

Religious Studies 438: Religion, Nature, and Environment

Fall Semester 2012

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

TR 8:00-9:15

Room: Saunders 104

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Office Hours: Tuesdays or Thursdays 9:15-10:15, by appointment at Graham Memorial Hall

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of the relationship between religion and the natural environment. Major topics to be covered will include the relationship between religion and ecology, the potential problems that certain religious worldviews pose for valuing non-human nature, and the emerging role of religious perspectives in addressing issues of ecological concern. We will also assess various definitions of the terms religion, spirituality, and nature including ways in which these terms have been employed in both a historical and contemporary context as well as the ways in which interpretations of these terms lead to understandings of the human-nature relationship. The question that will serve as our orientation throughout the semester is the following: In a time of widespread ecological degradation, what is the potential for religion or the religious to offer a significant contribution toward the attainment of sustainable human cultures? This question will be explored with reference to conceptions of the natural environment from existing religious traditions as well as through an examination of whether concern and care for natural environments can be understood as a form of religious expression.

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 ecological science.
2. To identify the role, if any, that religious traditions have in addressing ecological crises.
3. To analyze understandings of religion, nature, and environment 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 constructions 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.

ASSIGNED READING

1. Textbooks:

Required:

Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

Loyal, Rue, *Everybody's Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution* (State University of New York Press, 2000).

Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (University of California Press, 2010).

Edward O. Wilson, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance	15%
2. Discussion	10%
3. Current Events	5%
4. Reading Responses	15%
5. Midterm Paper	27.5%
6. Final Paper	27.5%

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:** At the beginning of the semester you will be split up into small groups. Throughout the course of the semester, each group 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 bring in written responses to reading assignments. The criteria for each response are as follows: **Each response must be at least 250 words and must contain one properly formatted reference to a particular day's reading. You can only submit one response per week. Responses will be due on Thursdays.** For full credit, you must complete **10** of these responses.

5. **Midterm Paper:** You will be required to write a midterm 4-5 page research paper on a topic of your choice pertaining to course content. This paper will be due on **October 11**. Further details about the paper will be discussed in class.

6. **Final Paper:** You will have two options for your final project. The first is to write a second 4-5 page research paper on a topic of your choice pertaining to course content. The second will be to write a 4-5 page report on the work (explicitly religious or otherwise) of a local environmental organization. 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 **and** an assessment of this particular organization's efforts to alleviate environmental problems. Your final project will be due on **December 4**, which is the final day of class.

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

A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (86-89); B (83-85); B- (80-82); C+ (76-79); C (73-75); C- (70-72); D (60-69); 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** absences without penalty during the course of the semester. Each subsequent absence will result in a loss of points. Each third absence will result in the loss of a letter grade. If you have more than 10 absences, you will receive a "0" for your attendance grade. The attendance grade distribution will be administered as follows:

<u># of Absences</u>	<u>Attendance Grade</u>
3	89
6	78
9	67
>10	0

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 University Honor Code. If you are unfamiliar with the UNC Honor Code, please visit the following link: <http://honor.unc.edu/>.

DROP POLICY

If you wish to drop the course, you must initiate the process yourself. If you drop before the midpoint deadline (October 15), you will receive a "W".

DISABILITY SERVICES

Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department of Disability Services. 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. For information on programs available at Disability Services, please visit the following link: <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu/>.

COURSE OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Week One

August 21: **Introduction to the Course**

August 23: **Taylor, Preface and Chapter 1 (ix-12)**

Week Two

August 28: **Taylor, Chapter 2 (13-41)**

August 30: **Lynn White, Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (Blackboard under Course Documents); Genesis 1:1-2:25**

Week Three

SEPTEMBER 4-LAST DAY TO DROP COURSE AND HAVE TUITION ADJUSTED

September 4: **CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES: "Christianity and Ecology"; "Judaism and Ecology"; "Islam and Ecology" (All articles are available on Sakai under Course Documents)**

September 6: **CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES: "Buddhism and Ecology"; Confucianism and Ecology"; "Hinduism and Ecology"; "Taoism and Ecology" (All articles are available on Sakai under Course Documents)**

Week Four

September 11: **Berry, Chapters 6 and 7 (80-100)**

September 13: **Berry, Chapters 9 and 10 (117-138)**

Week Five

September 18: **Berry, Chapters 12 and 13 (152-177)**

September 20: **Taylor, Chapter 3 (42-70)**

Week Six

September 25: **(Henry David Thoreau) Taylor, Appendix (227-247)**

September 27: **John Muir and John Burroughs (Sakai under Course Documents)**

Week Seven

October 2: **Aldo Leopold's "The Land Ethic" (<http://home.btconnect.com/tipiglen/landethic.html>), "Thinking Like a Mountain" (<http://www.eco-action.org/dt/thinking.html>), and "On a Monument to the Pigeon" (Sakai under Course Documents)**

October 4: **Film: *A Sense of Wonder***

Week Eight

October 9: **RESEARCH AND WRITING DAY: NO CLASS**

October 11: **MIDTERM PAPER DUE**

Week Nine

OCTOBER 15-LAST DAY TO DROP COURSE WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

October 16: **Taylor, Chapter 6 (127-154)**

October 18: **NO CLASS: FALL BREAK**

Week Ten

October 23: **Taylor, Chapter 7 (155-179)**

October 25: **Film: To be determined**

Week Eleven

October 30: **Wilson (1-61)**

November 1: **Wilson (62-109)**

Week Twelve

November 6: **Wilson (110-168)**

November 8: **Rue (ix-43)**

Week Thirteen

November 13: **Rue (47-96)**

November 15: **Rue (99-138)**

Week Fourteen

November 20: **Taylor, Chapters 8 and 9 (180-222)**

November 22: **NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

Week Fifteen

November 27: **Film: *Journey of the Universe***

November 29: **Paper Writing Workshop**

Week Sixteen

December 4: **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.