

Environmental Ethics

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Spring 2009
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This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

Course description

Environmental issues are increasingly significant for local, national and international populations. From global warming and ozone depletion to energy futures and ecological integrity, environmental issues are occasioned by competing interests, conflicting principles, and contested cosmologies. This course proposes to review the current global situation and examine selected case studies that represent a range of environmental problems. This “earth scan” becomes, in turn, the point of departure for an investigation of existing views of nature and the problems they create. Finally, students will develop a personal spirituality of nature and evaluate Christian perspectives to major environmental problems.

Course objectives

1. To understand the current environmental situation from an integrated perspective.
2. To consider existing views of nature and the problems they create.
3. To develop a personal spirituality of nature.
4. To understand how Christian perspectives have historically contributed to existing attitudes toward nature and offer resources for new insights.
5. To apply Christian perspectives to major environmental problems.
6. To introduce students to major environmental issues and their justice components.

Course Requirements

1. Preparation and participation. You are required to read the assigned material, attend class regularly and participate in class discussion. Your participation should reflect your engagement of the materials under review. (10%)
2. Midterm examination. You are required to complete an essay examination that will evaluate: a) your understanding of the environmental situation from an integrated perspective; b) your understanding of views of nature and the problems they create; and c) your understanding of how Christian perspectives have historically contributed to existing attitudes toward nature. (30%)
3. Presentation. You will be responsible for a class presentation on a case from the Martin-Schramm and Stivers text, or from another source. Directions will be distributed in the course. Students not presenting on a given day will prepare a one-page summary of the case and submit it to the instructor on the class session after the presentation. (30%)
4. Final Essay. You are required to submit a 10-12 page paper in which you briefly rehearse your understanding of the global situation or a local situation, evaluate major competing interests, religious principles and views of nature, and develop your own spirituality of nature. Essays should conclude with a cogent response to the question *what is to be done?* (30%)

Texts

- Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- James Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996.

Academic Honesty

All work you submit in Environmental Ethics is expected to be yours. Any quotation of the words of others must be clearly indicated, and all direct indebtedness must be acknowledged by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of Seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Course Topics

DATES	TOPICS	READINGS
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PART I-The Problem

Weeks 1-5

Syllabus

Limits to growth

The ecological crisis

Causes of the crisis

Attitudes toward nature

Four perspectives

The ethic of ecological justice

Earth Community, part I

Life Abundant, 1, 4, 5

Environmental Ethics, 1

Cry of the Earth, 1-4

Environmental Ethics, 2

Environmental Ethics, 3

PART II-Personal Integrity/Nature Spirituality

Week 6

Nature Spirituality

Integrity/Integration

Life Abundant, 2, 3, 6

Cry of the Earth, 5, 6

PART III-Christian Foundations

Weeks 7-11

Biblical texts and theology

The ethic of ecological justice

Personal Responsibility

Theology

Earth Community, part II

Life Abundant, 7, 8

Environmental Ethics, 4-12

Cry of the Earth, 7-11

PART IV-Conclusion

Weeks 12-13

The Earth Charter
Wrap up

The Earth Charter (handout)

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Week 1

Th 2/5 Introduction to the course

Week 2

T 2/10 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 1-19
Life Abundant, pages 3-24
Environmental Ethics, pages 1-14
Cry of the Earth, pages 1-11

Th 2/12 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 23-37
Life Abundant, pages 71-97
Environmental Ethics, pages 14-31

Week 3

T 2/17 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 38-74
Cry of the Earth, pages 11-34

Th 2/19 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 75-89
Life Abundant, pages 99-123

Week 4

T 2/24 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 90-110
Cry of the Earth, pages 63-85

Th 2/26 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 111-126
Cry of the Earth, pages 86-103

Week 5

T 3/3 **Reading:** *Earth Community*, pages 127-154
Cry of the Earth, pages 35-61
Environmental Ethics, pages 33-45

