

VALUING NATURE IN THE HUMAN AGE



Instructor: Chris Diehm

Much of what we think of as “nature conservation” is informed by the field of conservation biology. This area of natural science has traditionally placed normative emphasis on species, populations, and systems, and had a practical focus on protecting habitat, biodiversity, and ecological processes. In this way, nature conservation has typically aligned with holistic rather than individualistic or anthropocentric ethics, and been concerned about issues related to anthropogenic extinction and the degradation of natural systems.

Recently, however, scientists have proposed that we have entered a new geological epoch: the “Anthropocene.” This idea is both popular and controversial, to say the least. At a minimum, it signifies that humans exert massive, destructive, and often unintended influence over vast parts of the natural world. In light of this stark reality, people wonder if our profound human alteration of the planet also signals the need for sweeping changes in how conservationists think about, value, and manage it.

As our Anthropocene impacts intensify, what conceptual and ethical challenges do modern-day conservationists face? Should conservation stress only the human costs of nature’s degradation, or can an emphasis on species and ecosystems still be justified? Do the various measures traditionally taken to protect nature still make sense, or do we need new and different tools to address the Anthropocene’s new and vastly scaled-up problems?

Objectives

This course explores conservation ethics as they are taking shape in the mid-twenty-first century. Our readings are organized around three areas—value theory, conservation issues, and attitude formation. We open with a brief review of the controversies surrounding the “Anthropocene” epoch, and then move into the “Values” unit of the course. Here, we will analyze the anthropocentric concept of “ecosystem services,” the debates between ethical individualists and ethical holists regarding the value of species, and the perspectives of deep ecologists. In the “Conservation Issues” unit we will explore debates about ecological restoration, “re-wilding” North America, de-extinction, and genetic engineering in conservation. Finally, in the “Attitude Formation” unit, we will examine a sociological text that discusses how environmental attitudes are formed, as well as how environmentalists may or may not be able to change them.

Upon completing this course, you will have learned to:

- Use critical thinking to examine and evaluate philosophical arguments about conservation, including anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric arguments, as well as individualistic and holistic perspectives on the value of species
- Engage ideas, beliefs and values that are meaningfully different than your own
- Read closely and write effectively about texts that reflect on perennial questions concerning ethics, justice, and the human relationship to nature
- Formulate an original philosophical thesis, conduct research, and summarize and integrate relevant information as part of an extended writing project

Beyond these more academic objectives, we have the goal of completing our work in a manner befitting an advanced-level “capstone” course. I hope to accomplish this by following a seminar format, where the emphasis is on being a part of a community of learning that allows each of us to share the unique insights that we bring into the classroom, to learn from each other, and to develop as deep as possible an appreciation of the relevance and importance of the issues we will be addressing.

Requirements

Quizzes

Quizzes will be given on the assigned readings at the beginnings of some classes. These will not be announced, and there will be an average of one per week. As long as you have read you should be able to do fairly well on quizzes even if you have not completely understood all of the material. *NOTE: Missed quizzes can be made up by submitting a one-page (typed, double-spaced) summary of the reading that the quiz was about, no more than one day later than the class in which the quiz was given. I will drop your lowest score. Cumulatively, quizzes are worth 30% of your grade.



Quizzes will be graded on a 5-point scale: 5=excellent/all information is correct and answer is detailed; 4=very good/information is correct but detail is thin; 3= good/information is mostly correct but not detailed or overly vague; 2=poor/information is mostly incorrect with little or no detail; 1=very poor/information is almost entirely incorrect and there is no detail; 0=complete failure.

Short Writing Assignments

Everyone is required to submit four 1-2-page papers that will be assigned intermittently throughout the semester (see Reading List for exact dates). These assignments will in some cases require light independent research, and in others they will require you to write commentaries on articles the class is reading. Individually, these are each worth 5% of the final grade, for a combined total of 20% of your overall grade.

Research Paper

Everyone is required to write a substantial research paper for this course, which will involve several stages and at least two distinct grades. There are three options for completing this requirement, and you must indicate your chosen option when you submit your research paper proposal. Detailed information about this requirement is available in Canvas.

*SUST MAJORS NOTE: If you are taking PHIL 480 as part of the SUST major, you must choose a topic that aligns with an environmental justice theme.

*PHIL 680 NOTE: If you are taking this course as PHIL 680, you are restricted to OPTION 1 below, and the length of your work should be 20-25 pages.

OPTION 1: Traditional Research Paper

This option involves selecting a course-related topic on which you will do research and write a 10-12 page thesis-driven essay. If you take this option your first step will be to submit a paper proposal by **Friday, April 15th**. This should be approximately 1-2 pages, and in it you will sketch your topic and initial thoughts on how you might construct your argument. Next, we will set up a meeting to discuss your proposal, talk about sources, etc. Then, no later than **Monday, May 2nd**, you will submit a *complete* draft of your paper (full-length, with notes, properly formatted), suitable for me to read and comment upon. *This draft will be graded*, and is worth 10% of your final grade. You will then use my feedback to make corrections and submit a final draft no later than our scheduled exam date. Your paper should be 10-12 pages, typed and double-spaced, and is worth 40% of your overall grade.

OPTION 2: Shorter Research Paper with Oral Presentation

For this option, you will write a shorter paper (5-7 pages) with more limited research requirements, to be followed by a public presentation of your research. To take this option you will first submit a paper proposal by **Friday, April 15th**. This should be approximately 1-2 pages, and in it you will sketch your topic, your initial thoughts on how you might construct your argument, and your initial thoughts about a public presentation. Next, we will set up a meeting to discuss your proposal, talk about possible sources, etc. Then, no later than **Monday, May 2nd**, you will submit a *complete* draft of your paper (full-length, with notes, properly formatted), suitable for me to read and comment upon. *This draft will be graded*, and is worth 10% of your final grade. You will then use my feedback to make corrections and submit a final draft no later than **Friday, May 13th** (the last day of classes before exams). Your paper should be 5-7 pages, typed and double-spaced, and is worth 20% of your course grade.

Once your paper is complete, you will be required to make a 10-15 minute public presentation of your work, in a venue that we will determine together (typically, this will be either a public forum that I arrange with you, or a recorded Zoom presentation that we will make publicly available). This presentation will be worth an additional 20% of your grade, and more information about it can be found in the separate handout I have distributed. *NOTE: Failure to attend on the scheduled day of your oral presentation, or missing your presentation without a formally documented reason, will result in an automatic loss of this portion of your grade for the course.

OPTION 3: Book Review or Commentary

A third research paper option is to write a 10-12 page book review or commentary. To do this, you will read a substantial amount of extra-curricular material (a book), and then write either a long book review, or a thesis-based commentary on it. You'll begin by submitting a paper proposal by **Friday, April 15th**. This should be approximately 1-2 pages, and introduce the book that you have selected for your project along with your initial thoughts on how you will approach this assignment. Next, we will set up a meeting to discuss your proposal, talk about possible sources, etc. Then, no later than **Monday, May 2nd**, you will submit a *complete* draft of your paper (full-length, with notes, properly formatted), suitable for me to read and comment upon. *This draft will be graded*, and is worth 10% of your final grade. You will then use my feedback to make corrections and submit a final draft no later than our scheduled exam date. It should be 10-12 pages, typed and double-spaced, and is worth 40% of your overall grade.



Book options (with other suggestions welcome):

- Frederick Bender, *The Culture of Extinction*
- Irus Braverman, *Wild Life: The Institution of Nature*
- Lawrence Johnson, *A Morally Deep World*
- Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics*
- Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*
- Kent Redford and William Adams, *Strange Natures*
- Thomas Sikor, ed., *The Justices and Injustices of Ecosystem Services*

Class Conduct and Participation

While you are in class you should conduct yourself appropriately. This includes being attentive and having cell phones turned off and put away. Moreover, given that this is a seminar course, your *attendance is absolutely crucial and therefore mandatory*—anyone who misses more than 6 classes will automatically receive an “F” for the course. Your role in this class is not simply to receive information passively; it is to contribute actively, and this cannot happen if you miss between 20 and 25% of the class meetings.

Academic Integrity

I adhere to a strict policy on academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating, etc.). All questions you 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.

Missed/Late Work



Missed work usually can be made up on the condition that you either inform me beforehand of an upcoming absence, or provide me with a formal written excuse. If you have not made arrangements with me beforehand, your late work may or may not be accepted. If I do accept an assignment that has been turned in later than we have agreed, the highest grade you will be able to receive will be no higher than the lowest grade received by someone who turned the assignment in on time.

Texts

Thomas Heberlein, *Navigating Environmental Attitudes* (Oxford University Press)

Ronald Sandler, *The Ethics of Species* (Cambridge University Press)

Reserve Reading

Many of the readings for this course are on Canvas. These are marked as "(reserve)" on the reading list. It is your responsibility to get all assignments on time and be aware of when they are being read.

Grading

Unless otherwise indicated, all grades will be calculated 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	

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—Collins Classroom Center (CCC) #416

Office Hours—Monday, 2-3:30; Tuesday, 3:30-5. Other days and times by appointment.

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