commit three or four hours of reading per class. Disciplined study habits are essential, and group study is recommended.

Success in this course also depends centrally on the ability to write good papers. Writing a good paper not only involves comprehending the assigned readings, but also an ability to respond to them in thoughtful and nuanced ways. Whether agreeing or disagreeing with the material, you will need to *justify* your views on the matters in question by providing *good reasons* in defense of your thesis (as opposed to offering unexplained opinions, going off on tangents, or simply “regurgitating” the material). And like all good writing—which involves *careful organization, clarity, and good reasoning*—multiple drafts are essential.

Grading:

Attendance/Participation:	10%	
Pop Quizzes:	20%	
Midterm Paper:		30%
Final Paper:	40%	

Attendance is mandatory. It will be taken at the beginning of every lecture. **Missing four classes for any reason will result in a full grade reduction. Another full grade reduction will be made for any additional absence after that.**

There will also be five short **multiple-choice quizzes** (five questions) every other week (either on Tuesday *or* Thursday) at the beginning of class to review the materials of the prior two weeks. This is meant as an incentive to keep up on all of the readings. If you've done all the readings, the quizzes should be straightforward. Of the five quizzes, I will count only the **top four grades**, dropping the lowest score.

In addition to the quizzes, **two papers** (Midterm and Final) will be required (5-7 pages each). The Midterm is due at the beginning of class during Week 6—Tuesday, February 14th. The Final Paper is due Thursday, March 22nd in my mailbox at by **4:00** in 145 Columbia Hall. **Important: Late Midterm and Final papers will be docked one letter grade for each day late.**

- A = Truly Exceptional Work (90-100%)
- B = Outstanding, very good (80-89%)
- C = Good/Acceptable, average for most college students (70-79%)
- D = Passing, but needs improvement (60-69%)
- F = Below 60% is not a passing grade.

Academic Honesty:

Instructors are very good at recognizing plagiarism. Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's product, words, ideas, or data as one's own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. By placing one's name on work submitted for credit, the student certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments. On written assignments, if verbatim statements are included, the statements must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from regular text as indented extracts. A student will avoid being charged with plagiarism if there is an acknowledgment of indebtedness.

Indebtedness must be acknowledged whenever:

1. one quotes another person's actual words or replicates all or part of another's product;
2. one uses another person's ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories, even if they are completely paraphrased in one's own words;
3. one borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative materials--unless the information is common knowledge.

Unauthorized collaboration with others on papers or projects can inadvertently lead to a charge of plagiarism. If in doubt, consult me during office hours/via email, or seek assistance from Academic Learning Services (68 PLC, 346-3226).

Scheduled Readings (Any changes will be announced in class or on Blackboard):

Week 1: The Roots of Western Culture's Relationship to Nature: Part I

7/24 — **Introduction: What is Environmental Humanities?**

7/25 — **Where We Stand Today**

- Kathleen Dean Moore & Michael P. Nelson: "Science and Humanities: The Logical Necessity of Collaboration in the Face of Environmental Threats to the Future"
- James Gustave Speth: "The Limits of Today's Environmentalism"
- James Gustave Speth: "A New Consciousness"

7/26 — **Cultural Worldview**

- Bernard J. Nebel & Richard T. Wright: "Are We in the Process of a Major Paradigm Shift?"
- Charlene Spretnak: "Modernity is to us as a Fish is to Water"
- Ralph Metzner: "The Emerging Ecological Worldview"

7/27 — **Religious Attitudes to Nature**

- Bible: Selections from *Genesis*
- Lynn White Jr.: "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis"
- St. Francis: "The Canticle of Brother Sun"
- Laozi: Selections from *Dao De Ching*

7/28 — **Religious Attitudes to Nature (Part II)**

- Max Oelshlaeger: "Ancient Mediterranean Ideas of Humankind and Nature"

Quiz 1

Week 2: The Roots of Western Culture's Relationship to Nature: Part II

8/1 — **Philosophical Attitudes to Nature (Part I)**

- Plato: "The Nature of the Soul and its Relation to the Body"
- René Descartes: "Animals as Automata"

8/2 — **Philosophical Attitudes to Nature (Part II)**

- Max Oelshlaeger: "The Alchemy of Modernism: From Wilderness to Nature"

8/3 — **Root Metaphors of Nature: Unity Vs. Separation**

- Carolyn Merchant: "The World an Organism"
- Carolyn Merchant: "The Mechanical Order"

8/4 — **Narratives of the Human Relationship to Nature: Progress Vs. Decline (Part I)**

- Carolyn Merchant: "A Garden Planet"
- Carolyn Merchant: "The Fall From Eden"

8/5 — **Narratives of the Human Relationship to Nature: Progress Vs. Decline (Part I)**

- Carolyn Merchant: "Recovering the Garden"
- Max Oelshlaeger: "The Idea of Wilderness"
- Carolyn Merchant: "From Wilderness to Civilization"

Quiz 2

Week 3: Counter-Cultural Relationships to Nature

8/8 — **Literary Responses: The Romantic Turn to Wild Nature**

- Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selections from *Nature* & Henry David Thoreau: Selections from “Walking”
- John Muir: Selections from *Our National Parks*
(**Film: Our National Parks**)

Midterm Paper Due Monday, August 8th in class:
Late papers will be docked one letter grade for each day late.

8/9 — **Aldo Leopold’s Introduction of Ecology and Environmental Ethics**

- Aldo Leopold: “Marshland Elegy”
- Aldo Leopold: “Thinking Like a Mountain”
- Aldo Leopold: “The Land Ethic”

8/10 — **The Wilderness Ideal Challenged**

- William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”

8/11 — **Cultural Power: Race, Class, Gender, and Colonialism**

- Kevin DeLuca & Anne Demo: “Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carlton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness”
- Dean Curtin: “Recognizing Women’s Environmental Expertise”

8/12 — **Indigenous Perspectives:**

- Chief Luther Standing Bear: “Indian Wisdom”
- George Tinker: “An American Indian Cultural Universe”
- Winona LaDuke: “Voices from White Earth”

(Film: In the Light of Reverence)

Quiz 3

Week 4: Exploring New Relationships to Nature

8/15 — Leslie Silko, *Ceremony* (first half)

8/16 — Leslie Silko, *Ceremony* (first half)

8/17 — **Alienation and Reconnecting to Place**

- Martin Heidegger: “Memorial Address”
- Thomas Berry: “Returning to Our Native Place”

(Film: Crisis of Faith)

8/18 — **Ecotheology**

- Pope John Paul II: “The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility”
- Rosemary Radford Ruether: “The Biblical Vision of the Ecological Crisis”
- Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment: “Declaration of the ‘Mission to Washington’”

8/19 — **Now What?**

- Michael Maniates: “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?”
- Terry Tempest Williams: “Climate Change: What is Required of Us?”
- Thomas Berry: “The Great Work”
- Paul Hawkin: “The Most Amazing Challenge”

Quiz 4

Final Paper Due: Wednesday, August 24th by 4:00 in my mailbox at 145 COL.
Late papers will be docked one letter grade for each day late.