

Environmental Studies 282: Environment, Community, and Values

Professor: Todd Dresser

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:40am-11:10am

Sage Hall 2234

Office: 3449 Sage Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-3:30

Chat Hours: Mondays 3-5pm (I will be available to chat on the course page in D2L)

What is this course and how will we approach it?

This course examines how American social, religious, scientific, aesthetic, and philosophical ideas of nature have changed across time. We will combine the methods of Environmental Studies and History in order to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of how the values of a diverse cross section of Americans towards nature have changed across time.

Environmental studies, as a practically minded discipline, seeks to understand the current state of affairs between humans and the natural world: how it got to be the way it is, and - most importantly - how to work for a more just and sustainable future. History, by contrast, rarely makes pretensions towards practicality. Rather, as an academic discipline, it seeks to understand the world of the past on its own terms and recognizes that actors in the past had no intention to create the world we inhabit today. Paradoxically, historians typically assert that the best way to understand our present is to understand how the actions of past actors bequeathed a future they could not foresee and, more often than not, resulted from chance, contingency, irony, and unintended consequences. Who could have foreseen in 1492, for example, that an expedition to find a new route to Asia would introduce diseases to a different continent altogether and lead to one of the largest human extinctions in history? Or, who could have foreseen in 1789, that the hard-won U.S. constitution would barely last seventy years before being tested, and almost sundered, in the American Civil War? Who could have foreseen in 1861 that the U.S. would be reunited in 1865? But, those things happened. Historians try to understand why, while acknowledging that none of the actors involved knew what the eventual outcome would be.

Our overarching goal of the semester will be to combine the practical goals of Environmental Studies, which seek to make the world of the future better, with the academic goals of History, which seek to understand the past for its own sake. We will do this by studying many of the important aesthetic, social, religious, and philosophical ideas about nature that different groups of Americans have held and then we will connect the legacies of those ideas to contemporary environmental organizations, thinkers, and movements. The ideas of the past make their way into and inform contemporary movements (often in unpredictable ways) and those ideas influence how organizations and individuals advocate for a better future. The main assignment of the semester will ask to students to consider how contemporary organizations draw upon past ideas and values (consciously and unconsciously) and how those ideas inform the work of those organizations.

The Values of an Organization

The main assignment of the semester will require students to connect the readings, discussions, and lectures from the course to an environmental organization that they care about, are involved in/with, or would like to know better. Ideas, ideals, and values that people developed in the past, for their own purposes, often make their way into contemporary organizations in unexpected and complicated ways. Your job in this paper is to uncover the roundabout journey by which the values and ideas that motivate an organization that you care about, or would like to know more about, arose. It is my hope that students will develop a more nuanced understanding of an environmental issue, and an organization that deals with that issue, so that as students engage in those organizations, they have a more grounded sense of the context that gave rise to those organizations and issues. That is, as organizations work to make a better future, I would like students to have a better sense of their past.

Below is a list of questions to consider as you research and write your paper. There is some overlap in these questions. Your paper should address most or all of them:

- 1) When did this organization begin and why did it start in the first place?
- 2) How have the goals of the organization changed since it started?
- 3) When the organization started, what was its historical context? How did that context shape the organization's initial goals?
- 4) How and why did the organization change its focus or mission as its historical context changed?
- 5) To what extent did this organization conform to dominant ideas about nature and to what extent did it rebel against those ideas?
- 6) What are the ultimate goals of this organization? What type of world does it seek to create?
- 7) What ideas, values, movements, or beliefs from class most closely resemble those of the organization? How close is the resemblance? How do you account for the differences?
- 8) How does this organization envision the relationship between humans and the natural world? Why does it view these relationships this way? What type of evidence does this organization use to make its case about human/environment relationships (scientific data, personal interviews, historic case studies, etc) and how does it use that evidence?
- 9) To what extent does this organization have a singular, unified mission and to what extent does it have many missions or agendas? To what extent does this organization work at cross purposes?
- 10) Who or what does this organization try to help; who or what does this organization fight against; and who or what does this organization leave out? Why?

Please note that there is a trade-off when considering the size and scale of your organization. A large group, like the Sierra Club, has a long history and many sources of information. But, you will not be able to read all that information and synthesize it into a six-page paper. A smaller group, like the Friends of the Fox River, may not have generated as many sources, and the sources may be hard to find. But the one's that exist will be easier to read and summarize for your paper.

Nuts and bolts: The final paper should be six pages long (not including the works cited page), double-spaced, in a twelve-point readable font, with page numbers at the bottom, and written to the best of your ability. ***Final drafts are due December 8th.***

While this paper undoubtedly seems intimidating, there will be several assignments along the way that will help students practice making connections between historical context and contemporary organizations. We will also devote class time to working on research and writing strategies to help students complete this paper.

Smaller Assignments

To help with the values of an organization papers, there are smaller assignments sprinkled throughout the semester. These assignments are meant to help students practice connecting the past with the present. Students will also work on the various components of their term papers: bibliography, outline, peer editing, etc. These assignments are worth 5 percentage points each and total 35 percent of the final grade for the course. So, each individual assignment will not count heavily toward your grade but they add up to a significant portion when taken together.

Paper Presentations

Each student will give a ten-minute presentation on their organization, the work it does, its history, its goals, and the values that motivate its work. These presentations will take place during the last three class periods of the semester: **December 8, 13, and 15.** Students will sign-up for time slots on **November 22.**

The audience for these presentations is a group of smart people who are unfamiliar with the organization that the speaker is talking about. Therefore, the presentations should give enough background information so as to provide listeners with enough context to make sense of the presentation, but does not get bogged down in the minutia of the organization's operations. The presentations should discuss the origins of the organization, the context from which the organization sprang, how and why the organization has changed across time, and what ideas impel the work of the organization.

Students should include at least one visual aid in their presentation, whether it is a PowerPoint slide show, a handout, or a handmade poster. Far from being an additional pain for students, these visual aids should serve to ground the presentation and keep it from flying all over the place. The visual aids will also assist listeners in following what the speaker is trying to convey.

Discussion and Participation

Your participation in discussion is extremely important. Discussion in history is equivalent to a lab in a science course. It is where we test out ideas and weigh their validity. In addition, class discussion is where you can try out your ideas for your papers before you commit

to them in your essays. Therefore, discussion and participation will count significantly toward your grade. Conversely, since participation is so important, absence from class will be detrimental and your grade will drop significantly after two unexcused absences.

Plagiarism

There are many areas of life, outside of education, where it is acceptable to use the ideas or words of another person as if they were one's own. Politicians, for example, almost always use the words of speechwriters. Higher education, however, absolutely relies on the notion that the words and ideas that one presents as their own are, in fact, their own. To do otherwise is plagiarism and it cuts against core academic values. Misrepresenting someone else's work as one's own denies a person the chance to learn how to think, write, and argue in an informed and thoughtful way. First offenses of plagiarism will earn the student a grade of zero on the assignment where it occurs. Any offense after that will be remanded to the academic dean and the student risks failing the course altogether.

Many instances of plagiarism are unintentional and result from a lack of knowledge about how to cite sources. If you are unsure about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, please talk to me or visit the Polk Library's citation page <<http://www.uwosh.edu/library/citing.html>>. There is also a helpful tutorial on Cornell University's website <<http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm>>.

Statement on Laptops

Since many of the readings of the course are available in electronic form, students may use laptops in class in order to reference the course material and take notes. Students are not allowed to use their computers to create a distraction, however, and will be asked to turn off their computers if they are engaged in non-course related activities.

Course Readings

The amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are assigned to read over 100 pages of a single secondary source; other times you are asked to give a close reading to 30 pages worth of primary sources. Try to keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when the heavier reading loads are and plan ahead. The following items are available at the University Book Store:

Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*

Daniel J. Philippon, *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

Elizabeth Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008) paperback Sept. 2011

Electronic Readings: The majority of electronic readings will be available on e-reserve from the Polk Library. These readings are marked with a **(P)** in the weekly reading assignments below. Other readings will be on the course page on D2L. These are marked with a **(D2L)** in the reading schedule. In rare instances, I will send readings out as email attachments. I will let you know of these instances as they arise.

Grade Breakdown and Grading Scale

Requirement	Percentage of Grade
Smaller assignments	35% (7 assignments at 5% each)
Class Participation	20%
Final Paper	35%
Final Presentation	10%

We will follow the standard UW-Oshkosh grading scale

Grade	Percentage	Grade	Percentage
A	93-100	C	73-77
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	88-89	D+	68-69
B	83-87	D	63-67
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	78-79	F	59 and below

Schedule of Units, Readings, and Assignments

Myth and History:

Sept. 8th - Introduction

Sept. 13th - Library visit on doing online research and searching for material on the history of an organization. **We will meet in our regular classroom first.**

Sept. 15th -Shepherd Krech, *The Ecological Indian*, “Introduction” and “Hohokum” (P)

Assignment: Find an example online of an environmental group engaged in blending myth with history. Write a 500-word analysis on how your group walks the line between myth and history.

Roots of Conservation:

Sept. 20th - Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, “An Ethic of Permanence” (P) and Thoreau, *Walden*, “Economy” (P)

Sept. 22nd - Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, “Toward Conservation” (P) and G.P. Marsh, *Man and Nature*, “Introductory” (P)

Romanticism:

Sept. 27th - Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture*, “The Nationalist Garden and the Holy Book” and “Changing Concepts of the Sublime; (P) Thoreau “Ktaadn” (P) and Emerson “Nature” (P)

Sept. 29th - Reading: *Conserving Words*, “John Muir and the Sierra Club” and John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, “To the High Mountains” and “The Yosemite” and “A Strange Experience”(D2L)

Assignment: we have had two explanations of historical and environmental change - material and cultural. Find examples of each in your organization. How does your organization use material and cultural explanations to explain its work? (500 words)

Evolution and American Thought

Oct. 4th - Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, “Introduction,” “Variation under Domestication,” “Variation under Nature,” “Struggle for Existence,” and “Natural Selection” (P) and Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, “Agassiz” and “Brazil” (P)

Evolution and The Economy of Nature

Oct. 6th - Thorstein Veblen, “Why is Economics not an Evolutionary Science?”(D2L) and Herbert Spencer, “The Principles of Biology,” Andrew Carnegie, “Gospel of Wealth.” (P)

Evolution and the Nature of God

Oct. 11th - Ron Numbers, *The Creationists*, “Creationism in the Age of Darwin,” (P) Asa Gray, “Natural Selection Not Inconsistent with Natural Theology,” (P) and Liberty Hyde Bailey, “Evolution of a Strawberry” and “An Evolutionist Looks at Science and Religion” (P); William Jennings Bryan, “First Speech” and “Darrow Questions Bryan on Stand” from *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents* (P)

Evolution and the Nature of Social Difference

Oct. 13th - W.E.B. Du Bois, “Dayton is America” and Chicago Defender, “If Monkeys Could Speak” from *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents* (P) and Carl Degler, “Invoking Human Nature” from *In Search of Human Nature* (P)

Assignment: Find an example of how your environmental organization uses nature to either support or debunk the market. Why do they do this? Is it convincing? Find an example where your organization connects its ultimate values to scientific evidence. Why do they do this? Is it convincing? (500 words)

Progressive Conservation

Oct. 18th - *Conserving Words*, “The Closing of the Frontier”; Theodore Roosevelt statement on conservation; Gifford Pinchot, *The Battle for Conservation*, selections

Oct. 20th - *Conserving Words*, “Mabel Osgood Wright and the National Audubon Society;” Mabel Osgood Wright selection from *The Friendship of Nature*

New Deal Transformations

Oct. 25th - Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, “Poor People, Poor Land” (P) and screening of *The River*

Sand County

Oct. 27th - *Conserving Words* “Aldo Leopold and the Wilderness Society” and Leopold, *Sand County*, part I

Assignment: Turn in bibliography

Nov. 1st - Leopold, *Sand County*, parts II and III

Silent Spring and the Mass Society

Nov. 3rd - Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, “A Fable for Tomorrow” and “The Obligation to Endure,” “Elixirs of Death” and “The Other Road”. (P) Linda Lear, “Bombshell at Beltsville: Rachel Carson, DDT, and Agricultural Science” (D2L)

Splintering of Environmentalism - Radical Environmentalism

Nov. 8th - *Conserving Words*, “Edward Abbey and Earth First!” and Edward Abbey, selection from *Desert Solitaire*. (P)

Splintering of Environmentalism - The Population Bomb and Neo-Malthusian Concerns

Nov. 10th - Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (P) and Norman Borlaug, “Nobel Acceptance Speech”. (P) Selections from Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle*. (P)

Assignment: Write 500 words on how “the ecology of influence” works in your environmental organization.

Splintering of Environmentalism - Environmental Justice

Nov. 15th - Elizabeth Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, pages 1-85

Splintering of Environmentalism - Environmental Justice

Nov. 17th - Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, pages 86-150 and UCC statement on environmental justice. (P)

Assignment: Turn in outline or other prewriting form.

Road to Sustainability -

losing the words of the cold war

Nov. 22nd - Wendell Berry, *Unsettling of America*, “The Unsettling of America”, “The Ecological Crisis as a Crisis of Character” and Berry, “What are People For? (P)” and Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, “Losing the Words of the Cold War” and “The Rediscovery of the Market”. (P) *****Sign up for final presentations*****

Road to Sustainability-finding an individual nature

Nov. 29th - Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, “Heaven and Earth in Jest” “Winter” and “The Waters of Separation” (P) and Thomas Dunlap, *Faith in Nature*, “In for the Long Haul” (P)

Assignment: Turn in first draft for peer edit.

***Building a Sustainable Future -
The Local and the Global***

Dec. 1st - James McWilliams, *Just Food*, “Food Miles or Friendly Miles?: Beyond the Farm to Fork Paradigm of Production” (P) and Gary Paul Nabhan, *Coming Home to Eat*, “Eating My Way through House and Homeland.” (P)

Building a Sustainable Future - The new marketplace of nature

Dec. 6th -

Bill McKibben, selections from *Deep Economy* (P) and Mohammed Yunus, “The Promise of Social Business” from *Creating a World Without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism* (P)

Dec. 8th - Final Presentations ***** Final Drafts of Papers Due*****

Dec. 13th - Final Presentations

Dec. 15th - Final Presentations