

Environmental Ethics

Prof. Kristin Culbertson
100-Level

Course Description

When we hear about deforestation, destruction of coral reefs, and pollution of air and water, what strikes us as wrong about this? Is it the harm to human beings who rely on these resources? Is it the loss of something beautiful? Harm to animals who live in these environments? In this course we will explore various groundings for duties to the environment, as well as different types of duties we may have. We will discuss environmental problems of ecological harm, climate change, pollution, waste, and others. The goal of this course is familiarize students with conceptual frameworks for thinking about the natural world so that they can creatively and thoughtfully face environmental challenges as individuals and as global citizens.

Readings

No textbooks are required for this course. All readings available on the course website.

Evaluation

Participation (15%)

Students are expected to come to class prepared to ask questions and discuss the material. Consistent engagement in class discussions OR daily written participation via email will receive full credit. Participation is calculated weekly and the final participation grade is the average of the weekly grades.

Assignments (15%)

Throughout the semester students will be assigned short writing assignments and small group projects based on the readings for the week. These will include hands-on experiences with reflection papers, short argument analyses, and group presentations.

Midterm (20%)

The midterm will be an in-class written exam of short essay questions. Students will be asked to choose three out of five questions, each asking for detailed analysis of specific arguments from course readings.

Essay (30%)

Students will receive a list of five essay questions and will choose one to write a 1000-1200 word essay in response. Students are required to workshop their rough draft, in which they will receive feedback from peers and the instructor.

Final Exam (20%)

The final exam is a take-home test incorporating definitions, true/false, short answer, and essay questions. This test is open-book and open-note, and will be completed online with a time limit of two hours.

Policies

Academic Honesty: Don't try to pass off work that isn't yours. Always give credit to original sources. I will refer to university policies to handle cases of plagiarism. You are responsible for understanding these policies and abiding by them.

Participation: all participation in class discussions or activities counts towards participation points. If a student wants participation points for coming in to office hours, the time must be spent discussing the material, and the student should come prepared with questions or comments. If a student chooses to participate through written comments, these must be emailed to me on the day of class. Because students have multiple options for getting their participation points, I will not allow students to make up points late except in extreme cases.

Cell phones and laptops: Since readings are online I do allow students to use phones and laptops in class. However, recreational use of phones and laptops in class will detract from your participation grade. If you have an emergency and need to use your cell phone for texting or calling, please do so outside.

Classroom etiquette: Please be respectful of your fellow students and refrain from side conversations during class. Classrooms are quiet and side conversations can be heard clearly, causing distraction for me as the instructor and everyone else in the room. If talking becomes a repeated issue, students may lose participation points or be asked to leave.

Disabilities: If you are registered with CSD please talk to me so we can set up accommodations.

Schedule

Foundations for Environmental Ethics

Week 1-2: What is Environmental Ethics?

Jan 28: Course introduction

Jan 30: Jamieson, "The Environment as an Ethical Question"

Feb 4: Williams, "Must a Concern for the Environment be Centered Around Humanity?" McShane, "Anthropocentrism in Climate Ethics and Policy"

Feb 6: Wenz, "Ecology and Morality," Thompson, "A Refutation of Environmental Ethics"

Week 3-4: Who is Responsible?

Feb 11: *Informal writing assignment due*

Sinnott-Armstrong "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations"

Feb 13: Almassi, "Climate Change and the Ethics of Individual Emissions: A Response to Sinnott-Armstrong"

Feb 18: Garcia, Sanz, "Climate Change, Ethics, and Sustainability: An Innovative Approach"

Feb 20: Singer, "Will the Polluters Pay for Climate Change?"

Humans and Nature

Week 5: Humanity's Role in Nature

Feb 25: *Experience Reflection due*

Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"

Feb 27: Callicot, "A Critique of and Alternative to the Wilderness Idea," Video: "50 Years Ago this was a Wasteland"

Week 6-7: Giving Rights to Natural Objects

March 4: Stone, Ch 1 "Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects," Hutchison, "The Whanganui River as a Legal Person"

March 6: *Group project due*

Stone, Ch 2 "Does the Climate Have Standing?"

March 11: Cahen, "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems"

March 13: *Midterm*

March 17-23: Spring Break!

Environment and Civilization

Week 9: Garbage and Waste

March 25: Valero and Shulman *Waste: A Handbook for Management*, "Introduction,"
Jenkins, *The Humanure Handbook*, "Crap Happens," "Waste Not Want Not"

March 27: *Informal writing assignment due*

Dudish, *A Primer on Recycling*

Week 10: Sustainable Living

April 1: *Essay assigned*

Podcast: Next Economy Now: Holmgren *RetroSuburbia: A Downshifter's Guide to a Resilient Future*

April 3: Pembamoyo, "Renewal of Non-Western Methods for Sustainable Living,"
New York Times, "An Isolated Village Finds the Energy to Keep Going"

Week 11: Eating and Agriculture

April 8: *Rough draft workshop*

April 10: Thayer, "Eco-Culture," Thompson, "Nature Politics and the Philosophy of Agriculture"

Week 12: Social Challenges

April 15: Mies, "Deceiving the Third World: The Myth of Catching-Up Development,"
Wenz, "Just Garbage: The Problem of Environmental Racism"

April 17: Baxter, "People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution"

Environmental Activism

Week 13 Taking Action

April 22: *Essay due*

PBS, "The Radical Philosophy of Extinction Rebellion," "Extinction Rebellion Demands"

April 24: Kaza, "To Save All Beings: Buddhist Environmental Activism"

April 29: Exam Review

May 1: Final Exam