REL 2620 WAY OF THE EARTH

Spring Term 1 (2014) Mary Ashley, mashley@ses.gtu.edu
Sat. 10:00 - 2:00 Office hours: Cuvilly 23
Cuvilly 23 Saturdays 2:00-3:00 or by prearranged appt.

This course explores the profound links between ecology and spirituality, between “Mother Nature” (Gaia concept) and conceptions of human/divine nature(s). The course aims to integrate perspectives on such topics as science and religion, the spirituality of indigenous peoples, ecofeminism, Creation Spirituality, and reverence for nature in the teachings of world religions. We will discuss issues of justice and ethics in different religious traditions concerning ecology and raise religious awareness. This course emphasizes critical thinking and written communication.

Learning Objectives: Student will be able to demonstrate

1. An ability to recognize and correct the tendency of Western dualistic thought to divide the world into static polarities such as mind and body, religion and science, culture and nature, care and justice. (PLO 4)
2. A broad understanding of how traditional and major world religions enrich our responsible world-care. (PLO 2)
3. The ability to communicate (both in writing and through oral presentation) an in-depth understanding of one particular danger to Earth and/or non-human creatures, the response offered by a particular religious community, and the specifically religious reasons for that response. (ILO 1, 2, 4)


Attendance: Intensive classes require a stringent absence policy since even one absence may significantly affect achievement of course learning objectives. With only 28 class contact hours as opposed to the traditional 45 contact hours, all class time is critical. A student who misses more than one class period or the equivalent (for accumulated hours) must withdraw from the class and will be assigned a failing grade for the class unless officially dropping the class. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate the drop or withdrawal. There are no exceptions.

Average Student Workload Expectations: Class time consists of 28 hours and students are expected to attend. Students are expected to engage in approximately 103.5 hours of out-of-class homework over the seven week term, or approximately fifteen hours per week. Course assignments are made in accordance with this expectation.

Workload Distribution:

- Hours in Class: 28
- Readings: 50
- Written Assignments: 40
- Oral Presentation Prep.: 25

1 Also includes your reflections and responses. See below under “Requirements.”
Plagiarism Policy: Plagiarism is a violation of NDNU’s code of student ethics and will not be tolerated by instructors. It is a form of intellectual dishonesty that involves the theft of another person’s ideas, language and/or written thought processes. One violation of the policy will result in a failing grade for the assignment; repeated or flagrant plagiarism may result in failure for the course or even dismissal from NDNU.

Learning and Other Disabilities: NDNU complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students who have a disability that might affect academic performance are encouraged to confer with the instructor at the beginning of the semester and to contact Dr. Peggy Koshland Crane in the Program for Academic Support and Services (PASS) (650-508-3670; mcrane@ndnu.edu). In order to receive accommodations, students must register with the PASS office.

Requirements:
- Prior to class each week students will post a 600+ reflection on the readings on the portal (in the forum under collaborations) by Thursday (midnight). Exception: In preparation for the first class session on March 15, don’t use the portal. Bring a hard copy of your first reflection to class.
- Students will respond to another student’s post (one paragraph of 5-7 sentences is sufficient) by Friday midnight. Exception: No response is required before the first class on March 15.
- A final research project, which will include both a group presentation and a written paper (8 to 10 pages) is due on the last day of class (April 26). See details below.

Research Project:
- All topics must be decided upon by the third week of class.
- Research presentations (20-30 minutes each) will be done in teams of 2-3, and will describe the nexus between some threat to Earth (or non-human creatures) and a particular religious community’s response to that threat. While an organized and informative PowerPoint presentation will meet this requirement, other approaches are welcome.
- Research papers (8-10 pages) are to be done individually, and can be written on any such “nexus.” Students who choose to write on their team’s topic must develop some aspect of that topic and not simply summarize their team’s presentation. Papers must include a strong thesis statement and related argument, footnotes, and a bibliography with a minimum of 5 academic sources. Please use APA style. You may use Internet sources, but recognize that some sources are primarily interested in communicating the point of view of a particular corporation and others are primarily interested in exposing you to certain advertising. Please be prepared to defend your reasons for using a given website, especially if you want it to count as an “academic” source. Papers will be assessed in regard to both (1) analytical depth and (2) clarity of expression/argument. Because spelling and grammar affect clarity, these also will be assessed, such that for every 10 spelling or grammatical errors, 3 points (half a letter grade) will be deducted from the paper grade. Instructor office hours (as well as other NDNU resources) offer an opportunity to receive assistance in writing your paper.
On Grading: For each day that an assignment is late, one point will be deducted from your total grade for the class. Late work on the research presentation will not be accepted. Extra credit can be earned by completing one or more 3-page book reports (books to be assigned by instructor).

Point Breakdown

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade/Point Conversion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>A+ 100-97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflections and Responses</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>A 96-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Presentation²</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>B+ 89-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Research Paper</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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CLASS SESSION:

1. March 15. KINSHIPPING
Lecture: Moral, Believing Animals³
Film: “Beasts of the Southern Wild”
Group Time: Class Discussion.

2. March 22. EM-BODY-MENT
Lecture: Bodies
Films: “Eco-Dharma” and selections from “Microcosmos: The Grass People”⁴
Group Time: “My Choices for This Life” Exercise (AKA “The Bodhisattva Check-in”)⁵
Please bring your research topic ideas to this session as we will take time to allow teams and topics to find each other.

3. March 29. GOD’S GARDEN FOR ALL
Kinsley chapters 8 and 9
Note: By this class session, you must have a team research topic and an individual research topic.
Lecture: In the Beginning . . . a Cross-Species Equality
Films: “The Student, the Nun, and the Amazon”
Group Time: Genesis Exercise and Class Discussion

4. April 5. INDUSTRIALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM
Kinsley chapters 10 and 11
Lecture: The Enlightenment and Its Aftermath
Film: “An Inconvenient Truth”
Group Time: Lamentation Exercise and Class Discussion.

² The expectation is that each member’s contribution will be (roughly) equivalent. Please speak up if this is not the case.
³ A nod here to Christian Smith’s Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture (2003), which informs much of this lecture.
5. April 12. **WALKING LIGHTLY**
In Place of Lecture: Labyrinth Experience [to be confirmed]
Film: “Dirt! The Movie”
Group Time: Class Discussion.

6. April 19. **WEAVING TOGETHER HEAVEN AND EARTH**
Lecture: From the Personal to the Political (and Back Again)
Film: “Journey of the Universe”
Group Time: “The Mirror Walk” Exercise\(^6\) and Class Discussion

7. April 26. **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**
Research presentations and papers due today

\(^6\) Macy and Brown (2009), 88-89.