

Religious Studies 250: Religious Traditions and Care of the Earth

Spring Semester 2017

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

TR 11:00-12:15

Room: STAC 204

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Office: 215C Foust Building

Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:50; TR 8:45-9:20

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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.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND LEARNING GOALS

Student Learning Outcomes: GNR

General Education Global Non-Western Perspectives Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Find, interpret, and evaluate information on diverse cultures.
2. Describe interconnections among regions of the world. (Must include substantial focus on cultures, nations or sub-nationalities in the Caribbean, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa, Asia, Africa, Pacific Islands, or indigenous peoples around the world).
3. Use diverse cultural frames of reference and alternative perspectives to analyze issues.

General Education Writing Intensive Student Learning Outcome:

Students will be able to write in genres appropriate to the discipline(s) of the primary subject matter of the course.

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 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:

Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia University Press, 2009). (An online copy of this text is available for FREE through the UNC-G Libraries web site.)

Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1998). (An online copy of this text is available for FREE through the UNC-G Libraries web site.)

John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker. *Ecology and Religion* (Island Press: 2014) (An online copy of this text is available for FREE through the UNC-G Libraries web site.)

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	15%
2. Current Events	5%
3. Reading Responses	20%
4. Discussion	5%
5. Test 1	27.5%
6. Research Paper	27.5%

100%

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

1. 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.

2. Reading Responses: Throughout the course of the semester, you will be required to post written responses to reading assignments. The 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.** 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 final research paper. The assignments will be due by midnight of the day of the assigned reading and will be available through the Discussion link on Canvas.

3. Leading Discussion: At least once during the course of the semester, you will be responsible for leading a class discussion as a part of a group.

4. Test: Your test will consist of material from readings and power point slides that will be posted on Canvas. A Study Guide will be posted on Canvas, and the test will be available through Canvas at the Quizzes link. You are allowed to consult course materials including notes and readings during your tests; however, having a solid grasp of the material will be an imperative since you will be given a time limit for completion of the test.

5. Research Paper: You will have one research paper that will be due during final exams week. Your paper should be 4 double-spaced pages in length and written on a topic applicable to course content. Criteria will be posted under the Paper Criteria folder on Canvas. The paper can be written either as a standard research paper or a report on the work of a local environmental organization 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 **and** an assessment of this particular organization's efforts to alleviate environmental problems. The papers will be written on topics of your choice and will be due on **May 4**.

*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** absences 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 (March 10), you will receive a "W".

COURSE ACCOMMODATIONS

UNCG seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations must be registered with the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS) in 215 Elliot University Center, 336-334-5440, <https://ods.uncg.edu/>, oars@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 OARS and provide me with an explanation of the accommodations that you will need.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week One:

January 17: **Introduction to the Course**

January 19: **Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Introduction (pp. 1-12)**

Online Discussion Post Due by Midnight on Friday

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

Week Two:

January 24: **Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 13-42)**

January 26: **Reading: Bron Taylor (Canvas under Readings at the Pages Link)**

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Three:

January 31: **Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapter 3 (pp. 43-61)**

February 2: **Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapters 4-5 (pp. 62-95)**

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Four:

February 7: **Reading: CHOOSE AND READ TWO OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES: “Christianity and Ecology”; “Judaism and Ecology”; “Islam and Ecology” (Canvas under Readings at the Pages Link)**

February 9: **Reading: CHOOSE AND READ TWO OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES: “Buddhism and Ecology”; Confucianism and Ecology”; “Hinduism and Ecology”; “Taoism and Ecology” (Canvas under Readings at the Pages Link)**

Online Discussion Post Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Five:

February 14: **Reading: Lynn White, Jr.’s “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (Canvas under Readings at the Pages link); Genesis 1:1-2:25**

February 16: **Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapter 6 (pp. 96-108)**

Online Discussion Due by Midnight at Midnight on Friday

Week Six:

February 21: **Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapters 7-9 (pp. 109-153)**

February 23: **Reading: Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 6 and 7 (pp. 80-100)**

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Seven:

February 28: **Reading:** Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 9 and 10 (pp. 117-138)

March 2: **Reading:** Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 8 and 11 (pp. 103-116, 141-151)

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Eight:

March 7: **Reading:** Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 12 and 13 (pp. 152-177)

March 9: **Review for Test 1**

Test 1 to be Completed by Friday at Midnight

March 10—Last Day to Drop Course Without Academic Penalty**Week Nine:**

March 14, 16: **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

Week Ten:

March 21: **Film:** *Of Ants and Men*

March 23: **Film Discussion:** *Of Ants and Men*

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Eleven:

March 28: **Paper Writing Workshop**

March 30: **Reading:** *The Creation*, Chapters 1-6 (pp. 1-61)

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Twelve:

April 4: **Reading:** *The Creation*, Chapters 7-11 (pp. 62-109)

April 6: **Reading:** *The Creation*, Chapters 12-17 (pp. 110-168)

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Thirteen:

April 11: **Reading:** Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (ix-31)

April 13: **Reading:** Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (33-87)

No Online Discussion: Spring Holiday

Week Fourteen:

April 18: **Reading:** Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (89-141)

April 20: **Reading:** Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (143-174)

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Fifteen:

April 25: **Reading:** *Ecology and Religion*, Chapter 10 and Epilogue (pp. 154-170)

April 27: **Paper Writing Workshop**

Online Discussion Due by Midnight on Friday

Week Sixteen:

May 2: **Online Discussion Due by Midnight**

May 3: **Reading Day**

May 4: **Research Paper Due by 3:00 pm**

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.