

ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT & CULTURE RESEARCH SEMINAR

Fall 2008

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Office hours:	Tue 10-12 am, Thur 2-3 pm (through Sue Bean); or make arrangements with me directly
Secretary:	Sue Bean (x. 64055)
Meeting time & location:	Wed. 2:30-4:30 pm, Bittersweet House Founders Room

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a survey of advanced theories and methods in environmental thought and culture. It explores themes in recent writing, research, and professional activity in such related fields as environmental ethics and philosophy, environmental history, environmental anthropology and sociology, environmental communication and cultural studies, conservation psychology, sustainability education, religion and ecology, and the environmental arts.

Most weeks include an introductory overview of a relevant field, methodological approach, or set of key concepts by the instructor or guest speaker, discussion of at least one key topical article, and a student-led discussion of a supplementary article in the field. We will address theoretical and philosophical questions – i.e., questions of ontology and epistemology (*What is the nature of the phenomena we study? How do we establish that we have gained knowledge about them? What constitutes useful and adequate research?*) alongside those of ethics (*What should we do? What are our obligations to other humans, nonhumans, environments, and the world/Earth? What is the appropriate relationship between scholarship and activism/advocacy?*) – in order to see how these questions have been addressed and how they have affected environmental research and practice in different fields.

Questions to be considered include:

- What is the ontological status of the categories that make up environmental discourse, such as nature, environment, and ecology? How do we know what we know about nature and human-environment relations? How are these questions answered in different environmental fields and disciplines and within competing theoretical paradigms?
- How has the recognition of the environmental crisis affected fields and disciplines in academe and in public/popular culture? How have different scholarly disciplines (such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, geography, history, psychology, literary and cultural studies, the creative arts, and the natural sciences) responded to the environmental problematic?
- How are environmental problems best addressed? Should we focus on socio-political, economic or ecological structures (as sociological materialists and scientific realists assert), on values, beliefs, or discourses (as sociological idealists and social constructivists prefer), or on the interaction between these things (as proposed by relational, processual and practice-based approaches)? What are the main schools of thought on these matters, and how have they evolved?
- How does interdisciplinary environmental scholarship deal with the substantive differences between the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities? What is the relationship between environmental ethical/philosophical theory and environmental practice in academe and outside of it?
- How do communication styles differ from field to field within ETC? What are the standards of excellence in ETC academic disciplines?
- How do the fields and approaches within ETC inform your own research project and methods?

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- 1) Students are expected to attend classes, read and prepare responses to the assigned readings, and participate in class discussion.
- 2) Each student will be responsible for preparing, individually or in pairs, at least one or two weekly topics (depending on the number of students in the class and on student interests). This will involve
  - a. browsing key journals in the field, choosing an interesting recent article to make available to the class a week ahead of time, and leading a discussion on that article the following week;
  - b. preparing a one-page bullet-point overview of the main assigned reading for that week, with summary of key points, critiques (including your own critical response and a summary of any responses you find in the published literature), and questions for discussion; and
  - c. preparing (together with course instructor or guest faculty) a half- to one-page bullet-point overview of the field in question, with summary notes of the development and status of the field and a list of its main journals and scholarly associations.
- 3) Students are expected to write and present a brief (3-4 page) discussion paper outlining how one of the methodologies discussed in class would be applied to an environmental topic or issue with which the student is familiar. (Note: Students may choose to incorporate this into thesis/dissertation proposal development or some other form of ongoing work.)

## POSSIBLE TOPICS

*Final schedule will be determined in class based on student interests, guest availability, etc.*

- Nature & Culture: Definitions, Epistemologies, Debates
- Environmental Ethics/Philosophy
- Women, Environments, & Ecofeminism
- Political Ecology, Postcolonialism, & Environmental Justice
- Religion & Ecology; Ecotheology
- Indigenous Perspectives on Environmental Issues
- Environmental/Sustainability Education
- Environmental History
- Environmental Psychology, Conservation Psychology, & Ecopsychology
- Environmental Sociology & Politics
- Environmental Anthropology
- Cultural Studies of Science, Technology, and Nature
- Environmental/Nature Writing
- Environmental Communication, Environmental Aesthetics, & Ecocriticism
- Activism & the Environmental Scholar

## RESOURCES

*As part of the student presentations, we will be compiling a list of resources pertaining to the relevant fields making up Environmental Thought and Culture, along the following lines:*

<b>Field / subdiscipline</b>	<b>History &amp; status</b>	<b>Journals, listservs, forums</b>	<b>Professional associations</b>
<b>Environmental studies</b>	Umbrella term; several hundred university programs, some more inter- (or trans-) disciplinary than others; a few dozen graduate programs. Field began to be organized in late 1960s due to sudden increase in environmental awareness. Began as interdisciplinary amalgam (natural scientists, social scientists, planners, geographers, et al.). Consolidation of ES programs – issues of transdisciplinarity, breadth vs. depth in curriculum, etc. Next surge in early 1990s (Rio Summit, etc.). Growing again in mid-2000s.	Wide range. No single leading journal defining/unifying the field. Important articles can be found in a broad range of venues, e.g., <i>Environmental Ethics</i> ; <i>Environmental Values</i> ; <i>Society and Natural Resources</i> ; <i>Environmental History</i> ; <i>Organization and Environment</i> ; <i>Environmental Review</i> ; <i>International Journal of Environmental Studies</i> ; <i>Journal of Environmental Studies &amp; Policy</i> ; <i>Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies</i> ; <i>Environmental Management</i> ; <i>Nature &amp; Culture</i> ; <i>The Trumpeter</i> ; <i>Environment &amp; Planning A</i> ; <i>Capitalism Nature Socialism</i> ; et al.	None in US? (association may be forming.) Related: AASHE (Assn for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Ed)  Outside US: Environmental Studies Association of Canada; European organizations, et al.

