

**College of Charleston  
Department of Religious Studies  
Fall 2010**

**RELS 298: SPECIAL TOPICS IN RELIGION—RELIGION AND ECOLOGY**

**Instructor:** Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4A Glebe St., Room 101 (office of Dr. June McDaniel)

Office Hours: MWF 11:45am to 12:45 pm, or by appointment (email works best)

Email: levasseurtj@cofc.edu

Lectures: MWF 10:00 to 10:50am, ECTR 219

Credits: 3 Semester Hours (fulfills core requirement for Religion Major or Minor)

\*\*\*Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.\*\*\*



**Course Description and Instructional Format:** This course serves as an introduction to the study of religion/nature/culture interactions. It is comparative in scope and methodology and the course is designed so that the student, by the end of the semester, has engaged with and mastered foundational material germane to the study of religion and ecology. Classes will largely be based on a seminar format, meaning we will spend most classes discussing the assigned readings. This discussion will occur in small groups and amongst the class as a larger whole. Students should not expect structured daily lectures, but rather should expect to be called upon to vocalize their thoughts about the readings and are expected to be able to articulate key points in the readings.

**Course Goals and Objectives:** Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce the student to the field of “Religion and Ecology,” its methodologies, tributaries, some of its foundational works, and some of its key scholars
2. To introduce the student to the field of environmental ethics and to explore how environmental ethics and the fields of both ecology and environmental studies impact the study of religion and in turn how they may be impacted by the study of religion

3. To explore how religion/s shape/s human relations to the environment and how the environments in which humans live influence religion/s (aka “biocultural evolution”)
4. To utilize a comparative method to highlight similarities and differences amongst religions in objective #3

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding religion, nature, and ethics issues by having in-depth discussions of readings during every class period
2. To systematically analyze and synthesize various theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of human/nature/religion interactions during every class period
3. To write a research paper that allows the student to reflect upon, synthesize, and show mastery of course material and key concepts
4. To develop comfort in working with small groups and in participating in class discussions by requiring active engagement in both forms of discussion during every class meeting

**Required Texts:** Available at the CofC and University bookstores (and most likely used copies on-line):

- Foltz, Richard. *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*. Wadsworth, 2003

There will also be required readings that will be made available at Electronic Reserve online at [ereserve.cofc.edu](http://ereserve.cofc.edu) under my name. These readings are to be printed out and brought to class for discussion. You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for they day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand.

Recommended websites:

- <http://www.arcworld.org/> Alliance of Religions and Conservation
  - <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.htm>
- <http://fore.research.yale.edu/> The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology
- [www.religionandnature.com](http://www.religionandnature.com) International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture
- <http://www.nrpe.org/> National Religious Partnership for the Environment
- <http://www.creationcare.org/> Evangelical Environmental Network
- <http://thankgodforevolution.com/> Thank God for Evolution, Michael Dowd
- <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/> The Earth Charter
- <http://www.worldwatch.org/> Worldwatch Institute
- <http://earthdevotion.org/>

Recommended Journals:

- *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*
- *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*
- *Orion*

- *Adbusters*

### **Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:**

1) *Attendance*: Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for that day. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. Notes or discussion of class material that have already been covered will not be provided by the instructor for any student. It is your responsibility to be present and to be to class on time. Only excused absences (limited to a note from CofC; an official doctor's note; or evidence of a family emergency) render the above moot. After 3 absences of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After 7 absences (i.e. your 8<sup>th</sup> absence), you will receive a WF and be dropped from the course. Please observe the totality of this attendance policy.

2) *Common Courtesy*: As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during the whole class period. You may take notes on a laptop computer, although the instructor reserves the right to ask you to turn off the computer. For students who wish to pursue this style of taking notes, you must sit in the front row. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (i.e. whispering, reading a newspaper, surfing the web, texting messages, etc.) to leave the class. Repeat violations of these rules will result in dismissal from the class. *Each time* a person is caught texting messages during class or engaging in activities on their computer that are not related to the immediate class lecture (such as checking Facebook or sending email), **they will be required to write a 10 page research paper of the professor's choosing**. Failure to complete this paper will result in an incomplete grade for the course.

3) *Honor Code*: On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating.

4) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cds/index.htm>

5) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

6) *Assignments*: Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

1. Class participation—This includes attendance and how often and how well you contribute to class discussions and small group discussions. 10% of grade
2. Tests—There will be three tests spread throughout the semester. These are not cumulative, and will consist of fill in the blank, multiple choice, matching, and short answer questions. 11.66% each for 35% of grade.
3. Summary papers—You will be required to write a two page summary (400 to 500 words) of five major theoretical pieces that we will read over the course of the semester. These are to summarize the main argument/s and point/s of the article; explain why these points are important to the author (why does it matter); the evidence presented by the author; and mention what other authors/articles the reading is in dialogue with, and why. 5% each for 25% of grade.
4. Final Paper—You will write a seven-page (1,750 word) final paper about religion and ecology, with the exact subject matter left open to your choice. Guidelines for this paper will be distributed and discussed in early October. The paper will be due during finals week. 30% of grade.
5. Extra Credit—There will be options for extra credit as the semester develops. Most likely these will include attending guest lectures, watching movies, writing book reviews, and turning in a two-page analysis of the event/item. Points awarded for each event depend on the event in question, ranging from 1 to 2 points. Each student may earn a total of 4 possible extra credit points that are added onto their final score. The final day to turn in extra credit work is Monday, 11/29.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+: 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)



## Course Schedule

Unit 1: Introduction; Exploration of Key Terms; Ecology and Evolution and Ethics

- W 8/25: 1<sup>st</sup> class
- F 8/27: (1) Alan Durning, “The History of a Cup of Coffee.”

<http://www.sdearthtimes.com/et0295/et0295s1.html>

(2) Julia Whitty, "The Thirteenth Tipping Point."

<http://motherjones.com/environment/2006/11/thirteenth-tipping-point>

- M 8/30: over the weekend, (1) take the bioregional quiz

<http://www.dlackey.org/weblog/docs/Where%20You%20At.htm>

(2) and ecofootprint quiz <http://www.myfootprint.org/>

then (3) read "Gaia Awareness" by Stephan Harding (e-reserve #1) and

(4) Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology," <http://www.jstor.org/pss/20027715>

(google scholar search for the article)

- W 9/1: entry on "Environmental Ethics" from *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (e-reserve #2) and chapter on evolution by Gardner and Stern (e-reserve #3)
- F 9/3: Kirkpatrick Sale, chapter "Intensification and Agriculture" (e-reserve #4)
- M 9/6: William Cronon, chapter "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3985059?seq=1> (accessed through google scholar) [**summary paper #1 due**]
- W 9/8: (1) Mark Stoll, chapter "Religion and African American Environmentalism" (e-reserve #5); (2) Interview with Wangari Maathai <http://greenbeltmovement.org/a.php?id=115>
- F 9/10: Garret Hardin, (1) "The Tragedy of the Commons"

[http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art\\_tragedy\\_of\\_the\\_commons.html](http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art_tragedy_of_the_commons.html)

(2) "Living on a Lifeboat"

[http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art\\_living\\_on\\_a\\_lifeboat.html](http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art_living_on_a_lifeboat.html)

- M 9/13: Aldo Leopold, excerpts from *A Sand County Almanac* (e-reserve #6) [**summary paper #2 due**]
- W 9/15: discussion, video, prep for test #1
- F 9/17: Test #1

## Unit 2: "Ethics"/"Religion"/"Gender"

- M 9/20: (1) Carolyn Merchant, "Dominion over Nature" in Foltz (2) Interview with Edward Abbey (e-reserve #7)
- W 9/22: (1) Shamara Shantu Riley "Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too" in Foltz (2) Bina Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India" <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178217?seq=1> (google scholar search), read pgs. 119-127 only.
- F 9/24: Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" in Foltz (2) Yi-Fu Tuan, "Discrepancies between Environmental Attitude and Behavior: Examples from Europe and China" (e-reserve #8)
- M 9/27: Emma Tomalin, "The Limitations of Religious Environmentalism for India" (weblink to be provided) [**summary #3**]
- W 9/29: catch-up on discussing readings, video

## Unit 3: Western Monotheistic Religions and Ecology

- F 10/1: Calvin Dewitt, “Behemoth and Batrachians in the Eye of God: Responsibility to Other Kinds in Biblical Perspective” (e-reserve #9)
- M 10/4: Ecological Hermeneutics—(1) Ellen Davis on Genesis, “Seeing with God: Israel’s Poem of Creation” (e-reserve #10)  
(2) Norm Habel, “The Mandate to Dominate” in *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (e-reserve #11)
- W 10/6: Skim *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* readings on Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (e-reserve #12); discuss final research paper
- F 10/8: Arthur Waskow, “And the Earth is Filled with the Breath of Life,” in Foltz
- M 10/11 FALL BREAK
- W 10/13: (1) Sallie McFague, “An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have It?,” in Foltz  
(2) “God in the Garden,” link to be emailed
- F 10/15: (1) Richard Foltz, “Islamic Environmentalism in Theory and Practice,” in Foltz; (2) K. L. Afrasiabi, “Toward an Islamic Ecotheology,” in Foltz
- M 10/18: Test #2

#### Unit 4: Asian Religions and Ecology

- W 10/20: (1) Skim ERN article on Hinduism and Ecology (e-reserve #13); (2) Kelly Alley, “Idioms of Degeneracy,” in Foltz
- F 10/22: (1) Skim ERN articles on Buddhism and Ecology (e-reserve #14); (2) Rita Gross, “Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic,” in Foltz
- M 10/25: (1) ERN article on Chinese concepts of Nature (e-reserve #15); Tu Weiming, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” in Foltz
- W 10/27 catch up, video, start finding sources for final paper
- F 10/29: no class...pursue extra credit options, work on final paper
- M 11/1: John Snarey, “The Natural Environment’s Impact Upon Religious Ethics: A Cross-Cultural Study,” weblink to be emailed [**summary #4**]

#### Unit 5: Indigenous Peoples and North American Manifestations

- W 11/3: Gary Paul Nabhan, “Cultural Parallax in Viewing North American Habitats,” in Foltz; lecture on Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- F 11/5: Vine Deloria Jr., “Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility,” in Foltz; video, *In the Light of Reverence*
- M 11/8: (1) Keith Basso, “Stalking with Stories,” weblink to be emailed; (2) Graham Harvey, “Paganism and the Environment,” in Foltz; (3) Derrick Jensen, selection from *A Language Older Than Words* (e-reserve #16)
- W 11/10: Wes Jackson, sections of *Altars of Unhewn Stone* (e-reserve #17)
- F 11/12 Wendell Berry, sections from *Home Economics* (e-reserve #18)
- M 11/15: catch up, discussion, video
- W 11/17: Test #3

#### Unit 6: Possible Futures

- F 11/19: Gustav Benavides, “Ecology and Religion” weblink to be emailed

- M 11/22: Donald Crosby, “A Case for Religion of Nature,” weblink to be emailed; Thanksgiving break; work on paper
- M 11/29: no readings, work on paper
- W 12/1: Bron Taylor, “Introduction” from ERN (e-reserve # 19)
- F 12/3: Bron Taylor, “Green Futures of Religion?,” weblink to be emailed [summary #5]
- M 12/6: David James Duncan, “Assailed” (e-reserve #20); class wrap-up and teacher evaluations
- Final paper due F 12/10 4pm in Religious Studies Office