

ENVS 303: Human Ecology and Ethics

Fall 2017, 5 credits

Instructor:

Kate J. Darby, Ph.D.

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209 Arntzen Hall

Office Hours: Mon: 12-1 pm; Weds: 2:45-3:45 pm; by appointment (Note: I am not available for meetings on Thursdays)

Teaching Assistants and Discussion Section Instructors: Kevin Moens (moensk@wwu.edu), Sahar Arbab (arbabs@wwu.edu), and Elliott Winter (wintere9@wwu.edu)

Course Meetings:

Mondays and Wednesdays: 10:00-11:50 am in PH 146

Friday Discussion Section Meetings:

Sockeye: 10-10:50 am in Arntzen 030 with Sahar Arbab

Chinook: 10-10:50 am in ES 418 with Kevin Moens

Coho: 11-11:50 am in Arntzen 030 with Sahar Arbab

Chum: 11-11:50 am in ES 418 with Kevin Moens

This course explores social justice aspects and ethical frameworks of environmental challenges, as they manifest themselves across temporal and geographic scales in coupled human-natural systems. Content introduces students to a range of intellectual traditions and worldviews for understanding nature and humanity's role therein, recognizing the diversity of those relationships. This course explicitly treats "the environment" as comprising relatively pristine landscapes as well as managed and urban ecosystems, and humans as co-evolving with dynamic and complex environments.

Many of human-nature interactions have led to socio-environmental dilemmas where processes, outcomes, and the values underpinning decisions are contested. In this course, you will begin to develop your ability to use different "epistemological lenses" to understand the complexity of environmental issues and to explore and define your own orientation to them, by:

1) **Using an ethics lens.** Why are environmental problems "problems"? It seems that this must be because things humans value are threatened. Similarly, an "issue" exists when different people value different aspects of the problem or possible solutions, or prioritize similar values differently. Understanding several ways that people frame issues *as ethical* – that is, as matters of right and wrong or good and bad—sheds important light on the controversies. These also underlie policies. We can describe the situation more accurately if we understand how we are moral or ethical agents and recipients. One goal of this course is that you be able to recognize, describe, and understand the ethical dimensions of social-environmental problems. Any choice inevitably involves weighing risks, consequences, principles, and values. Are there more or less reasonable ways of doing this? Do ethics constrain policy processes? What are your convictions about the human-human ethical aspects of environmental problems, and the human-nature aspects? You should come out of this course better able to frame, articulate, compare, and evaluate such convictions, as well as issues you observe around you, and smaller-scale decisions you may confront in life.

2) **Using the related lenses of history, social structure, actors, and discourse analysis** to contextualize and explain environmentally-relevant choices made in the past with reference to the beliefs and values of the time. Across cultures (including but not limited to Western traditions and the United States), how have different thinkers conceptualized or “constructed” nature and human-nature relations? How have these ideas been contested and enshrined in rules or systems that regulate actions? Ideas about nature can be discussed in abstract terms, but it is because they have been advocated by diverse agents, stakeholders, organizations – all of which have differing kinds and degrees of power – that they have become a force in conditioning the present. You should come away from this course able to analyze the discourses that characterize socio-environmental controversies with reference to structures and power they express. Social theorists debate the role of such structures versus the power of individual actors or “agents” in determining the both circumscribed controversies and broad outlines of culture. You should be able to elucidate the actions, contexts and conditions by which well-known and lesser-known environmental leaders have effected change and resisted harm to humans and environments.

3) **Employing a socio-ecological systems-theory lens.** This lens is somewhat more “naturalistic” than the preceding humanistic perspectives, but humans are very much a part of nature still. You will learn to explain characteristics of environmental issues as the intersection of two classes of systems: human ones and nature ones. In fact, they cannot be split; nature influences humans as much as the other way around. We will refer to human-nature *coupled systems* or as *socio-ecological system*. You should increase your understanding of the varying strategies for subsistence and capacities for adaptation that shape human social organization. Using systems vocabulary you should be able to describe interdependent elements, relationships, patterns and processes of co-constitutive human and natural systems. There is not only one way to construe these complex “human ecologies”, and we will explore multiple theoretical perspectives for interpreting changing socio-ecological systems over time.

4) **Developing a personal integrative lens** to that expresses your own growing awareness of the influences of your experiences and assumptions on your stances on social-environmental-ethical dilemmas. How have you acquired your ideas about “the environment”? How does looking at them through the lenses of ethics, power, and systems increase your mental sophistication? Do your received ideas stand up to scrutiny? Your behaviors and life choices? Please note that the emphasis in this course is not so much on *What* to think, as much as *How* to think about these complicated issues. We hope your goals include becoming more perceptive and discerning about environmental topics, and able to critically examine and reasonably justify choices. Environmental issues are contentious partly just because we *are* each other’s environments, so it matters a great deal how we think about it. Finally, an important goal is that you increase your ability to communicate your authentic and self-reflexive evolving questions and commitments orally and in writing.

This is a course where we will no doubt ask more questions than we conclusively answer. This is not surprising, because arguably no one can claim at this time to have “solved” the intellectual or the practical problems of attaining “sustainable” and just ecological relations of humans! As in other questions that concern the future, we are more or less on the same footing here! Welcome to the discussion—if you choose to take this course, you will be expected to actively participate in it!

Student Learning Goals

The faculty at Huxley College and specifically its Department of Environmental Studies hold ourselves accountable to helping you achieve challenging learning objectives. This course supports these goals, which can be stated in terms of you strengthening your ability to:

- Ethically evaluate social priorities and their risks in the context of environmental problem solving.
- Apply an integrative approach towards understanding human-environment interactions.
- Identify and analyze complex environmental problems and recognize diverse stakeholder perspectives.
- Transfer academic learning to a real-world context of constraints and opportunities.
- Analyze and communicate ideas effectively in oral, written, and visual forms.

The New “Core”

This quarter marks the Environmental Studies department’s final transition to a new set of core courses – 303 and 305 – that all majors will take when they first enter the department. These two courses will be taken in sequence in large lecture format two days a week, with smaller Friday discussion sections, and each course will be FIVE credits.

In addition to being core courses for environmental studies majors, these two courses will also be important cross-over courses for Environmental Sciences students, as well as students with minors and self-designed majors centered around sustainability or environmental studies.

The core course revisions have been part of a broader effort to streamline, update, and improve the ENVS curriculum. As such, you should expect your upper division ENVS courses to build from the concepts introduced in 303 and 305. We also hope that these courses offer a structured way to build community among your peers, and with ENVS faculty. As we continue to hone and improve these curricular changes, we welcome your feedback!

Texts

- White, R. (1991). *Land use, environment, and social change: The shaping of Island County, Washington*. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press. In the bookstore.
- Robbins P, Hintz J, Moore S (2014). *Environment and Society: Critical Introductions to Geography*, 2nd ed. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell. ISBN 9781118451564
(This text will be used in both core courses, so keep it! It is available as an e-text and for rent. Shop around.) Available as e-book: <https://www.vitalsource.com/referral?term=9781118451519>
- All other readings will be available via Canvas.

Assessments

- 1) **Attendance and Course Engagement (25%).** Attendance and course engagement will be assessed several ways.

First, before most classes, you will take an open-book, open-note reading quiz on Canvas to gauge your understanding of the text.

Second, although this is a large class, you will be actively engaging in the material during lecture through activities, small group discussion and the use of Socrative classroom response technology (i.e. using your smart phone or laptop as a “clicker”). All information about the classroom response technology is posted on Canvas. At the beginning of each class, you should expect a clicker quiz to

review content from last class. Throughout each lecture, you should expect at least two or three opportunities to engage with the course material through Socratic. You will ALWAYS be encouraged to work with your neighbors and consult any materials you'd like to complete these mini assessments.

Third, your TA will record attendance and assign participation scores for your Friday meetings.

Finally, we will occasionally complete small group activities in lecture.

Your lowest TWO daily reading quizzes and lowest TWO daily participation and attendance scores will be dropped.

- 2) **Weekly Writing Assignments (60%):** You will have a writing assignment due at the end of most weeks of class.
 - A. **FOUR Critical Thinking and Synthesis Responses (24% total, 8% each, lowest score dropped).** These writing prompts will require you to deeply understand, extend and connect the course content from your readings and lecture material. You will be assessed on your understanding and application of the course material, your writing quality, and your proper attribution of ideas through citations. You may consult the course texts and your notes for these assignments, but they must be completed independently. Because most of you will find these assignments challenging, your lowest score will be dropped.
 - B. **Essay: Subsistence and Socio-Ecological System Change (9%).** The first essay will focus on broad ideas about human-nature/socio-ecological systems, including cultural evolution and ecology. This essay will be highly structured, asking you to use evidence from class readings and films to describe how a subsistence approach shapes other aspects of society.
 - C. **Adopt an Environmental Hero(ine) Project (9%).** As a Friday discussion group, you will select and research one of several environmental leaders, from a diverse pool of past and present leaders. You will *individually* write a short essay on the life, work, and ethical lens(es) of your chosen leader. Then, as a group, you will compare notes and present your leader in a Friday discussion session. Later, we will discuss a current socio-ecological issue from the perspective of your chosen environmental leader. It will be challenging to stay "in character," but important for exploring the complexity and the complementary (or competing!) values that must be considered in addressing socio-ecological issues.
 - D. **Essay: Island County (9%):** This essay will focus on the human ecology of Island County, based upon a book-length study we will read. You will get to choose one of several question prompts and case study.
 - E. **This I Believe Personal Ethic Podcast or Video (9%).** You will develop a short, personal reflection explaining your emerging environmental ethic and ideas of sustainability. You will write and revise a reflection (shoot for 600, well-crafted words) and then create a 3-minute recording of yourself reading it. This assignment is modeled on the international organization, "This I Believe". If you haven't heard these essays on the radio, listen to a few at <http://thisibelieve.org/>.
- 3) **Final Exam (15%):** The final exam will cover all concepts in the course and consist of short answer, multiple choice, and short essays that help you demonstrate your mastery of the major concepts in the course.

Grading breakdown

A	≥	94%
A-	≥	90%
B+	≥	87%
B	≥	83%
B-	≥	80%
C+	≥	77%
C	≥	73%
C-	≥	70%
D	≥	65%
F	≥	64%

Assignment Policies

- You cannot make up in-class participation points OR reading quizzes; however, the lowest two daily participation grades and reading quizzes will be dropped. Thus, you can generally miss two days of regular class for any reason without it affecting your grade. The TAs and I do not need to know that you will miss class. **Please DO NOT email us if you are ill, if you sleep in, or if life otherwise gets in the way of your attendance. These things happen – this is why we drop the lowest scores.**
- **No late assignments will be accepted.** Most assignments are due in Canvas and all dates are posted well ahead of due dates. Exceptions for excuses that follow university policy for Emergency Leave of Absence (via Office of Student Life) or for documented, university-approved events (e.g. sports). For other absences, plan on any material missed to count towards your “dropped” scores.

Some tips for enjoying and learning the course material this quarter:

- The Course Module section of Canvas contains all of the information you need to prepare for each day’s class – the readings, some direction and tips re: the readings, links to assessments, etc.
- You may find the reading load for this class to be a bit heavy. Try to devote a chunk of time to prepare for each class, and to complete the reading quiz. As you are reading, take note of any key ideas or areas of confusion. Bring your reading notes and the readings themselves to class – either as a paper copy or electronic version on your tablet or laptop. We have tried to indicate rough reading times on Canvas so you have a sense of how much time you’ll need to prepare for each class.
- You may find the ideas in this class challenge your previously held worldviews. I encourage you to remain open to learning about new perspectives and to embrace the discomfort and uncertainty that these explorations sometimes invoke.
- Most of the written assignments are due by 11:59 pm on Saturday night. I strongly recommend that you write a draft of your assignment before your Friday discussion question so that you can ask your TA for any clarification on the related content or prompt. Of course, you are welcome and encouraged to turn in your assignments earlier than Saturday night
- To succeed at understanding the course content, you will need to be an active, engaged participant in lectures and discussion sections. You will need to take thoughtful, careful notes. Although I use Power Point in class, you’ll notice that many of the details are left blank for us to fill in during class time. I will ONLY post the skeleton versions of the slides on Canvas.
- This course should help you hone your critical thinking skills. These are the skills that will help you navigate the overwhelming set of ideas, “facts”, news pieces, opinions, etc. that populate our

globalized world. You should expect few “right” answers in this course. Instead, you will be assessed on the strength of your understanding, application and analysis of key concepts and theories.

- To help you organize the key ideas explored in this class, I encourage you to create and maintain an annotated glossary that includes key terms. For each key term/idea, you may want to associate it with a particular reading, author, or set of readings and others. You may also want to include an example to help you understand the concept.
- If you have any questions or concerns about the course, please email me or visit me in my office hours.

Expectations:

I expect us to develop a classroom culture of respect and engagement. To accomplish this, we will each need to strike an appropriate balance between listening and verbally engaging.

You can expect me to create an inclusive classroom environment that respects the diverse perspectives offered by each of you and that engages in critical debate and discussion. You can also expect me to challenge your previously held beliefs and ask you to question the status quo. I hope you will challenge me in the same way. We will be engaging with difficult, messy ideas and sometimes that can be frustrating and uncomfortable. You should not be surprised if I ask you to clarify, further develop, or justify an idea you put forth in our classroom discussions. I hope that we can all learn from one another and we can only do so through deep debate and discussion. **I will not tolerate any form of hate speech or other oppressive language in the classroom, the discussion sections, or online forums.**

National politics and discourse aside, **each and every one of you belongs in my classroom community.** Please let me know how I can support you.

If you need to miss class due to a religious observance, please speak to me in advance to make arrangements to cover material from that day.

Western Washington University has an official policy concerning **academic dishonesty** that is published in the General Catalog in Appendix D. **All students in this class are expected to abide by this and other policies listed in the official catalog.** I take issues of academic dishonesty very seriously and follow the University’s procedure for reporting and compliance. We will devote class time to ensure that you understand how to ethically engage with others’ work.

*To request **disability accommodation**, please contact **disAbility Resources for Students** office, 650-3844, or for **student assistance** related to required course procedures, please contact the **Student Life** office, 650-3706. Students are also responsible for knowing and adhering to WWU's standards for **ethical computing**. Refer to these web sites:*

- **Policy for Responsible Computing**
<http://west.wvu.edu/atus/helpdesk/acceptableusepolicy.shtml>
- **Ethical Conduct: User Agreement for WWU Network and Computer Resources**
<http://west.wvu.edu/atus/helpdesk/useragreement.shtml>

You can expect me to be available to help you with course assignments, readings, or any other aspect of this course. I am always available during office hours. If you are unable to make it to my office during these times, please feel free to email or call my office to set up a separate meeting time. My goal is to help you succeed as a college student and my door is always open to discuss issues unrelated to this course.

You can expect me to promptly respond to your emails during normal working hours (i.e. M-F, 8-5).

This syllabus is likely to change, depending on student interest and our collective understanding of course material and concepts. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.

