

## **Religious Studies 250: Religious Traditions and Care of the Earth**

Fall Semester 2013

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

MW 3:00-3:50, Fridays Online

Room: Graham 423

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Office: 215A Foust Building

Office Hours: MW 10:00-10:50

### **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).

Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker. *Journey of the Universe* (Yale University Press: 2011).

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 Blackboard site.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance	20%
2. Discussion	15%
3. Current Events	10%
4. Reading Responses	15%
5. Midterm Paper	20%
6. Final Paper	20%

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100%

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

**1. Attendance and Participation:** Attendance and regular participation in class discussions will account for 20% 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:** **Twice** 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. Online Reading Responses:** Since we will meet in person only twice a week, you will be required to complete weekly online assignments on the Blackboard Discussion Board. **Your posts should be written in response to the reading(s) for that particular week and must be posted no later than 12:00 Midnight on Friday night.** Further criteria for each response are as follows: **Each response must be at least 200 words and must contain one properly formatted reference to a particular day's reading. You can only submit one response per week.** For full credit, you must complete **10** of these responses. **LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

**5. Midterm Paper:** You will be required to write a midterm 4-5 page research paper on a topic of your choice pertaining 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 the efforts 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+ (100); A (93-99); 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 20% 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.

## 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 (October 11), 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](http://www.uncg.edu/ods), [ods@uncg.edu](mailto: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:**

- August 19: **Introduction to the Course**  
 August 21: **Taylor, Preface and Chapter 1 (ix-12)**  
 August 23: **Online Class**

### **August 23—Last Day to Change Course or Course Section Without Special Permission; Last Day to Drop Course for Tuition and Fee Refund**

### **Week Two:**

- August 26: **Taylor, Chapter 2 (13-41)**  
 August 28: **Lynn White, Jr.’s “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (Blackboard under Course Documents); Genesis 1:1-2:25**  
 August 30: **Online Class**

### **Week Three:**

- September 2: **NO CLASS: LABOR DAY HOLIDAY**  
 September 4: **CHOOSE AND READ TWO OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES: “Christianity and Ecology”; “Judaism and Ecology”; “Islam and Ecology”; “Buddhism and Ecology”; Confucianism and Ecology”; “Hinduism and Ecology”; “Taoism and Ecology” (All articles are available on Blackboard under Course Documents)**  
 (All articles are available on Blackboard under Course Documents)  
 September 6: **Online Class**

### **Week Four:**

- September 9: **Berry, Chapters 6 and 7 (80-100)**

September 11: **Berry, Chapters 9 and 10 (117-138)**

September 13: **Online Class**

#### **Week Five:**

September 16: **Berry, Chapters 12 and 13 (152-177)**

September 18: **Taylor, Chapter 3 (42-70)**

September 20: **Online Class**

#### **Week Six:**

September 23: **(Henry David Thoreau) Taylor, Appendix (227-247)**

September 25: **John Muir and John Burroughs (Blackboard under Course Documents)**

September 27: **Online Class**

#### **Week Seven:**

September 30: **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" (Blackboard under Course Documents)**

October 2: **Paper Writing Workshop**

October 4: **Online Class**

#### **Week Eight:**

October 7: **Film: *A Sense of Wonder***

October 9: **Midterm Papers Due**

October 11: **No Online Class**

### **October 11—Last Day to Drop Course Without Academic Penalty**

#### **Week Nine:**

October 14: **NO CLASS: FALL BREAK**

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

October 18: **Online Class**

#### **Week Ten:**

October 21: **Film: *Lord of the Ants***

October 23: **Wilson (1-61)**

October 25: **Online Class**

#### **Week Eleven:**

October 28: **Wilson (62-109)**

October 30: **Wilson (110-168)**

November 1: **Online Class**

#### **Week Twelve:**

November 4: **Swimme and Tucker (1-46)**

November 6: **Swimme and Tucker (47-80)**

November 8: **Online Class**

#### **Week Thirteen:**

November 11: **Swimme and Tucker (81-118)**

November 13: **Film: *Journey of the Universe***

November 15: **Online Class**

#### **Week Fourteen:**

November 18: **Taylor, Chapters 8 and 9 (180-222)**

November 20: **“A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding”**

**(<http://episcopalscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CreationCatechism.pdf>)**

November 22: **Online Class**

**Week Fifteen:**

November 25: **Paper Writing Workshop**

November 27, 29: **NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

**Week Sixteen:**

December 2: **Final Papers 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.*