

Environmental Ethics



Instructor Information

Dr. Amanda M. Nichols
Email: amnv22@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Online by Appointment (Zoom)

Course Information

REL 2104. Spring 2026
Tues. 8:30–10:25am (Period 2+3)
Thurs. 9:35–10:25am (Period 3)

Recurring Zoom Link: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/94945913171>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to environmental ethics. Students will engage with competing secular and religious views regarding human impacts on and moral responsibilities toward nature. Students will also examine critical theoretical approaches, key thinkers, and social movements in contention over competing environmental values.

ROLE IN CURRICULUM

This course serves as an elective for Religion majors and minors and provides credit for the department's ethics emphasis. It also meets the ethics requirement in UF's Sustainability minor and for SNRE students, and provides Humanities General Education, and Gordon Rule Writing credit (E2/2000 words or more).

Prerequisite

Achieving sophomore status.

Humanities Credit

This course meets the requirements for the University of Florida's Humanities credit. Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used

within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives. A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the historical emergence and development of environmental philosophy and environmental ethics in Western societies, as well as the ways such ethics become entwined with and influenced by developments in religion, literature, and the arts, as illuminated by the Humanities.
2. To understand the range of perspectives on human responsibility to the environment and enable critical thinking and writing about them, including by arbitrating among competing views of environmental facts.
3. To understand the epistemological bases (philosophical, scientific, religious, aesthetic) for different ethical orientations as well as the various methodological approaches to making individual and public environment related decisions.
4. To introduce the contribution of different humanities disciplines, especially art history, literary criticism, philosophy, and religious studies, to illuminating environmental ethics and practice.
5. To communicate effectively and logically one's own moral perspective and views of environmental facts and trends orally and in writing.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation – 100 Points

In this synchronous course, attendance will include logging on to the course Zoom promptly at the assigned meeting times, having your camera turned on for the duration of the class, and remaining online for the entire scheduled meeting time. Participation involves consistent and quality preparation for class, engaged attitude, active note taking, and educated questions and comments which contribute to small group and class discussions.

2. Reflection Journal – 150 Points

During this course, students will complete a series of short writing reflections designed both to gauge student engagement with course material and to help students fulfill the Gordon Rule Writing Credit (E2/2000+ words). During the semester, students will be asked to respond to regular prompts generated by the instructor. These prompts may pose questions about the assigned readings, class lectures, or your learning expectations and experiences. Submissions will be evaluated by the instructor based on completeness, degree of engagement with course materials, and writing quality.

3. Group Peer Instruction (GPI) – 200 Points

As part of the collaborative learning environment fostered through this course, students will be responsible for presenting an assigned selection of the course materials to their peers and facilitating discussion. This is a group assignment, where students will work together as part of a team assigned by the instructor. Together, they will discuss the pre-selected course readings, prepare a presentation to present to the class, create an activity that fosters critical thinking about the assigned readings, and answer questions from their peers about the material. Learning outcomes for this assignment will be assessed through a combination of self, peer, and instructor evaluation.

4. Lightning Talk – 250 Points

In consultation with the instructor, students will identify an environmental issue that they are interested in independently researching. Students will prepare a three-minute “Lightning Talk” which they will present to their peers and then submit a final recording for the instructor. Students will be expected to prepare a succinct summary of the issue, including the primary social, environmental, and ethical concerns that this issue raises. In addition to their talk, students will be expected to prepare a visual aid to use during their presentation and will submit a short, written paper on their chosen topic. Presentations will be evaluated by peers and the instructor; the written papers will be evaluated by the instructor based on completeness, degree of engagement with course materials, and writing quality.

5. Exams – 300 Points [Midterm – 125 Points; and Final – 175 Points]

There will be two examinations in the course: the midterm will be taken during week eight and the final will be taken during week sixteen (finals week). Exams are designed to offer a range of questions for students to respond to and will test their overall understanding of and ability to engage with the course materials. Exams will be cumulative, drawing on any readings, assignments, and in class discussions that have occurred previously.

GRADING SCALE

Grade	GPA	Percentage	Points		Grade	GPA	Percentage	Points
A	4.0	93-100	930-1000		C	2.0	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929		C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899		D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869		D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829		D-	.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799		S	0	0-59	0-599

***Note: It is my policy not to round grades (e.g., 89.9% or 899/1000 points will be considered a B+)

Grades are consistent with UF policy as stated here:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

POLICIES AND RULES

1. Classroom Demeanor

Our classroom is an intellectual community where everyone, including the instructor, shares responsibility for cultivating and maintaining a respectful learning environment. All members of this class are expected to uphold the standards of academic and personal integrity laid out in the [UF Student Honor and Conduct Codes](#).

Please keep in mind that people come to this class from different backgrounds and with different experiences. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about may engage topics and opinions different than your own. Unique student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate maturity and respect for ideas that may differ from your own. While debate and disagreement about these ideas is encouraged, all conversations must be conducted with civility and focus on critiquing ideas, not people. Disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated and will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence,

from the class. Students who exhibit behavior that disrupts the learning process in this course may be subject to disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct.

2. Attendance and Participation

This is an online, synchronous course. Attendance via Zoom during assigned course meeting times is required. Attendance and participation are highlighted in this class and will be essential for student success. Poor attendance and participation will negatively impact your course grade.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog. Do not register for this class if you cannot attend during the scheduled meeting times.

Please let the professor know about any planned excused absences (for religious holidays, athletic events, or other reasons) as soon as possible, and at least 24 hours in advance. For unplanned absences (due to illness or emergency), please let us know as soon as possible and provide paper or electronic documentation (e.g., doctor's note) if possible. Absences due to illness will be excused with a physician note. Students are responsible for catching up on all missed course materials and assignments.

3. Assignments, Extensions, and Late Work

Assignment Deadlines

All course assignments must be submitted via Canvas and are due at the time and date noted on the course schedule. Assignment submissions will close automatically after the submission deadline and will not be reopened. Please make sure you allow yourself plenty of time to submit your assignments in advance of the deadline.

Failure of technology is not an excuse. It is your responsibility to double check to make sure your files have been correctly attached/uploaded and that your submission is complete by the deadline. Late assignments will not be accepted in this course, nor will assignments submitted via email to the instructor or Teaching Assistant(s).

Assignment Submission Requirements

All papers should be submitted as Microsoft Word (.doc, .docx) documents to Canvas unless otherwise noted on the assignment instructions. UF provides Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus for all students, free of charge. Please visit the [Student Resources](#) page for information about how to get access to the Office 365 package.

Assignments submitted as PDFs or as Pages files will not be accepted. All submissions should be polished and presented in a professional manner. Because professional communication varies in document design, all assignments will have specific formatting guidelines to follow. Please read the assignment details carefully and ask questions early to avoid losing points.

Extensions

Requests for extensions on assignments are welcome but must be submitted at least **48 hours in advance of the assignment deadline**. It is important that students are aware of upcoming deadlines in this course and do not wait until the last minute to begin working on their assignments. While managing course workload is an expectation for all enrolled students, there may be instances where you need

more time to complete an assignment and make sure it is representative of the quality of work that you can produce. Accountability and being proactive are important parts of your responsibility as an engaged participant in this course. All reasonable requests for assignment extensions submitted at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline will be accommodated. Requests for extensions should be submitted via direct email to the instructor.

[Note: Most granted extensions will be for an additional 24 or 48 hours on a given assignment but may be for longer in the case of extenuating circumstances. All extensions must be determined in consultation with, and at the discretion of, the Instructor].

Late and Make-up Work

Late submission of Reflection Journal assignments and Self Evaluations will result in an automatic zero on the assignment. Late submission of any other assignment, including exams will result in a 10% deduction per day that the assignment is late. If the deadline is 11:59pm and you submit the assignment at 12:00am, it will be considered late.

Assignments and in class work missed due to un-excused absences are not eligible for make-up. Making up missed work due to documented illness or emergency may be allowed, at the discretion of the instructor and on a case-by-case basis. Please contact the instructor as soon as you can to make them aware of the documented illness or emergency and to discuss missed assignments.

Returned Assignments

Assignments will generally be graded by no later than one week after they were due.

Reconsideration of Graded Materials

If you have any questions or concerns about a graded assignment, you should contact the course instructor via email and request a meeting to discuss the assignment during office hours. Content of graded assignments will not be discussed via email. If a student requests reconsideration of graded materials, the instructor reserves the right to raise or lower the grade accordingly.

4. Canvas Course Readings and Deadlines are Authoritative

Course reading assignments may be modified. The syllabus distributed at the beginning of class may be updated. All assigned reading for this course will be provided on Canvas. The assigned pages for course readings available via the course Canvas page are the operative and binding version. The course assignments and point values will remain as they are detailed in the syllabus, though the due dates may be adjusted. Students should set up their Canvas account so that they receive instructor announcements via Canvas directly in their email.

5. Accommodations for Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting course accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

6. Counseling Resources

Resources available on-campus for students include the following: 1. University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 352-392-1575, personal and career counseling; 2. Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1171, personal counseling; 3. Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1161, sexual counseling; 4. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 352-392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.

7. Academic Honesty and the UF Honor Code

Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. In compliance with the UF policy all suspected Honor Code violations will be reported. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating may fail the course, and recurring violations may result in more serious consequences, including suspension or expulsion.

Please keep in mind that plagiarism and academic dishonesty include:

- Copying verbatim or paraphrasing someone else's material and presenting it as your own, without appropriate citation and, as needed, quotation;
- Using or borrowing concepts or data without citing the original source;
- Downloading material from the internet and presenting it as your own;
- Using AI generated or AI assisted text in an assignment or submitting an AI generated assignment as your own work;
- Commissioning or accepting work from another source or individual and submitting it as your own;
- Reusing or resubmitting your own or others' past assignments or assignments for other courses without permission and/or appropriate citation (self-plagiarism).

See the [Policy](#) website for more information.

8. Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations during the available interval. Summary results of these assessments will be available to students. Evaluations are completed at the [Gator Evals](#) site.

9. Intellectual Property Rights

Pursuant to [UF Regulation 1.018](#), this syllabus as well as the structure, content, lectures, assignments, and any other materials created for and used in this course, including but not limited to the course Canvas page, are the intellectual property of the Instructor (creator) who holds copyright. These materials may not be recorded, copied, or reproduced, in whole or in part, without the express written consent of the Instructor.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – January 12 – 16 | Course Introduction

In Class

Course Introduction, Syllabus Review, Group Activities, and Lecture

Readings and Viewings

A. Rich – “Claiming an Education”

C. Sagan – *Pale Blue Dot*, Video and Selected Readings

T. Morton – Selections from *Hyperobjects* (2013)

Assignment Deadlines

Reflection 1 – Due Sunday, January 18, 11:59pm

Week 2 – January 19 – 23 | Planetary Ethics

In Class

Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

J. Lovelock – Selected Readings from *Gaia: A New look at Life on Earth* (1979)

J. B. Caldicott – Selected Readings from *Thinking Like a Planet* (2014)

Week 3 – January 26 – 30 | Land Ethics

In Class

GPI – Group 1; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

A. Leopold - “The Land Ethic,” in *A Sand County Almanac*

M. Liboiron – Select passages from “Land, Nature, Resource, Property” and “Scale, Harm, Violence, Land”

J. R. Smith – Selections from *Ice Geographies* (2025), “Ice as Terrain”

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 1; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, 27 January, 5:00pm

Reflection 2 – Due Sunday, February 1, 11:59pm

Week 4 – February 2 – 6 | Historical Approaches

In Class

GPI – Group 2; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

A. Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)

L. White Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” (1967)

G. Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” (1968) and “Lifeboat Ethics” (1974)

R. Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980)

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 2; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, 3 February, 5:00pm

Lightning Talk Proposal – Due Sunday, February 8, 11:59pm

Week 5 – February 9 – 13 | Wilderness

In Class

GPI – Group 3; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

J. Muir, Selections from *Our National Parks* (1901)

W. Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”

S. Rutherford, Selections from *Governing the Wild* (2011)

S. Taylor, Selections from *Disabled Ecologies* (2024)

A. Bernstein, “Pleistocene Park: Engineering Wilderness in a More-than-Human World”

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 3; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, 10 February, 5:00pm

Reflection 3 – Due Sunday, February 15, 11:59pm

Week 6 – February 16 – 20 | Other-than-Human Rights

In Class

GPI – Group 4; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

C. Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing”

D. Schafer, Selections from *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, Power*

E. Christ, “Ecocide and the Extinction of Animal Minds”

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 4; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, 17 February, 5:00pm

Week 7 – February 23 – 27 | Radical Environmentalism

In Class

GPI – Group 5; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

B. Taylor, “Radical Environmentalism” in *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality, and the Planetary Future* (2010)

B. Taylor, “Resistance: Do the Means Justify the Ends?”

A. Nichols, “Karen Coulter and the Religious Roots of Radicalism in North America”

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 6; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, 24 February, 5:00pm

Lightning Talk Annotated Bibliography – Due Sunday, March 1, 11:59pm

Week 8 – March 2 – 6 | Midterm

In Class

Tuesday Group Review Sessions; Midterm Exam (Online – Opens Wednesday at 9am)

Assignment Deadlines

Midterm Exam – Due Friday, 6 March, 5:00pm

Week 9 – March 9 – 13 | Ecofeminsim and Deep Ecology

In Class

GPI – Group 6; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

A. Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement”

C. Merchant, Selections from *The Death of Nature* (1980)

V. Plumwood, Selections from *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993)

C. Adams, Selections from *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990)

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 6; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, 10 March, 5:00pm

Reflection 4 – Due Thursday, March 12, 11:59pm

Week 10 – March 16 – 20

-----***SPRING BREAK (NO CLASSES)***-----

Week 11 – March 23 – 27 | Environmental Justice

In Class

GPI – Group 7; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

T. T. Williams “Clan of the One Breasted Woman”

R. Nixon, Selections from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011)

D. N. Pellow, Selections from *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* (2017)

M. Liboiron, Selections from *Pollution is Colonialism* (2019)

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 7; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday 24 March, 5:00pm

Lightning Talk Script – Due Sunday, March 29, 11:59pm

Week 12 – March 30 – April 3 | Climate + Anthropocene Discourses

In Class

GPI – Group 8; Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

J. W. Moore. – “The Rise of Cheap Nature”

N. Oreskes, “The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change: How Do We Know We’re Not Wrong?”

K. P. Whyte, “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises”

K. A. Schulz, “Decolonizing Political Ecology: Ontology, Technology and 'Critical' Enchantment”

Assignment Deadlines

GPI – Group 8; Self Evals; Peer Evals – Due Tuesday 31 March, 5:00pm

Reflection 5 – Due Sunday, April 5, 11:59pm

Week 13 – April 6 – 10 | “Green” Energy and Geoengineering

In Class

Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

A. Nichols – “Nuclear Energy” in Routledge Handbook of Religion and American Culture

S. M. Taylor – “I Can’t, It’s a Prius” in *Ecopiety* (2019)

H. J. Buck – Selections from *After Geoengineering* (2019)

Assignment Deadlines

Week 14 – April 13 – 17 | (Inter)Planetary Ethics

In Class

Lightning Talks – Presentation; Lecture

Readings and Viewings

A. M. Nichols – “@I_sodope, #Memes, and Religion: A Critical Analysis of Nuclear Energy Rhetoric in the 21st Century”

S. M. Taylor – Selected readings from *Ecopiety* (2019) or article (TBD)

M. J. Rubenstein – Selected readings from *Astrotopia* (2022)

Assignment Deadlines

Lightning Talks, Peer Evals – Due Tuesday, April 14, 5:00pm
Reflection 6 – Due Sunday, April 19, 11:59pm

Week 15 – April 20 – 24 | Conclusions

In Class

Lecture; Group Activities and Discussion

Readings and Viewings

D. Haraway, Selections from *Staying with the Trouble* (2016)

A. Tsing, Selections from *Mushroom at the End of the World*

Assignment Deadlines

Lightning Talks – Recording, Visual Aid, and Short Paper – Due Tues., 21 April, 5:00pm

-----**NO CLASS ON THURSDAY (READING DAY)**-----

Week 16 – April 27 – 30 | Finals Week

Final Exam: 28 April 2026 | 10:00am – 12:00pm