

Humanity and Nature

HMN 365

Spring 2013

Professor: Ron Von Burg
Classroom: Carswell 301
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Overview of the Course

Humans have a complex relationship with nature. We are at once of nature, in nature, and above nature. In the spirit of interdisciplinary humanities, this class examines humanity's relationship with nature from a variety of perspectives: philosophical, scientific, religious, political and aesthetic. Despite the various perspectives on humanity's relationship with nature, humans need the "gifts" of nature for survival. To that end, this course focuses on how we sustain a viable relationship with nature. This class will feature both civic engagement and cross-curricular components with an emphasis on sustainability. You will work with students from screenwriting and film production classes to develop and produce short plays and films exploring humanity's relationship with nature.

At the end of course, we should accomplish the following goals:

- Understand a variety of humanity's relationships with nature
- Explain key insights on nature from a variety of humanistic perspectives
- Identify ways for the humanities to highlight sustainability and an environmental ethic

To move toward these goals, this class has several components:

- Readings and discussions devoted to illustrating key concepts, processes, and historical developments regarding humanity's relationship with nature
- Group projects that help put these principles into practice
- Interactions with local organizations that promote sustainability
- Individual written assignments
- Presentations on classroom readings and outside research

Required Materials and Internet Sources

The materials necessary for successful completion of this course include three required books and a series of readings that are available on SAKAI. The readings necessary for each lecture will be indicated in the syllabus. The required texts are available at the bookstore:

Crosby, Donald A. (2002). *A religion of nature*. SUNY Press: Albany, NY.

Latour, Bruno. (2004). *Politics of nature: How to bring the sciences into democracy*. (trans. by C. Porter). Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

Wilson, Edward O. (1984). *Biophilia: The human bond with other species*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

Assignments and Grading

Daily Question/Participation	50 pts
Engagement Reflection Essays	150 pts
Synthesis Essays (2 @ 50 pts each)	100 pts
Nature One-Act/Earth Day Performance/Reflection	<u>200 pts</u>
Total	500 pts

This course adheres to the following grade scale:

A=465-500 points	B-=400-414 points	D+=335-349 points
A-=450-464 points	C+=385-399 points	D=315-334 points
B+=435-449 points	C=365-384 points	D-=300-314 points
B=415-434 points	C-=350-364 points	F=0-299 points

Daily Question: Each class session, every student is required to bring one well thought out discussion question regarding that day's readings. This question can focus on one particular aspect of a single reading, bring the day's readings into conversation with other readings, or extend on the readings through application. Either way, it must be insightful, thoroughly developed and academic. These questions will serve as the foundation to that day's discussion and may be even further developed to provide direction for your synthesis essays.

Engagement and Reflection Essays: Over the course of the semester, you are required to work with a local organization dedicated to sustainability, assisting them for at least a total of 10 hours. I will assist you identifying and coordinating with local organizations. These organizations may be connected with Wake Forest or the broader Winston-Salem community. You will write two essays as part of this project. In the first essay, you must research the organization and the problem(s) it seeks to address. You will reflect on what you expect to learn during your experience, questions you may have, and goals you wish to accomplish. In the second essay, you are required to reflect on the experience, highlighting the challenges and opportunities the organization and volunteers face in addressing issues of sustainability. We will develop an online presence for the class, and the revised reflections will be posted on the class web or Facebook page.

Synthesis Essays: After two of the class sections, you will write a 4-5 page essay that explores the dominant themes, possible research questions, and/or scholarly advancements evident in each section. You have some latitude in choosing which two sections you wish to discuss, but they must ultimately be approved by me. Each essay will be a type of literature review with particular emphasis on how one may advance a new research trajectory.

Nature One-Act Performances and Reflection: In collaboration with students from COM 316 (Screenwriting), COM 214 (Media Production: Narrative), and COM 213 (Media Production: Documentary), you will develop, produce and perform a one-act play on some aspect of humanity's relationship with nature. We will divide into three groups (3-4 students/group). Each group will select a particular relationship with nature (religious, scientific, political) and collaborate with students from COM 316 to create one-act play that explores humanity's relationship with nature. We will develop scenarios for the One-Acts to submit to the screenwriting course. They will return to us scripts that we can select and edit to suit our productions. I encourage you to use your knowledge of and experience with the local organizations you will be working with over the semester to inform the creative process. Plays that engage local issues of sustainability are encouraged. These plays will be performed for local youth organizations (primarily elementary aged students) and you will lead age-appropriate discussions and activities about the topics covered in plays following the performance. During the entire process, students from COM 213 will document your efforts to create a play about the nature. You are required to write a 2-3 page essay reflecting on the experience. These reflections will be shared with the class at the end of the semester.

Attendance, Participation and Late Policy

Due to the nature of this course, your presence and punctuality are required for every class meeting. You may have legitimate reasons for being absent. Consequently, any more than one unexcused absence results in points being deducted from your final grade for each additional absence, with no exceptions. Also, you are responsible for the material covered while absent. Documented and extraordinary circumstances will be evaluated on a case by case basis. Late assignments will not be accepted. As a matter of course, I will also not give extensions for assignments.

Class Conduct

You are responsible to come to each class prepared, having read the assigned material and being attentive and respectful of others. Many opportunities to learn, practice, and master the skills necessary to succeed in the course will be given and it is in your best interest to take full advantage of them. I am willing and eager to help you in any way possible, so please do not hesitate to ask for additional suggestions or comments.

Disability Resources

Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please let me know during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the class. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism of any kind is not tolerated. To plagiarize means to use or pass as one's own the ideas or writings of another. You may not present work and assignments that have been prepared by other people or for other courses without fully acknowledging the source. You may use other people's words and ideas only if quoted properly and full credit is given. Any student failing to give credit for ideas or materials that he or she takes from another source is guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism of any form will result in an F. If you are in doubt about the legitimate use of sources for your work, check with me. I will assist you in ensuring the originality of your ideas and avoiding subsequent problems.

Tentative Schedule of Readings Assignments

Readings need to be read **before** discussion that day.

1/17 Introduction: What is humanity's relationship with nature? Why should we care?

Philosophy and Nature

1/22 Selections from Plato/Aristotle/Isocrates (Sakai)

1/24 Selections from Nietzsche (Sakai)

1/29 Thoreau-*Walden* "Economy" (Sakai)
Selection of Organization Due

1/31 Thoreau-*Walden* "Higher Laws" and "Conclusion" (Sakai)

2/5 Emerson-"Nature" (Sakai)

Science and Nature

2/7 EO Wilson-*Biophilia*

2/12 EO Wilson-*Biophilia*
First Engagement Reflection Essay Due

2/14 Selections from the *Biophilia Hypothesis* (Sakai)

2/19 Steffen et al.-"The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives" (Sakai)
The Economist-"The Anthropocene-It's a Man-Made World" (Sakai)

Religion and Nature

2/21 Crosby-*A Religion of Nature*

2/26 Crosby-*A Religion of Nature*

- 2/28 Veldman et al.-“Climate Change and Religion-A Review of Existing Research” (Sakai)
 Carr et al.-“The Faithful Skeptics” (Sakai)
Scenarios for One-Acts Due
- 3/5 Boorse-“Loving the Least of These” (Sakai)
 ECI-“Call to Action” (Sakai)
- 3/7 Cornwall Alliance-“A Renewed Call to Truth” (Sakai)
- 3/12 **Spring Break**
- 3/14 **Spring Break**

Politics and Nature

- 3/19 Latour-*Politics of Nature*
Selection of Preliminary Scripts
- 3/21 Latour-*Politics of Nature*
- 3/26 Latour-*Politics of Nature*
Finalized Scripts Selected
- 3/28 Shellenberger and Nordhaus-*The End of Environmentalism* (Sakai)
- 4/2 Wilson-“What is Nature Worth?” (Sakai)
- 4/4 Selections from John Burroughs (Sakai)

Art and Nature

- 4/9 Selections for Poole’s *Earthrise* (Sakai)
- 4/11 Songs of Nature (Sakai)
- 4/16 Rehearsals
- 4/18 Rehearsals
- 4/23 Lakoff-“Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment” (Sakai)
Second Engagement Reflection Essay Due
- 4/25 Final Project Presentations
- 4/30 Reflection Essay Presentations
Performance Reflection Essays Due

Final Essays Due May 9 at 2 PM-Final Essay Presentations During Exam Period