

Instructor

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Course Description

Humanity's often destructive relationship to nature raises a wide array of pressing ethical questions. Is it morally wrong to cause the extinction of species? To pollute or destroy ecosystems? To alter global climate? To deprive future generations of the opportunity to appreciate natural beauty or the use of some natural resource? If so, what are the grounds for saying so? Do some natural objects have value beyond their usefulness to human beings? If not, what could be the point of preserving parts of nature useless to us? Does appreciation of natural beauty, for instance, have a special role to play in human well-being? This course will engage these questions through readings by Aldo Leopold, Paul Taylor, J. Baird Callicott, and others. We will also consider the meaning and significance of ideas like sustainability and how access to environmental goods can be justly distributed among human beings.

Course Objectives

By this course's end students should:

1. Be familiar with the major philosophical issues and theories concerning the ethics of humanity's relationship to nature.
2. Be able to analyze philosophical arguments and think critically about ethical issues.
3. Be able to compose a compelling argumentative essay.
4. Be able to participate in meaningful exchange with others about the resolution of environmental problems.

Required Texts

Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce, *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book*, 3rd ed., Thomson Wadsworth.

Lisa H. Newton et al., *Watersheds 4: 10 Cases in Environmental Ethics*, Thomson Wadsworth.

Various texts on ANGEL.

Assignments**1. Pre-reading questions**

1-3 short answer essay questions you will respond to before doing the reading for the week. These are assigned in Weeks 1-2 and 4-5 and 7. These questions are intended to prepare you for the week's material and there are no right or wrong answers. They are graded pass/fail for 1 point per question. Thoughtful completed responses get full credit. Carelessly written or incomplete answers fail.

2. Reading comprehension exercises (RCEs)

Exercises of 5-10 fixed response questions intended to gauge your comprehension of the readings. There will be no RCEs during weeks 3 and 6. You may take each exercise twice. Questions for the exercises are taken from a weekly study and review guide sheet which you have in advance. Fill out the sheet as you read and listen to the lectures, then do the exercises to see how you've done. These exercises will also help you prepare for comprehension and retention tests.

3. Comprehension and retention tests

Tests of 10-20 mostly fixed response questions about the week's material. Sometimes there will be one or two short answer essay questions. There will be tests during weeks 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7. Tests are timed and are available to you from midnight Friday to 8 p.m. You have 60 minutes to complete them, after which time the test will be automatically submitted whether you have finished or not. Test questions will be randomly selected from a question pool and different students may get different tests.

4. Discussion boards

During weeks 1, 2, 4, and 7 you will be required to participate in discussions about environmental problems. Discussants, to be assigned each week, will post a short position piece (between 250 and 500 words) about some environmental issue (oil spills, for example). Commentators, also to be assigned each week, will then comment on the piece. Discussants will then reply to comments. The point of this assignment is to practice articulating and defending a controversial position through reasoned arguments, responding to critical feedback, and deliberating with others about how to resolve environmental problems.

5. Argument analysis, essay, essay journal, and peer review comments

Two argumentative essays of 1200 to 1800 words (or 4-6 pages) will be assigned, one during Week 3 and due at the start of Week 4 and another during Week 6 and due at the start of Week 7. As part of the assignment you will be required to read a scholarly work on your own and share your analysis of it with the class. You will also submit a two-page draft of each essay for blind review by two of your peers by noon Wednesday of Weeks 3 and 6. You will also then have to review the work of two of your peers as part of the essay assignment. Because good argumentative essay writing is a process, you will also be required to keep an essay journal during Weeks 3 and 6. More detailed information about the essay and journal assignments will be available on ANGEL.

6. Climate change wiki

During Week 5, the class will be divided into approximately 8 teams of 5 people each. Each team will be charged with writing a wiki on one aspect of the climate change problem. Each

person from each team will be assigned a day on which to edit the wiki. On your assigned day, you will document the work you do by taking a 'before' screenshot and an 'after' screenshot. Team members can however contribute to the wiki as much as they like and receive some extra credit for any documented work.

Grade Breakdown

Pre-reading questions	5%
Reading comprehension exercises	7.5% (lowest 2 scores dropped)
Forum discussant posts	7.5%
Forum commentaries	7.5%
Comprehension and retention tests	15% (lowest test score dropped)
First essay	15%
Second essay	20%
Argument analysis and essay drafts	9%
Peer review comments	6%
Climate change wiki	7.5%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale

Typical scale, i.e. 100-90 = 4.0, 89-85 = 3.5, 84-80 = 3.0, etc.

Course Policies

1. **Civility:** Because students do not meet their professor or their classmates face-to-face when they take an online class, the online format may create a false sense of anonymity. For some students, this occasionally leads to uncivil behavior (addressing the professor very casually, posting derisive comments about other students' views on the student discussion board, and so forth). Incivility will not be tolerated in this class, just as it is not tolerated on campus. Students are expected to be respectful towards their professor and towards their classmates. Students who engage in uncivil behavior will lose 5% points on their final overall grade for each infraction. Whether an infraction has occurred will be entirely for me to decide.
2. **Late Assignments:** The following assignments are not accepted late (i.e. you get a 0 for them if late): pre-reading questions, reading comprehension exercises, discussion board participation, climate change wiki, journal entries, and peer review comments. Any other work submitted past the deadline will receive only half marks. (For example, an essay graded 80% will receive a 40% grade.) Please plan accordingly (make sure you have a reliable internet connection, and begin submitting all assignments at least 30 minutes before the deadline).
3. **Missed comprehension and retention tests:** This course is a 6.5 week commitment. During those 6.5 weeks, you are expected to have access to a reliable internet connection and a distraction-free room for taking the 4 Comprehension and Retention Tests on the days that they are available. This will likely require advance planning on your part. *If this is not possible for you, then you should not take this course, or you should be willing to accept an "F" for any tests that you cannot take during the window of availability.*
4. **Contacting the professor:** I am always happy to assist you in any way that I can, and to discuss

your questions and concerns. Please remember that it is your responsibility as a student to contact me *in a timely manner* as soon as a question or concern arises. I check class email from 9am-6pm M-F. I do not check email on Saturday or Sunday.

5. **Religious Obligations:** If your religious obligations conflict with a scheduled assignment, and you let me know at least two weeks ahead of time, I will make alternative arrangements for you. Please provide a note specifying your religious affiliation, the obligation in question, and corresponding activities.
6. **Students with Disabilities:** Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation ("VISA") form. Please send me this form *at the start of the term* or not later than *two weeks prior* to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date cannot be guaranteed accommodation, but will be honored whenever possible.
7. **Academic Integrity:** Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. This includes all forms of plagiarism, cheating, and knowingly assisting others in either of these. When you cheat, you are lying to your professor and the university, and stealing from other students who have earned their grades. I will follow the university's Academic Integrity Policy in all such matters. Specifically, if you are found to be guilty of academic dishonesty, you will receive a penalty grade (0 on the assignment; if more than 1 student is involved in the offense, e.g., one student attempts to share exam questions or answers with another student, all students involved will receive a 0 on the test), I will submit a report to the dean of your program (which will stay in your electronic folder), and you will be required to attend a course on academic integrity. You will also face the possibility of further disciplinary action (such as failing the class, suspension from the class, your program, or the university). This policy will be applied as of the first offense; no warnings are issued. More information about MSU's academic integrity policy may be found at <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/honestylinks.html>. In order to avoid any unfortunate misunderstandings, it is your responsibility always to include in your written work and oral presentations proper references to any and all secondary sources that you have cited or consulted, including web pages. If in doubt, consult with me *before* submitting your work.
8. **Technical Difficulties:** In the event of technical difficulties, students are expected to follow the procedure detailed in the Orientation materials ("Policy and Procedure for Technical Difficulties"). The professor will *only* take account of "technical difficulties" *if* the student has followed this procedure (which will be documented by the ANGEL Helpline staff).

Reading Schedule

WEEK	TOPICS		READINGS
1	Why care about the environment?	Utilitarianism and aesthetics	(ANG): Pinchott, 'The Birth of "Conservation"' (ANG): Muir, 'A Voice for Wilderness'
		Cost-benefit analysis (CBA)	EEPB (V:40): Sagoff, 'At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima' <i>Recommended:</i> EEPB (I:2.5): Utilitarianism and Economic Theory
2	Nonanthropocentric environmental ethics	Animal rights	EEPB (III:15): Singer, 'Animal Liberation' EEPB (III:16): Regan, 'The Case for Animal Rights'
		Biocentric individualism	EEPB (IV:24): Taylor, 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature' (ANG): Taylor, <i>Respect for Nature</i> , Ch. 6, 'Competing Claims and Priority Principles' <i>Recommended:</i> EEPB (I:2.7): The Influence of Kant
		Ecocentrism	EEPB (IV:25): Leopold, 'The Land Ethic'
3	Responses to nonanthropocentric ethics	Ecofeminism, environmental pragmatism, biocentrism, and CBA	Various. See the 'Essay assignment information' document on ANGEL.
4	Sustainability and agriculture	Weak and strong sustainability	EEPB (V:61): Solow, 'Sustainability: An Economist's Perspective' EEPB (V:62): Gooden, 'Sustainability'
		Agricultural ethics and biotechnology	EEPB (VI:69): Pollan, 'A Plant's Eye View of the World' (ANG): Thompson and Hannah, 'Food and Agricultural Biotechnology'

5	Climate change	The major issues	(ANG): Gardiner, 'Ethics and Global Climate Change'
		Individual responsibility	(ANG): Sinnott-Armstrong, 'It's Not My Fault'
6	A more detailed look at sustainability issues	Sustainability, population, GMO foods, climate change	Various. See the 'Essay 2 assignment information' document on ANGEL.
7	Environmental justice and activism	Environmental justice	(ANG) Cole and Foster, 'We Speak for Ourselves' (ANG) Wenz, 'Just Garbage'
		Activism	EEPB (VII:95): Foreman, 'Strategic Monkeywrenching' (ANG): Martin, 'Ecosabotage and Civil Disobedience'