

Religion and Ecology

(Rel 345: 3 CR. HUM/GA).

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Office hours will be through Zoom: Friday 9-11am, and by appointment. Let me know when you would like to meet and I will send you a Zoom invitation.



Mangroves in the Sundarbans. Photo credit Mohamed Ahklas Uddin.

Course Description:

In what ways are religions *ecological*? How do religious worldviews overlap with specific understandings of *sustainability*? Under what conditions, if any, are religious resources mobilized in ways that combat environmental degradation and support environmental justice? This class seeks to explore such questions by first developing a conceptual framework for thinking about the intersection of “ecology” and “religion” and then applying that framework to specific examples of “religious ecology” from around the world.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN AND HOW YOU WILL LEARN IT. **You will leave this class able to begin to answer these “big questions”:**

Why do connections between religion and ecology matter for our global future?

What do connections between religion and ecology look like in specific, real-life situations?

You will fulfill the following learning outcomes:

- **GEP Humanities 1:** Read closely, think critically, and write effectively about texts or cultural artifacts that reflect on perennial questions concerning the human condition (such as the search for truth and meaning, the confrontation with suffering and mortality, or the struggle for justice, equality, and human dignity).
- **GEP Humanities 2:** Investigate and thoughtfully respond to a variety of ideas, beliefs or values held by persons in situations other than one’s own.
- **GEP Global Awareness 1:** Identify the key components found within one or more cultures that are distinct from those found in predominantly English-speaking cultures.
- **GEP Global Awareness 2:** Analyze key forces or processes that contribute to global interconnectedness, and their implications.
- **GEP Global Awareness 3:** Demonstrate curiosity and empathetic insight about diverse cultural perspectives.
- **RELIGIOUS STUDIES:** Demonstrate the ability to interpret, describe, and compare religious phenomena as they intersect with diverse historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Assessment of learning outcomes:

Achievement of these learning outcomes will be measured through the following:

Weekly Short Answer questions that assess your knowledge of specific terms and information and ideas from a given week. (GEP Global Awareness 1 and 2 and 3, Humanities 1 and 2, Religious Studies)

Short Answer Tests that will measure your understanding of specific concepts from within Units 1 and 2 (GEP Humanities 1 and 2, GEP Global Awareness 1 and 2 and 3, Religious Studies).

An essay question that will ask you to construct an answer to a more complex question that integrates what you learned in Unit 1 and 2 with the new more complex content in Unit 3. (GEP Humanities 1 and 2, GEP Global Awareness 1 and 2 and 3, Religious Studies).

Final Project that will ask you to investigate a religion-and-ecology related project that meshes with you specific interests and major, thereby training you in religion-and-ecology research methods.

Explanation of Alignment with Learning Outcomes

The ecological aspects of religious worldviews (and the everyday practices, behaviors, mindsets, and experiences framed through these worldviews) directly engage how humans ought to fit into the broader life-community of the planet and of the universe. As such they directly involve questions about truth, meaning, purpose, and justice (GEP Humanities 1). This course surveys a range of religious ecological beliefs and practices from around the world that in order to be understood and thoughtfully evaluated must be situated within the broader context of specific religious and cultural traditions (GEP Humanities 2, GEP Global Awareness 1 and 3, Religious Studies). The course specifically engages the entanglements of religious ecological beliefs and practices with processes such as colonialism and globalization (GEP Global Awareness 2). All of the above are only possible when specific examples of religious beliefs and practices are engaged within the context of their specific historical, social, and cultural contexts (Religious Studies).

Grading and Student Expectations

Weekly Short Answer questions: 15%. Each week there will be a short answer question based on that week's assignments and lecture. The rough draft of the answer must be submitted before class each week, and a final version by Friday at midnight of the same week. There is a separate grade for each. The lowest two grades will be dropped.

Unit 1 Take-Home Test: 15%. Short-answer format.

Unit 2 Take-Home Test: 15%. Short-answer format.

Unit 3 Essay: 15%. Expository essay based on *The Hungry Tide*.

Final Project: 30% (5% Final Project Preparation Worksheet, 5% Research

Prospectus, 5% Oral Presentation, 15% Final Essay). The final project will be rather individualized because it will be contoured to fit your specific interests and major. It could be standard research essay (1000-1500 words) or possibly take another form.

Participation: 10%. You must actively participate in our class at least 12 times during the semester. Active participation is defined as some combination of the following:

- Attending face-to-face class in a way that demonstrates that you have prepared the class materials.
- Participation in interactive activities (polls, discussion forum, etc.)
- Completing make-up assignments if you are absent (see absence guidelines below)
- Discussing class material with me outside of face-to-face class meetings.

At the end of the semester, you will need to submit a self-evaluation form. This form will ask you to give yourself the participation grade you feel you deserve for the semester. I will then take this self-evaluation into account when determining your participation grade. The grade will be determined according to the following scale:

23-25 = 90-100%. 20-23 = 80-90%. 19=70%.

If you miss more than six classes for any reason your participation grade will be a zero unless you meet with me. we determine that your absences are not impacting your ability to be successful in this class.

Percentage to Letter Grade Conversion

A: 94-100, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82, C+:77-79, C: 73-76. C-: 70-72, D+: 67-69, D: 65-66, F: 64 or lower.

Text Rental

Ecology and Religion. John Grimm and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Island Press, 2014

Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology. Ed. Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien. 2nd edition. Routledge, 2017.

Text Purchase

The Hungry Tide. Amitav Ghosh. Mariner Books 2006. **ISBN-10:** 061871166X; **ISBN-13:** 978-0618711666. NOTE: Other editions are fine.

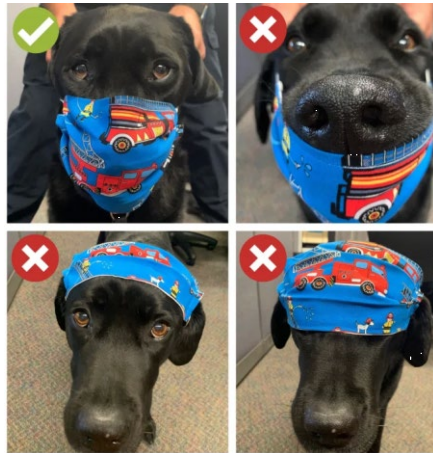
Inclusivity Statement

My goal in this course is to create and maintain a learning community that feels welcoming to students from all different kinds of backgrounds and experiences. Diversity (of sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture) makes our learning better, but only if our class feels like a safe space for learning and growth. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. ***Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.***

If you have experienced a bias incident (an act of conduct, speech, or expression to which a bias motive is evident as a contributing factor regardless of whether the act is criminal) at UWSP, you have the right to report it using this [link](#). You may also contact the Dean of Students office directly at dos@uwsp.edu.

COVID-Related Policies

UWSP is committed to offering students a face-to-face learning environment that is as safe as possible. Here is how we'll handle face-to-face classes unless the university decides to change COVID-related policy. For our class to meet together, everyone needs to sit in their assigned seat (for contact tracing). Everyone needs to wear their masks ***properly*** or we cannot meet face-to-face.



The only exception to this rule is if you have a mask exemption that has been granted to you directly from the Disability and Assistive Technology Center (DATC). If this is the case, you and I will both know because we will have received official notification from the DATC. All of the above guidelines have been set by the University and are not subject to my individual discretion.

Class Absences

It is inevitable that this is going to be a complicated semester. I am always ready to help you succeed in this class. If you miss class for a COVID-related reason (sickness, quarantine, isolation), or for any other acceptable reason¹ then you'll need to follow these steps in order to count that class towards your participation grade:

Step 1: Complete all of the assigned reading for the day(s) you missed.

Step 2: Review the in-class materials from the day(s) you missed (audio recordings, PowerPoint lectures, films, etc.).

Step 3: Review notes from someone in your group.

Step 4: Have a look at the written assignment for the week and see if you feel able to complete the assignment properly.

Step 5: Write a brief 1-2 paragraph summary of what you feel were the important concepts and details from each class, along with any questions or confusions that you have.

Step 6 (OPTIONAL): If necessary, request a Zoom meeting with me to go through your questions.

If you have an unexcused absence, then I would ask that you do steps 1-4 before requesting a meeting. I am also ready to give you flexibility on assignment deadlines if you need it.

¹ *The following are acceptable reasons for absence from class: illness, family emergency, or a school or team related event. Best practice for excused absences is send an email to lwhitmor@uwsp.edu prior to the absence requesting that it be excused.

Policies and Resources

Assignment Submission and Late Work Policy

All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through Canvas unless otherwise instructed. Assignments must be submitted by the given deadline or special permission must be requested *before the due date*. Without instructor permission, late or missing assignments may affect the student's grade. I am always ready to work with students who are struggling.

Student Support

UWSP offers students support in many different ways: technology, study skills, subject-specific tutoring, counseling, and medical services. There is a special section of our Canvas course with links to all of the ways that the university is ready to help you.

Religious Beliefs Accommodation

It is UW System policy ([UWS 22](#)) to reasonably accommodate your sincerely held religious beliefs with respect to all examinations and other academic requirements.

Equal Access for Students with Disabilities

If modifications are required due to a disability, please inform the instructor and contact the [Disability and Assistive Technology Center](#) to complete an Accommodations Request form. Phone: 346-3365 or Room 609 Albertson Hall.

Title IX

UW-Stevens Point is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and institutional policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In the event that you choose to disclose information about having survived sexual violence, including harassment, rape, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, and specify that this violence occurred while a student at UWSP, federal and state laws mandate that I, as your instructor, notify the Title IX Coordinator/Office of the Dean of Students. Please see the information on the [Dean of Students webpage](#) for information on making confidential reports of misconduct or interpersonal violence, as well as campus and community resources available to students. For more information see the [Title IX page](#).

Academic Misconduct

Copying off of someone's test, plagiarism, claiming credit for work that is not yours, and all other forms of academic misconduct are not tolerated at UW-Stevens Point. If a student is confused about what exactly academic misconduct is, there is information available regarding rules and procedures for the [process](#). You can also visit with your faculty or learn how to cite the work of others at the [Writing Lab](#).

Emergency Procedures

See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Procedures at www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures for details on all emergency response at UW-Stevens Point."

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) provides students with a right to protect, review, and correct their student records.

Lecture materials and recordings for Rel 100 Fall 2021 are protected intellectual property at UW-Stevens Point. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or share lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

Schedule of Assignments

Unit 1: Beginning the Conversation

Week 1: How do we think about connections between religion and ecology? Pt 1.

Wednesday, September 8, 2021: First Meeting

ASSIGNMENT: Short answer due by Friday, September 10 at midnight.

Week 2: How do we think about connections between religion and ecology? Part 2.

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, September 17 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

- In *Grounding Religion*: Chapter 1 (Religion: What is it, who gets to decide, and why does it matter?) and Chapter 2 (Case Study: Religion and the twenty-first century North American anti-extraction movement).
- In *Ecology and Religion*: part of Chapter 1 (p. 13-22), part of Chapter 2 (31-42)
- Think of one example of something that you would consider to be an example of a "religious ecology" and post your connection to our [class Padlet](#) (password is Fluffy).

Week 3: How have Christian thinkers understood the connections of creation, dominion, and stewardship? How does the history of Christianity in the West intersect with "science vs. religion" conversations? What is religious about environmental justice?

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, September 24 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

- In *Grounding Religion*, Chapter 3 (Ecology: What is it, who gets to decide, and why does it matter?)
- Excerpt from PBS History of Faith and Reason (link on Canvas)
- "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" by Lynn White (PDF on Canvas)
- "Rethinking Lynn White" by Matthew Riley (PDF on Canvas)
- Beginning of the *Report on Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* published by the United Church of Christ in 1987 PDF on Canvas)
- Summary of Laudato 'Si: On Care for Our Common Home (PDF on Canvas). Focus on the highlighted sections.

Unit 1 Take-Home Test given out.

Week 4: In-class focus: what can we learn from Islam and Judaism about human-nature relationships?

Wednesday, September 29, 2021

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Unit 1 Take-Home test due by beginning of class.

Unit 2: Varieties of Religious Ecologies

Week 5: What can we learn from indigenous religions in the Americas about human-nature relationships?

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, October 8 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS

- In Ecology and Religion: Chapter 8 (Indigenous Traditions and the Nurturing Powers of Nature) AND look through the resources in the back of the book (glossary, appendices).
- Selections from "Planting Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants" by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Within PDF, read from beginning to page 38.
- STANDING ROCK:
 - "Pipelines, Mines, and Dams: Indigenous Literary Water Ecologies and the Fight for a Sustainable Future" by William Huggins. Read from the beginning to at least p. 57.
 - "Water is life – an indigenous perspective from a Standing Rock Water Protector" by Chas Jewett and Mark Garavan
 - Why Understanding Native American Religion Is Important... (link on Canvas)
 - John Grim (one of the authors of Ecology and Religion) on Standing Rock (link on Canvas)
 - Standing with Standing Rock (link on Canvas)
 - VIEW: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/12/biodiversity-indigenous-women/>

Week 6: What can we learn from African traditions about human-nature relationships?

Wednesday, October 13, 2021

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, October 15 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

- View the documentary *Osun Osogobo* (link on Canvas) and read the background essay about Osun Osogobo and Yoruban religion (link on Canvas).
- "Biodiversity" from the UW-Green Bay Cofrin Center for Biodiversity
- "Indigenous Beliefs and Biodiversity Conservation: The Effectiveness of Sacred Groves, Taboos and Totems in Ghana for Habitat and Species Conservation" (PDF on Canvas)
- *An Ecowomanist View of the Dakota Access Pipeline* by Ariana Raya (PDF on Canvas)

Week 7: What can we learn Buddhist traditions about human-nature relationships?

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, October 22 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

- Section 1: Quick intro to Buddhism.
 - [The Path of Awakening](#)
 - [Renouncing the World](#)
 - [Becoming the Buddha](#)
 - [The Teachings of the Buddha](#)
- Section 2: Digging deeper into Buddhist Religious Ecologies
 - The Concept of "Interbeing" (PDF on Canvas)
 - [Sulak Sivaraska: How to Fight Oppression](#)

- Swearer: *The Resources of Buddhist Ecology* (PDF on Canvas)
- [Forest Monks in Southeast Asia](#)
- [Joanna Macy: Sacred Ecology/The Self as Metaphor/Deep Ecology](#)
- Section 3: Buddhist Economics
 - **Grounding Religion**: Chapter 11: Economics (252-265)
 - [Dhammic Socialism](#)
 - OPTIONAL: "Buddhist economics and the environment - Material flow analysis and the moderation of society's metabolism" by Peter Daniels (NOTE: This article will not be everyone's cup of tea -- just take a crack at it. PDF on Canvas).

Unit 2 Take-Home Test given out.

Week 8: What can we learn from Daoist and other East Asian traditions about human-nature relationships?

Wednesday, October 27, 2021: In-class focus on Daoist and other East Asian traditions.

ASSIGNMENT: **Unit 2 Take-Home test due by beginning of class.**

Unit 3: The Lived Complexity of Religious Ecologies / Individual Research Projects

Week 9: What can we learn from Hindu traditions about human nature-relationships?

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, November 5 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

- Begin *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh: in my edition 1-63 (the end of the "Boat" chapter).
- *Hinduism: Devotional Love of the World* by David Haberman (PDF on Canvas).

Week 10: How do the messy entanglements of Hinduism, Islam, western colonialism, globalization, and climate change frame everyday life in the Sundarbans? Part 1.

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

ASSIGNMENT: Short answer draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, November 12 at midnight.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

- In *The Hungry Tide*: (in my version) p. 64-145 (end of "Pursued" chapter and Part 1)
- Read excerpts from *Feeding a Thousand Souls: Women, Ritual, and Ecology in India*
- [How Islam Can Represent A Model for Environmental Stewardship](#)

Hungry Tide essay handed out. Final Project Preparation Worksheet handed out.

Week 11: How does one conduct research about religion and ecology? Part 1.

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

ASSIGNMENT: Final Project Preparation rough draft due by beginning of class, final version due by Friday, November 19 at midnight. In-class group presentations of specific chapters from *Grounding Religion*.

In-class focus on research methods and group presentations about specific ideas from *Grounding Religion*.

Week 12: How do the messy entanglements of Hinduism, Islam, western colonialisms, globalization, and climate change frame everyday life in the Sundarbans, Part 2

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

ASSIGNMENT: Asynchronous interactive assignment to be uploaded by Wednesday at 6pm.
See details in Canvas.

PREPARE FOR CLASS:

Finish Hungry tide. Asynchronous Class with Interactive Assignments to be uploaded by Wednesday at 6 pm.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13: How does one conduct research about religion and ecology? Part 2.

ASSIGNMENT: *Hungry Tide* essay due by beginning of class.

Wednesday, December 1, 2021: In-class focus on research projects.

In-Class research workshop. Work on Final Project Prospectus due following week.

Week 14 (FINAL WEEK): Final projects.

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

ASSIGNMENT: Final Project Prospectus due. Final Project Oral Presentations during class.

Final Essay due during finals period.