



Instructor: Chris Diehm

Environmental philosophy is a relatively new academic area that takes a distinctively philosophical approach to questions about our human relationship to the natural world. But what exactly does a “philosophical” approach to human-nature relationships involve, and how might this approach help us to understand some of the many complex dimensions of environmental issues? In this course we will encounter both contemporary and classic texts as we investigate some of the most interesting philosophical questions that can be asked in regards to the natural environment, and explore some of the most important intellectual sources not only of environmental problems, but also their potential resolution.

### Course Objectives

This course is designed to acquaint you with contemporary philosophical perspectives on the human relationship to nature, as well as influential readings in the history of philosophy that are widely discussed among conservationists, philosophers, and environmental advocates. Most of what we will examine comes from the Western intellectual tradition, though this is not the only tradition we will encounter. We will begin with readings that discuss Western attitudes towards nature. We will then look at some historically important sources of these attitudes, focusing on the dualism of Plato, the individualism of thinkers like John Locke, the egoism of philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, and the view of nature as “property” most famously defended by, again, John Locke. From there we will investigate contemporary views that seek to re-imagine the human-nature relation, including the views of human-centered environmentalists, animal ethicists, and species-focused conservationists. We will also examine several issues about which conservationists sometimes disagree, including ecological restoration and the use of genetic engineering in biodiversity protection. In all of this you will become familiar with core areas of philosophy including metaphysics and ethics, as well as core areas of contemporary debate about humans, non-human animals, and species.

Hence, by taking this course you will learn to:

- Identify philosophical and ethical dimensions of environmental issues.
- Demonstrate familiarity with major philosophical themes and concepts relevant to thinking about the environment.

Before we begin, however, you should remember that college education is more than technical training; it is a process of developing your intellectual abilities and talents. Philosophy emphasizes careful reading, critical thinking, and effective communication, as well as less tangible skills like understanding others, seeing problems from multiple perspectives, and tolerating new ideas. Because philosophy is particularly good at promoting these skills, this class satisfies the Humanities component of the General Education Program, which targets the following objectives:

- Reading closely, thinking critically, and writing effectively about texts that reflect on perennial questions concerning the human condition, including the confrontation with suffering, and the struggle for justice and equality.
- Investigating and thoughtfully responding to a variety of ideas, beliefs or values held by persons in situations other than your own.

## Requirements

### Quizzes

I will give unannounced quizzes frequently. These will take place IN CLASS, deal directly with the daily readings, and contain 2 multiple choice questions, each of which is worth 2.5 points (for a maximum of 5 points). As long as you have read, you should do fairly well on quizzes even if you have not fully understood the reading. These are DATE-SPECIFIC CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS, which are partly intended to gauge if you are IN CLASS AND PREPARED FOR THE DAY. This means that missed quizzes cannot be taken outside of the class periods in which they are given. At the end of the semester I will drop your lowest score. These will count collectively for 25% of your grade.

### Papers

There will be two position paper assignments. The first of these will be due around the midterm, and the second is due on the date and time of the regularly scheduled final. These papers should be 600-800 words (2 pages) and are each worth 15% of your final grade. Altogether, then, papers are worth a total of 30% of your final grade.

Paper topics will pertain to course material covered, and will require you to *reflect on* and *react to* topics we've covered (that is, not simply to repeat information or summarize the views of others). Grades for papers will be based on three criteria:

- (1) *Meeting the terms of the Assignment* – addressing the topic questions, proper formatting and length, and submitted on time.
- (2) *Writing* – writing that is clear, organized, and free from grammatical or spelling mistakes.
- (3) *Content* – content that is reflective, creative, and shows an accurate understanding of the course material.

In my comments, I will use the following codes to give you feedback in the body of your papers:

*Highlighted* items indicate spelling or technical errors.

*Pins* on items may have one or more of the letters below next to them to indicate...

Awk = awkward grammar or phrasing

Vague = vague or imprecise meaning

Unclear = unclear meaning

Incorrect = incorrect or mistaken statement of an idea

Finally, all paper assignments are required to be submitted in electronic format on Canvas, and will go through an "originality check" performed by "Turnitin.com."

### Tests

There will be two tests. Each test is worth 20% of your final grade. Combined, therefore, tests are worth a total of 40% of your final grade.

### Classics of Nature Literature Paper

One paper assignment will require you to select and read a significant work of nature literature (from a list I will provide) and write a 600-800 word (two-page) analysis of its themes. This assignment will be graded on what is essentially a "pass/fail" scale, and is worth 5% of your grade.

## Work Completion Policy

This course has five "major," or increased point value, requirements: the two papers, the two tests, and the Nature Literature paper. You must complete all five of these assignments to receive a passing grade for the course, regardless of the point total you have earned through other coursework.

## **Missed/Late Work**

Missed or late work sometimes can be made up on the condition that you either inform me prior to an upcoming absence, or provide me with a formal, written excuse. Late work will be penalized according to the following policy: IF YOU'VE CONTACTED ME beforehand to authorize a late submission, your work will be penalized by a 2% grade reduction for every day that it's late. IF YOU HAVE NOT CONTACTED ME beforehand to authorize a late submission, your work will be penalized by a 5% grade reduction for every day that it's late.

## **Attendance**

I will take attendance regularly and will know of absences due to missed quizzes, etc. Excessive absences will almost certainly hurt your quiz grade. In addition, anyone who misses more than the equivalent of three weeks of class will automatically receive an F for the course. The reason for this is that your role in a philosophy class is not simply to receive information passively; it is to contribute actively to the classroom environment, and this cannot happen if you miss between 20 and 25% of the class meetings.

## **Academic Integrity Policy**

I adhere to a strict policy on academic integrity (cheating, plagiarism, etc.). Any questions that you may have regarding academic integrity should be resolved before you turn course materials in to me. Information can be found in UWSP Chapter 14, available at: "<http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>". The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. In addition, all infractions will be reported to the university.

## **Class Conduct**

While you are in class, my expectation is that you will conduct yourself appropriately. This includes being generally *attentive*, and having *cell phones turned off and put away*. There is nothing appropriate to this course about texting friends, going over materials from other classes, or sleeping, and if you are doing any of these things, I will ask you to leave the room for the remainder of the class period.

## **E-mail Notice**

When you send me e-mail informing me of upcoming absences, I typically save the message without initially replying to it. I review my e-mails after class meetings, and reply to them at that point, so that I can inform you of anything unusual that may have gone on in class, share ppt.s (which are often being developed or adjusted just prior to class meetings), etc. This way you receive the most accurate information I can provide, even though you may not receive an immediate reply to your message.

## **Text**

*Environmental Philosophy: An Introduction*, Simon James (Wiley).

## **Reserve Materials**

Some readings will be available electronically through Canvas in the weekly modules. These are marked as "(reserve)" in the reading list. It is your responsibility to be aware of what is being read and to have work completed on time.

## Grading

Unless stated otherwise, all work will be graded according to the following scale:

93-100 = A    90-92.9 = A-    87-89.9 = B+    83-86.9 = B    80-82.9 = B-    77-79.9 = C+  
73-76.9 = C    70-72.9 = C-    67-69.9 = D+    60-66.9 = D    below 60 = F

### TWO NOTES ABOUT GRADES:

1. I'm happy to discuss any questions you have about grades, but grades are not "negotiable" in the sense that you can simply request to have a higher grade, or request to do extra work, just to receive the grade you would prefer to receive. If you want to receive higher grades, you should put in the additional effort *before* submitting your work, such that your grade is the highest possible the first time you receive it.
2. I do not "round" grades up or down for any assignments, or for your final course grade. If you finish the semester with, for example, an 89.9, your grade will be recorded as a "B+". I do this because there is no justification for changing a grade – up or down – simply because it provides a preferable outcome. While I understand that people often like to have grades rounded up, I regard doing that as being just as arbitrary as rounding them down, and therefore, to avoid all of that, I let your numerical grade stand as the final determinant of your letter grade.

## General Degree Requirements

This course satisfies the Humanities component of the university's general education program.

## Other Information

Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. Religious beliefs will be accommodated according to UWS 22.03 provided that you have notified me of any possible conflicts with the class.

## Personal Information

Office Hours – Tuesday and Thursday 12:00-1:50 p.m. p.m. Other days and times by appointment.

Office Location – Collins Classroom Center (CCC) #416

E-mail – [cdiehm@uwsp.edu](mailto:cdiehm@uwsp.edu)

Phone – 715-346-2334