

**ES 101**  
**Seminar on Environmental Issues**  
**Spring 2008**

Tuesday-Thursday, 11:30-1:00  
Swart 14

**Professor:** Jim Feldman

**Email:** [feldmanj@uwosh.edu](mailto:feldmanj@uwosh.edu)

**Telephone:** 920-424-3235

**Office:** Swart 315

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:15-2:45 or by appointment

**Course Description:**

When you look at a tree, what do you see? What language would you use to describe that tree? The scientific vocabulary of ecology? The metaphorical language of literature, poetry, or art? Or would you use economics, and see not a tree but a commodity? The choices are endless. Such choices have changed over time; we do not look at trees in the same way our ancestors did. Environmental controversies have their roots in deep and often bitter disagreements about how different groups see nature, and how these groups envision the proper human relationship to nature. Should we control nature, and reshape it to purely human, utilitarian ends? Should we preserve it completely untouched? Or should we find some other path between these two extremes? And what tools should we use to accomplish these goals? Should science, philosophy, or economics guide our interactions with nature? Such questions have critical implications for the environment, and for the human communities that depend on the environment

The goal of this class is to provide an introduction to the field of environmental studies by using an interdisciplinary perspective to explore the complex relationships between humans and the natural world. We will focus on four case studies: wolf management, global climate change, agriculture & food, and environmental responsibility. Central themes of the course will include changing perceptions of the relationship between nature and culture; the different cultural lenses through which people look at nature, the role of science in environmental policy making; and the role of individuals, communities, and societies in environmental responsibility.

An additional goal of this class is to further your liberal arts education. What does this mean? The liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class, then, is not just to convey specific information about environmental issues (although you will learn much about this) but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, and how to understand modern environmental issues in their social, historical, and political context. A liberal arts education provides the tools we need to be active citizens of our communities. As we will learn this semester, active citizenship plays a key role in resolving the complex environmental dilemmas that we as a society face today.

**Attendance, Discussion and Participation**

Your participation in discussions and other class activities is essential. Lectures, discussions and other activities will be integrated. Come to class each day prepared to discuss the reading assigned

for that day. There will be a variety of short assignments, many completed during class, throughout the semester. These will range from short writing pieces to found object exercises or internet searches. They will be collected and will count, along with your attendance and participation in class discussions, toward 15% of your grade. Attendance will be taken every class meeting; your grade will drop significantly with each absence. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will fail the course. An “unexcused absence” is any absence for which you cannot provide a note from a doctor, another professor, or some other documented explanation of your absence. If you simply cannot make a class, please contact me before the class meets; perhaps an arrangement can be made to ensure that you are not penalized for missing class for legitimate reasons. There will be no opportunity to make up short assignments. Your **active** participation is the key to your learning the material and to the success of the course—both for you as an individual and for the class as a whole.

Please check your email account regularly for updates and last minute information about upcoming class meetings. Also, email is generally the best way to get in contact with me.

### Reading Responses

Ten times over the course of the semester, students are expected to hand in reading responses. These are to be brief (1 page, double spaced) answers to the questions listed on the syllabus below. Each student is responsible for handing in ten out of the fourteen reading responses. These reading responses will be count toward 10% of your total grade. **Everyone** must complete the first and last reading responses.

### Exams and Papers

Papers: You will be responsible for two papers, one due Tuesday, **February 28** (at the start of class) and one due Thursday **May 14** (also at the start of class). For each paper, you will choose among several possible paper topics, which will be handed out 10-14 days in advance. The first essay will cover the topic of wolf management. The final paper will be a comprehensive essay that demonstrates your understanding of material covered throughout the course. Each paper should be 4 to 6 pages long, typed, double spaced, standard margins, 12 point font. In addition to handing in a hard copy of your papers in class, you are expected to submit an electronic copy through the course Desire2Learn website. We will discuss the objectives and requirements for these papers in detail during the semester.

Mid-Term Exam: There will be an in-class midterm on Tuesday, **April 1** that will consist of one essay and a short-answer section that will test your understanding of key concepts.

### Readings

A note on the readings: the amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are asked to read close to 200 pages of a single source. Try to keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when the heavier reading loads are coming, and plan ahead.

All of the following books are available at the University Book Store in Reeve Memorial Union, as well as on reserve at the library:

Renee Askins, *Shadow Mountain: A Memoir of Wolves, a Woman and the Wild* (New York: Anchor

Books, 2002)

Joseph C. DiMento and Pamela Doughman, eds., *Climate Change: What it Means for Us, Our Children, and Our Grandchildren* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007)

Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild* (Hungry Mind Press: St. Paul, MN, 1995)

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006)

Electronic Reserve Readings—in an effort to save students the cost of a University-produced reading packet, a variety of course materials have been placed on the Polk Library's Electronic-Reserve. These are REQUIRED readings, and students are REQUIRED to print them out and bring them to class the day that we will be discussing them.

### Course Policies and Conduct

All of us must do our best to be intellectually honest and tolerant of personal differences. Environmental topics are often controversial, and we all have our own beliefs. I hope that everyone will feel safe to express an idea, even if that idea is not a popular one.

There are some university guidelines for behavior that I expect all of us to abide by as well. One of these has to do with plagiarism, or taking credit for the work of others. This is a serious offense and will be treated according to university guidelines; failure of the course is a potential outcome of academic dishonesty. This doesn't mean you shouldn't talk with other students about what you are thinking or writing; but when you write something on a paper or exam, it must be in your own words, not copied from someone else. We will discuss what plagiarism means more fully during the course of the semester. If you have any questions about academic honesty, and what might or might not be considered plagiarism, please ask, rather than taking a risk with grave consequences.

Please let me know what I can do to accommodate any disabilities that you might have.

### Grading Breakdown and Course Requirements

Attendance, Participation	15%
Group Project	5%
Reading responses	10%
First Paper	20%
Midterm	20%
Final Exam	30%

We will follow the standard university grading scale:

A 93-100	C 73-77
AB 88-92	CD 68-72
B 83-87	D 60-67
BC 78-82	F 59 and below

## Weekly Readings and Lectures

### Unit I: Wolf Controversies—The Wild and the Tame

#### Week 1

February 5: Introduction—Course Themes and Objectives

February 7: Wolves—Current Controversies

Reading: Renee Askins, *Shadow Mountain*, 1-26

**Assignment:** Each student must find one article on wolves published within the last 6 or so months, and bring it with them to class. The article can be from a newspaper, magazine, or scientific journal. If your last name starts with the letters A-G, find and bring an article on wolves in Wisconsin or Minnesota. If your name starts with H-O, bring an article on wolves in Yellowstone National Park or the northern Rockies; P-Z, some other region like the Southwest or the Southeast.

#### Week 2

February 12: Native American Attitudes toward Wolves

Reading: Askins, *Shadow Mountain*, 28-86

**Reading response 1 (EVERYONE MUST COMPLETE):** How, according to Askins, are humans connected to animals? Be sure to use specific examples from the reading, and to underline your thesis statement.

February 14: The Campaign to Eradicate America's Wolves

Reading: Askins, *Shadow Mountain*, 89-138

#### Week 3

February 19: Wolves in Myth and Memory: From the Black Death to the Present

Reading: Askins, *Shadow Mountain*, 141-193

Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, excerpts, ER

**Reading Response 2:** Pulling from both the Askins and the Lopez readings, craft an argument that explains why wolves have played such a central role in European fairy tales (Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, etc.)

February 21: Wolves in Wisconsin & the West

Reading: Askins, *Shadow Mountain*, 197-249

Wisconsin wolf articles, ER

Explore the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources wolf management plan at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/publications/wolfplan/toc.htm>.

#### Week 4

February 26: Wolf Rehabilitation: Why Do We Now Want Wolves?

Reading: Askins, *Shadow Mountain*, 253-93

Thomas McNamee, "Tinkering with Nature," ER

**Reading response 3:** Craft an argument about why we should or should not use radio collars in our research and management of wild wolves. What does Askins think about this, and how does your opinion compare to hers? What would McNamee say? Be sure to underline your thesis statement.

## Unit II: Politics and Science of Global Warming

February 28: Human History, Geological Time, and Global Climate Change

Reading: recommended, not required: Begin reading DiMento & Doughman, eds., *Climate Change*

**Assignment:** Come to class with a list of three concrete ways that you think your life will be affected by global warming.

**First paper due**

### Week 5

March 4: The Science of Global Climate Change

Reading: DiMento & Doughman, eds., *Climate Change*, Ch. 2-3, 11-64

March 6: Science, Scientists, and Environmental Policy

Reading: DiMento & Doughman, eds., *Climate Change*, Ch. 4 and 6, 65-101, 139-60

**Reading response 4:** How can non-experts make sense of the complex science of global warming? How do we know what science is correct, and where is the best place for average people to get information about global warming and other environmental issues?

### Week 6

March 11: Climate Change and Global Environmental Justice

Reading: DiMento & Doughman, eds., *Climate Change*, 161-79

**Reading response 5:** “Environmental Justice” can be defined as A recognition that access to a clean, healthy environment is a fundamental right of all human beings; “Environmental Racism” as decisions that restrict certain people or groups of people to polluted or degraded environments on the basis of race, or perhaps some other social indicator like income or ethnicity. Provide two examples of these principles—one drawn from today’s reading, and one that you have observed in real life—preferably a local example.

March 13: **No Class**

**Assignment/reading response 6:** On your own, watch one movie from the list below and write a critical 2-page review of the movie. Be sure to assess how the movie communicates about issues of climate change, and assess the movie as a source of information for the general public about this issue. What impact might these movies have on the way people react to or understand global warming? The following movies are on 3-hour reserve at Polk Library, or you may rent them on your own

- “The Day After Tomorrow”
- “An Inconvenient Truth”
- “The Great Global Warming Swindle”

### Week 7

March 18: Negotiating Climate Change

Reading: DiMento & Doughman, eds., *Climate Change*, Ch. 5, 101-138

March 20: The Future of Climate Change

Reading: DiMento & Doughman, eds., *Climate Change*, Ch. 8, 181-196

**Reading response 7:** What do you think the future holds in terms of climate change? How will the world react to the challenge of global warming? Be sure to refer to the reading your answer.

## SPRING BREAK

### Week 8

April 1: **MIDTERM**

### **Unit III: Food, Agriculture & Sustainability**

April 3: Industrial & Sustainable Agricultural Systems

Reading: Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*, 1-64

**Reading Response 8:** What, in your opinion, should be the goal of US agricultural policy? Be sure to refer to the reading in your answer.

### Week 9

April 8: Industrial Agriculture Past and Present

Reading: Pollan, *OD*, 66-119

**Assignment:** Found object exercise: Bring to class one food item (or simply its packaging) that, in your opinion, provides a commentary on the ecological limits of Wisconsin and/or the larger American food-production system. We will talk more about this assignment in class.

April 10: The World on a Plate

Reading: Pollan, *OD*, 123-184

**Reading response 9:** What is "Big Organic"? What do you see as its greatest strengths and weaknesses?

### Week 10

April 15: King Corn

Reading: 185-225

April 17: Local Farms in a Global World

Reading: Pollan, *OD*, 226-273

**Reading response 10:** What do you see as the chief advantages of a local food system? What do you see as the largest barriers to its success? Be sure to refer to the reading in your answer.

### Week 11

April 22: Hunters, Gatherers, Vegetarians, and Vegans

Reading: Pollan, *OD*, 277-364

**Reading response 11:** Considering Pollan's discussion of the ethics of eating animals, defend your decision to eat/not eat meat.

April 24: Solutions and Lessons

Reading: Pollan, *OD*, 365-411

**Reading Response 12:** What, in the end, does Pollan want us to do after reading his book? Is what he is asking us to do realistic?

### **Unit IV: Individuals, Communities, and Environmental Responsibility**

### Week 12

April 29: Group Project: Class meets in Halsey Computer Lab

Reading: Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-55

May 1: Looking for Hope, Part 1

Reading: McKibben, *Hope Human and Wild*, Ch. 2

### **Week 13**

May 6: Sustainability at UWO

Reading: McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, Ch. 3

Anthony D. Cortese and William McDonough, "Education for Sustainability: Accelerating the Transition to Sustainability through Higher Education," ER

Cortese, "Education and Sustainability: The University as a Model of Sustainability," ER

Explore the UWO Green page at

[http://www.uwosh.edu/enviro\\_studies/Campus%20sustainability/green\\_page.html](http://www.uwosh.edu/enviro_studies/Campus%20sustainability/green_page.html)

**Reading Response 13:** After doing the reading and perusing the website, what do you think that UWO could do, as an institution, to become more sustainable? What might *your* role in this process be?

May 8: Looking for Hope, Part II

Reading: McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, Ch. 4

**Reading response 14 (EVERYONE MUST COMPLETE):** What insights/examples presented by McKibben in his chapters on Brazil, India, and home seem to you to provide the best, most instructive and hopeful lessons for modern American society?

### **Week 14**

May 12: Group Presentations

No reading

May 14: Group Presentations

No reading

**TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE. YOUR PRESENCE IN CLASS IS REQUIRED**