

RELIGION 450: Religion and Ecology

Dr. Luke Whitmore

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12–3 and by appointment.

Location: CCC 417 (and sometimes Zest)

DESCRIPTION

The senior seminar is where religious studies students are invited to investigate adaptively and creatively a specific set of advanced topics in the study of religion, using the knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired over the course of their studies at UWSP. In my view this means that our task is to consider cutting edge topics that are of critical importance both in the academic study of religion and in the world today. My aim is to equip the participants in this seminar with the ability to participate in public conversations about religion in skillful and useful ways and to offer a set of conceptually, intellectually, and existentially useful touchstones with which to think about being in the world. A corollary goal is to understand the value of training in religious studies in today's world and to provide language that can be used to express this understanding to others.

The specific topic for this semester is “religion and ecology.” As we will immediately begin to notice, both of these terms require careful definition as well as an understanding of their respective intellectual genealogies. In a general sense, however, what we are interested in learning how to understand and analyze are how what might be termed the *ecological* aspects of “religious” traditions connect to one of the most pressing problems facing the world today: environmental degradation.

ORIENTING QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of data are being considered and why those kinds of data?
2. What approaches are being used to analyze those data and why those approaches?
3. What operative understandings and/or definitions of “ecology”, “ecological”, “religion”, “religious,” “spiritual,” and “spirituality” are present?
4. What are the arguments and to whom are those arguments directed?
5. What understandings are present about the connections of “religion”, “ecology”, and “environmental degradation”?
6. Of those understandings, which do you think are “useful” or “hopeful”, and why? Which do you think are problematic, and why?

READINGS

The following texts are required for purchase. Any available edition is acceptable.

Berry, Evan. *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*. University of California Press, 2015.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; Paw Prints, 2010.

Grim, John, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. *Ecology and Religion*. Washington: Island Press, 2014.

Other readings will be provided in PDF and printout form.

GRADES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Participation and Preparation: (20%)

You are expected each week to come to class having carefully prepared the reading and with your own preliminary answers to the ORIENTING QUESTIONS already prepared. Each week, in addition to the assigned reading, it is expected that you will be doing your own reading, exploring, and thinking about your final paper topic. Most weeks we will discuss your progress at some point during the seminar. Each week several seminar participants will be asked to take on a higher level of responsibility for our conversations together. This includes coming to class with your answers to the ORIENTING QUESTIONS prepared to share with the class and with several questions or topics you think deserve emphasis. I will attempt to pair particular students with particularly appropriate weeks to the extent possible. In the last several weeks of the seminar each participant will present their in-progress final project to the class. This presentation will include an explanation of how you would describe your work this semester to a potential employer.

Assignment 1: (20%)

There are three components to this assignment. The first component is an *approximately 1000-word essay* in which you will, in response to a specific prompt, offer your own analysis of what we have done in the first seven weeks of the course. The second component is a preliminary *annotated bibliography* containing at least eight sources relevant to your in-progress choice of topic for the final paper. The third component is a *resume*.

Assignment 2: Research Prospectus (20%)

This assignment will ask you to respond to a series of questions (guidelines to be provided) designed to ensure the success of your final paper. It will further ask for a second *annotated bibliography* containing at least sixteen sources relevant to your final paper.

Final Paper/Project: (40%)

The final paper, unless otherwise stipulated, will be a 3000 word research essay on a topic of your choice that you have developed in consultation with me over the course of the semester. While the ambit is quite broad, the essay must in some way or other position itself relevant to the ORIENTING QUESTIONS and consider the relationship of the material studied in the first half of the semester (Weeks 1–7) to the material studied in the second half of the semester.

Absences

Our seminar meets once a week and full participation is crucial. Everyone is automatically entitled to one unexcused absence. Anything beyond this should be discussed with me and may impact your final grade.

Learning Accommodations

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>
<http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>

Mutual Respect

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/rightsCommBillRights.pdf>

Academic Misconduct

<http://library.uwsp.edu/guides/vrd/plagiarism.htm>
<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

For the Schedule of Assignments, and for notes and questions raised before, during, and after each seminar, see our class Workflowy. I have sent each of you an email invitation. You will need to create a free Workflowy membership for yourself for this class. You can access Workflowy through the web and through smartphone and tablet apps.

Schedule of Assignments

- Week 1: 1/27
 - Ecology and Religion: 12-35 (and, optionally, 1-11)
- Week 2: 2/3
 - Ecology and Religion: p. 35-42 (the rest of Chapter Two), Chapters 3 and 4
- Week 3: 2/10
 - Devoted to Nature: Introduction and Chapter 1
- Week 4: 2/17
 - Read Laudato 'Si
 - Visit from Dr. Dona Warren
- Week 5: 2/24: Student Leader: Blaze
 - Devoted to Nature: Chapter 2 and 3
- Week 6: 3/2 (Encyclical Panel)
 - This week we will not meet at the scheduled time. Instead, all who are able should come (and participate, if possible!) in the public panel discussion on Laudato 'Si that begins at 7/7:30 in the DUC. If you are truly unable to attend at this time, please see me to discuss an alternate version of what you will do for class this week.
 - Finish Reading Laudato 'Si if you have not already done so.
- Week 7: 3/9: Student Leader: Kylie Lacombe
 - Devoted to Nature: Chapters 4 and 5
 - Ecology and Religion: Chapters 5 and 6
- Week 8: 3/16:
 - Ecology and Religion Chapter 8: Indigenous Traditions
 - Assignment 1 Due
- SPRING BREAK
- Week 9: 3/30: "India"
 - Ecology and Religion: Chapter 9
 - "Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Chipko Resistance" by George A. James (PDF on D2L)
 - "Towards and Indigenous Indian Environmentalism" by Christopher Key Chapple (PDF on D2L)
 - Optional:
 - Selections from Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India (PDF on D2L)
 - Development Theory (Oxford Bibliographies)
- Week 10: 4/6: Research Focus
 - Come to class ready to share where you are with your research project. Bring specific questions and materials either in print or digital form.

- Week 11: 4/13

- Ecology and Religion: Chapter 7
- Donald Swearer: “Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories: The Resources of Buddhist Ecology” (PDF attached and on D2L — let me know if you’d like a printed copy).
- Peter Daniels: “Buddhist economics and the environment - Material flow analysis and the moderation of society's metabolism” (PDF attached and on D2L — let me know if you’d like a printed copy)
- Week 12: 4/20
 - “Tradition and Sentiment in Indonesian Environmental Islam” by Anna M. Gade (PDF on D2L)
 - “Sumac Kawsay, Pachamama, and Cosmopolitics: The Rights of Nature, Earthbound People and Global Indigenous Struggles” by Chris Crews (PDF on D2L)
 - Assignment 2 due.
- Week 13: 4/27
 - Hungry Tide 3-102 (or depending on edition, up to the chapter entitled "Epiphany")
- Week 14: 5/4
 - Hungry Tide: 102-212
 - Presentations (15 minutes plus question-and-answer each)
- Week 15: 5/11
 - Finish Hungry Tide
 - Optional: Ecology and Religion Chapter 10 and Epilogue: Interreligious Dialogue
 - Presentations
 - Closing Remarks
- Final Paper due during Finals