

Freshman Seminar 142: Religion and Nature in an Age of Ecology

Spring Semester 2015
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
TR: 11:00-12:15
Room: Bryan 117

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Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore the ways in which selected religious traditions have responded to and been transformed by the modern Environmental Movement. Particular, although not exclusive, emphasis will be placed on Buddhist and Christian traditions.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals for this course include but are not limited to the following:

1. To assess the relationship between religion and nature.
2. To identify the role, if any, that religious traditions have in addressing ecological crises.
3. To analyze understandings of religion, nature, and ecology and how these understandings relate to the alleviation of ecological degradation.
4. To critically evaluate the ways in which our ecological context influences and contributes to the construction of religious belief and practice and, concurrently, the ways in which religious institutions potentially influence and affect the ecological communities of which we are inextricably a part.
5. To critically assess why the emerging field of "Religion and Ecology" is a subject that is worthy of study in an academic setting, which will involve an examination of the ways in which human cultures construct various understandings of religion and nature.

WRITING INTENSIVE STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

- WI SLO 1: Students will be able to recognize and write in genres appropriate to the discipline(s) of the primary subject matter of the course.
- WI SLO 2: Students will be able to use informal and formal approaches to writing and multiple drafts to deepen their mastery of the subject.

*These competencies will be developed through two paper writing workshops during the semester in addition to the availability of individual student conferences. Paper writing workshops will focus on all aspects of the writing process including the development of paper topics, thesis construction, and paper organization and coherence.

ASSIGNED READING

1. Textbooks:

Fox, Matthew. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (HarperOne, 1988).
Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*. (Parallax Press, 2008).
Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn (editor). *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (The Golden Sufi Center, 2013).

2. Additional reading materials will be made available through the Course's Blackboard site.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance	15%
2. Discussion	15%
3. Current Events	5%
4. Reading Responses	15%
5. First Paper	25%
6. Final Paper	25%

100%

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance and regular participation in class discussions will account for 15% of your final grade.

2. **Leading Discussion:** Throughout the course of the semester, you will be responsible for periodically leading class discussions.

3. **Current Events:** Once during the semester on a day of your choice, you will be required to bring in a copy of and provide a short report on a current news story pertaining to the course content.

4. **Reading Responses:** Throughout the course of the semester, you will be required to complete written responses to reading assignments. The criteria for each response are as follows: **Each response must be at least 200-250 words and must contain one properly formatted reference to a particular day's reading.** For full credit, you must complete **10** of these responses. You are encouraged to use these short assignments to generate ideas and content for your papers. All responses will be submitted through the Blackboard Discussion Board.

5. **Thesis Statement:** A thesis statement for each of your papers will be due on the days designated for writing workshops. During that class session, we will have peer review sessions in which you will offer feedback to and receive feedback from your fellow classmates. You will also receive feedback from me on your planned paper topics.

6. **Research Papers:** You will have two research papers assigned during the course of the semester. These assignments should be 4-5 pages in length and written on a topic applicable to course content. The papers can be written either as a standard research paper or a report on the work of an organization/institution that combines the areas of religion and environmental protection. For the latter project, you should include **either** an interview (phone or in-person) with a representative of this particular organization **or** a description of your visit to a function sponsored by the organization/institution **and** an assessment of this particular group's efforts to address environmental problems. The papers will be written on topics of your choice and will be due on **March 5** and **April 23**.

*This course will be graded using a plus/minus grading system. Grades are assigned according to the following scale:

A+ (98-100); A (93-97); A- (90-92); B+ (86-89); B (83-85); B- (80-82); C+ (76-79); C (73-75); C- (70-72); D+ (66-69); D (63-65); D- (60-62); F (<60).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance counts for 15% of your final grade. Therefore, attendance is expected and necessary for success in this course. You are allowed **2** absence without penalty during the course of the semester. Each subsequent absence will result in a loss of points from your attendance grade.

COURSE POLICIES

1. Proper class preparation is expected. You should come to class having already read the assigned reading for the day and ready for class discussion.
2. Regular and timely class attendance is required. If you are consistently late for class, you will lose points on your final grade.
3. Newspaper reading, the use of cell phones, sleeping, doing crossword puzzles, etc. is prohibited during class time. In other words, you should be focused on the content of each class session.
4. If you will be unable to attend class on the day of a test or if you will be unable to turn an assignment in on time, please let me know in advance. The day of the test does not constitute advance notice. I will be willing to make accommodations for extenuating circumstances.
5. Respect for your fellow classmates, your teacher, and the course material must be maintained at all times. Critical discussion of the issues applicable to this course is allowed; derogatory language is not. A failure to adhere to this policy will result in your removal from the class session and an unexcused absence.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All academic work for this class must conform to the standards of the UNC-Greensboro Academic Integrity Policy. If you are unfamiliar with the UNC-Greensboro Academic Integrity Policy, please visit the following link: <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu>.

DROP POLICY

If you wish to drop the course, you must initiate the process yourself. If you drop before the midpoint deadline, you will receive a "W".

DISABILITY SERVICES

UNCG seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Office of Disability Services in 215 Elliot University Center, 334-5440, www.uncg.edu/ods, ods@uncg.edu.

I am happy to accommodate any special needs that you may require for the completion of this course. However, it is your responsibility to complete all of the applicable paper work with Disability Services and provide me with an explanation of the accommodations that you will need.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week One

January 13: **Introduction to the Course**

January 15: **Lynn White, Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (Blackboard under Course Documents); Genesis 1:1-2:25**

January 16—Last Day to Change Course or Course Section Without Special Permission; Last Day to Drop Course for Tuition and Fee Refund

Week Two

January 20: **John Cobb's "Christianity and Ecology" and "Theology and Ecology" (Blackboard under Course Documents)**

January 22: **Donald K. Swearer's "Buddhism and Ecology" and Ian Harris' "A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant" (Blackboard under Course Documents)**

Week Three

January 27: **John Shelby Spong's "Bad Theology Creates Bad Ecology" (Blackboard under Course Documents)**

January 29: **Film: *Moyers on America: Is God Green?***

Week Four

February 3: *Spiritual Ecology* (pp. 25-30; 37-48)

February 5: **Matthew Fox** (1-17; 33-74)

Week Five

February 10: **Matthew Fox** (75-128)

February 12: **Thich Nhat Hanh** (Part One: Chapters 1-5)

Week Six

February 17: **Paper Writing Workshop**

February 19: **Thich Nhat Hanh** (Part Two: Chapters 6-10)

Week Seven

February 24: **Matthew Fox** (129-156)

February 26: **Mathew Fox** (157-244)

Week Eight

March 3: **Thich Nhat Hanh** (Part Three)

March 5: **MIDTERM PAPER DUE**

March 6—Last Day to Drop Course Without Incurring a WF (Withdraw Failing) Grade**Week Nine**

March 10, 12: **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

Week Ten

March 17: **Thomas Berry's "New Story"** (Blackboard under Course Documents)

March 19: *Spiritual Ecology* (pp. 15-24; 61-76)

Week Eleven

March 24: *Spiritual Ecology* (pp. 49-60)

March 26: **Film: *Journey of the Universe***

Week Twelve

March 31: *Spiritual Ecology* (pp. 7-14)

April 2: **George Tinker's "Creation as Kin: An American Indian View"** (Blackboard under Course Documents)

Week Thirteen

April 7: *Spiritual Ecology* (pp. 77-84; 85-102)

April 9: *Spiritual Ecology* (pp. 175-184; 235-244)

Week Fourteen

April 14: **Web Site Day: Find and Research a Web Site Addressing Religion and Ecology/Environment**

April 16: **Paper Writing Workshop**

Week Fifteen

April 21: **No Class: Research and Writing Day**

April 23: **FINAL PAPER DUE**

Further information concerning these matters will be given in class. In addition, the information contained within this syllabus is a general guide and may be subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.