



## HUMANS, NATURE, & THE ANTHROPOCENE

Instructor: Chris Diehm

The idea that people are “a part of nature” is widely accepted (at least in theory), but exactly what it means remains to be determined. For some, it signifies that humans are just one small part of the larger ecological order and thus ought to adopt environmental attitudes of respect and humility; for others, it indicates human dependence on natural systems and nature’s instrumental value; for others still, it represents the fact that human beings have decisively influenced the course of planetary biology, ecology, and even geology, and that the proper role for humans to assume is a distinctly managerial one.

In addition to these theoretical and ethical considerations, there is also the fact that contemporary human beings spend more and more time in artificial environments, and less and less time in natural ones. Not surprisingly, many environmentalists worry about this trend. Now more than ever, they say, people need to “get outside” and “reconnect with nature.” But why would environmentalists say this, and what, if anything, does it have to do with the conceptual and moral questions sketched above?

### Objectives

This course explores a broad range of questions about how people conceptualize, experience, and value nature when proceeding from the belief that humans are a part of the natural world. It begins with an analysis of the widely-used concept of “ecosystem services” and then proceeds to examine the notion of “biophilia,” the philosophy of “deep ecology,” and several related issues about how modern-day humans can and often do experience nature. It concludes with readings that address the idea of the “Anthropocene” epoch. All of these points of focus, in their various ways, accept that humans and nature are inextricably connected, yet all present unique perspectives on what this means both conceptually and practically. The course is structured to be at the same time both thematic and topical, as well as strongly inter-disciplinary, including readings by philosophers, scientists, social scientists, and on-the-ground conservationists.

Upon completing this course, you will have learned to:

- Define, distinguish, compare and contrast anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric perspectives.
- Define and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of numerous concepts researchers have proposed that are central to conversations among contemporary conservationists, including “ecosystem services,” “biophilia,” “deep ecology,” “conservation psychology,” and “the Anthropocene.”
- Recognize and discuss the ways in which social science informs certain contemporary philosophical theories, and can be integrated into philosophical perspectives.
- Formulate an original philosophical thesis, conduct research, and summarize and integrate relevant information as part of an extended research paper.
- Apply philosophical standards of oral and written communication to grammatically correct and organized verbal and written presentations.
- Critique your own and others’ work to provide useful feedback and improve communication skills.

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 all 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. Missed quizzes cannot be made up (this includes quizzes missed due to lateness). Quizzes will not be announced, and there will be an *average* of about 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. I will drop your lowest score before calculating your quiz grade. Quizzes will be graded on the following 5-point scale: 5=excellent/all information is correct and answer is detailed; 4=very good/information is correct but detail is somewhat thin; 3= good/information is mostly correct but not detailed or overly vague; 2=poor/information is mostly incorrect and there is little or no detail; 1=very poor/information is almost entirely incorrect and there is no detail; 0=complete failure. Cumulatively, quizzes are worth 15% of your grade.

### *Short Reaction Papers*

Everyone is required to submit two approximately 2-page typewritten reactions to or commentaries about the readings. You must do one of these no later than October 23<sup>rd</sup>, and the other between October 25<sup>th</sup> and December 4<sup>th</sup>. These assignments are each worth 5% of the final grade, making these worth a total of 10% of your overall grade. If you are taking this course for graduate credit (Phil 680) you will be required to submit four of these, and each individual assignment will be worth 2.5%, making this requirement worth a total of 10% of your overall grade.

### *Oral Presentation*

Everyone is required to make a 10-minute long oral presentation related to the article that the class will be discussing that day. I will distribute a sign-up sheet for this at the start of the semester, and you can choose which day you will also make your oral presentation (you should also consider writing one of your reaction papers on the day you make your presentation). This assignment is worth 5% of your grade, and more information about it can be found in the separate handout I have distributed.

\*Failure to attend class on the 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.

### *"Nature in Culture" Paper*

At some point during the semester, I would like for you to find an example from a "popular culture source" in which either "nature experience," connection to nature, or environmental identity (i.e. our course themes) figure prominently in the imagery or symbolism of the example. To complete the assignment, you will need to turn in both (a) a copy of the example (newspaper article, magazine ad, short video clip, etc.) and (b) a two-page analysis in which you discuss how the example displays the course theme you think it displays, why it seems to mean that, and whatever further commentary you think might be warranted. This is due anytime up to December 13<sup>th</sup>, and is worth 10% of your final grade.

\*Prior to submitting this assignment, you will have to meet with a classmate to discuss your work, and to have her/him proof-read your writing. Failure to do this will result in an automatic drop of one full letter grade for your cumulative grade for the course.

### *Research Paper*

You are required to write a substantial research paper for this course, which will involve several stages and two distinct grades. First, you will submit a paper proposal by November 15<sup>th</sup>, approximately 1-2 pages long, in which you sketch the topic you would like to research and your initial thoughts on how you might construct your argument. Next, we will set up a short meeting to discuss your proposal, talk about possible sources, etc. No later than Thursday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, you will have to 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. Your final draft is due no later than

Thursday, December 20<sup>th</sup> (our scheduled exam date). It should be between 10 and 12 pages long, typed and double-spaced, and is worth 40% of your overall grade. Specific information about what is expected of a research paper can be found in the research paper handouts.

*\*Research Paper Alternative*

As an alternative to the paper described above, you have the option of writing an extended analysis of one of the books listed below. To do this, you will have to read a substantial amount of extra-curricular material (i.e. the book), and then follow the steps described above (paper proposal, draft, etc.). This paper could take the form of a lengthy book review, or a traditional thesis-based commentary on the book.

Book options (with other suggestions welcome):

Frederick Bender, *The Culture of Extinction*

Irus Braverman, *Wild Life: The Institution of Nature*

Stephen Kellert, *Birthright*

Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*

Christopher Uhl, *Developing Ecological Consciousness*

*Class Conduct and Participation*

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 a college 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 (that is, if you are asked to leave, you should not return until the next class period, since coming back into the room only creates a further disruption).

Moreover, given that this is a senior seminar, it is very important that everyone participate actively. This means, first, that your *attendance is absolutely crucial and therefore mandatory*—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.

Second, *verbal participation is required*. This is because in philosophy it is expected that you engage in conversations, answer questions that are posed, and ask questions of your own. It is also expected that you learn to do these things appropriately even when I am not doing obvious sorts of things intended to facilitate discussion.

I will keep a record of how much you participate in class in this way, and your active participation is worth 10% of your grade.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

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

There are no required texts for the course, though I am happy to make recommendations for course-related texts if you are interested in owning some of them.

## Reserve Reading

All of the readings for this course are on D2L. These are marked as “(reserve)” on the reading list. It is your responsibility to get all assignments on time and to 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 |              |

## General Degree Requirements

This course satisfies the Writing Emphasis (WE) component of the university’s general degree requirements (GDRs). It also satisfies the Communication in the Major and Capstone Course requirements of the new general education program (GEP).

## 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

Phone—715-346-4948

Office Hours—Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 12:30-1:50 p.m. Other days and times by appointment.

E-mail—cdiehm@uwsp.edu