

NR 5194 Environmental Ethics

Offered: Fall Semester

INSTRUCTOR: Jenn Lawrence, Ph.D., jennlaw@vt.edu, Skype: jenn.l.lawrence

REQUIRED TEXT: Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works
by Schmidtz and Willott ISBN: 978-0-199-79351-8

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course offers a critical examination of the ethical dimensions of major environmental issues and assesses the embedded social, economic, and cultural constructs that shape both the causes and consequences of environmental problems. Environmental problems are incredibly complex, in moral as well as in economic, political, and biological terms; however, there is often a desire to oversimplify both the roots of current environmental crises as well as the possible responses. The course contextualizes this tension by assessing environmental problems such as, but not limited to, overconsumption; resource conflicts; carrying capacity; food production; climate change; and environmental disaster through a philosophical lens. A special emphasis on responsibility and accountability will be used as a framework for analysis, asking questions about responsibility to future generations, human/non-human relationships, as well as the impact of particular worldviews on the possibility for creating an environmentally sustainable and secure future. In this way, the course highlights critical questions about implications for justice and equality. Finally, the course will assess both mainstream and alternative political methods of addressing environmental issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Grades will be computed on the following basis:

Discussion Forums – 40%

Short Essays (4 x 15%) – 60%

Extra Credit opportunities throughout the semester

SCHEDULE:

Week 1 – Introduction | Reverence for Nature

Week 2 – Animal Liberation | Deep Ecology

Week 3 – Rights & Duties | Constructing Environmental Values

Week 4 – Ecocentrism vs. Anthropocentrism

Week 5 – Social Ecology | Environmental (In)justice

Week 6 – Locating Nature | Promethian Wilderness

Week 7 – (Over)consumption | Consumerism, Waste

Week 8 – Ecofeminism | Power Relations & Environmental Burden

Week 9 – (Over)population | Carrying Capacity

Week 10 – The Problematics of Preservation

Week 11 – Commons | What Does Sustainable Development Sustain?

Week 12 – Poverty | (In)equality

Week 13 – Resource Competition | Ethical Cities

Week 14 – Environmental Policy | Extra-Political Environmentalism

Week 15 – Environmental Citizenship | Individual Responsibility