



**Hartford International**  
UNIVERSITY FOR RELIGION & PEACE

## **Environmental Ethics (ET 631)**

### **A Hybrid Synchronous Course??**

### **Spring Semester 2023**

### **SYLLABUS**

Instructor:

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Office Hours: By Appointment (Zoom or in person)

Meeting Dates and Times:

Wednesday 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Course Format:

Face to Face

Course Description:

In a time of increasing distance from the natural world, re-connection to the (literal) ground of our life becomes all the more important. This course introduces students to the use of ethical theory, in dialogue with ecological science and with insights and practices of a range of religious and spiritual traditions. Through attention to wildness, climate change, environmental justice, food, and water – and in engagement not only with course readings and one another but also with indigenous human populations and the plants, animals, waters, and elements of one's place – students will practice ethical reasoning and develop their own ethic of intergenerational and multispecies relations.



### Course Objectives: *This course is designed to invite students...*

- into immersive encounter with [G\*D/mystery/wildness in] the natural world;
- into greater familiarity and intimacy with the creatures and landscapes of one's home: to learn to attend to and cherish the Earth and its life in any particular place, *as a primary good*;
- into greater awareness of the present ecological crisis: its economic and spiritual underpinnings, its scientific articulation, its summons to ethical thinking and vocation;
- into primary themes and strands of ecological theology and eco-philosophical ethical reflection from a variety of contemporary traditions;
- into familiarity with ethical deliberation that honors the complexity of interwoven biological, aesthetic, economic, human, and spiritual values at stake in particular contested questions;
- into a personal ethical vision toward just and fully relational human forms of life, *and*
- **thus:** into the fullest possible exploration of what *being human on Earth* means for us today.

### Hopes for Movement This Semester:

- from otherworldly or anthropocentric worldviews, and ethics or theologies of human dominance over nature, to a fully biologically grounded cosmology and ethics: relating to *reality* (and thus G\*D/mystery/wildness) in increasing fullness;
- from debilitating to regenerative forms of life together with one another, with G\*D/mystery/wildness, with humans we will never meet, with our own bodies/hearts, and with creation;
- from denial, complicity, distraction, panic/rage, or despair to truth-telling, love, discernment, and action – as individuals, as a university community, as religious or moral leaders, as citizens – in addressing the greatest moral and spiritual challenge our species has ever faced ... and thus into participation in the Great Work of our time (Thomas Berry).

### Course Learning Outcomes: TBD

#### Required Texts:

Bohannon, Richard, ed. *Religions and Environments: A Reader in Religion, Nature, and Ecology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 978-1-78093-802-8.

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*. Berkeley: Parallax, 2008. 978-1-888375-88-6.



## Assignments and Means of Assessment:

*Every child should have mud pies, grasshoppers, water bugs, tadpoles, frogs, mud turtles, elderberries, wild strawberries, acorns, chestnuts, trees to climb. Brooks to wade, water lilies, woodchucks, bats, bees, butterflies, various animals to pet, hayfields, pine-cones, rocks to roll, sand, snakes, huckleberries and hornets; and any child who has been deprived of these have been deprived of the best part of education.*

— **Luther Burbank**

- **Five** (of six total) **Blogs**, *your choice of which week to skip* – due by [day] at 11:59pm in the weeks noted, with guidelines to be provided = **25%**
- **Paper 1: Wilderness Encounter** = **5%**
- **Paper 2: Letter to Future Grandchild** = **5%**
- **Paper 3: Your Environmental Ethic** = **15%**
- **Eco-Experience: Ten Immersions in Outdoor Beauty** = **10%**
- **Research and Class Presentation** = **25%**
- **Attendance and Participation** = **15%**

**Paper 1: Narrate a Wilderness Encounter.** In 4-5 double-spaced pages, narrate a recent or childhood encounter with some aspect of non-human wildness: a wild animal, a storm, an immersion in wild water, a beloved tree or other plant, a trip into wilderness, etc. Choose an experience that conveys for you something of the power, beauty, mystery, or terror evoked by Berry, Plumwood, and Sanders or Snyder, including at least one quote from each. Where were you? What happened? Use as much sensory detail as possible – what you saw, heard, touched, felt, smelled, tasted, imagined – to invite the reader into your experience.

**Paper 2: Letter to Your [Present or Future] Grandchild:** Guidelines to be provided.

**Paper 3: Your Ecological Ethic:** Quoting from the 4-5 readings that have made the greatest impact on you, articulate **an environmental ethic framed through your core religious or personal/moral values, principles, and character.** What **specific goals or hopes** do you bring from this course to strengthen your capacity for fearless, peaceful, playful, hopeful, risky action through your future vocation for the life of the world? What great difference do you want your life to make?

**Research Presentations:** Presentations on a given topic are to include attention to the underlying science of your topic; policy or economic factors contributing to it; local implications or impact; and action steps geared both to personal and/or national/global levels and to HIU. Please center your presentation in an analysis of a) ethical considerations at stake in your topic and b) how your proposed action steps help address these concerns. Each person will have 30 minutes of class time to present, engage, and mobilize us around your topic. For grading purposes, the PowerPoint or prezi you submit should include a bibliography of all sources you used in your research. *Work in pairs is possible also; each pair will have 60 minutes.*

**Eco-Experience: Local Beauty.**

- 1) **Take part in *ten* separate outdoor experiences** this semester. Only one can be a sports field, and at least one should be solo. These could range from ten minutes wading in your local creek to an overnight backpacking trip. In your solo experience/s, include enough silence and stillness to be able to immerse into the place for a time.
- 2) **Track your experience using photos and words** to convey specific experiences of beauty you encounter each time, noting particular creatures, landscape features, water, plants, land, or weather you encounter: what happened? How did your perception shift? Who showed up? You could write a haiku or three for each experience, or narrate the sensory experience of what each photo conveys – or...?
- 3) **Curate your words and photos into a form to present and submit.** *Grade includes attention to beauty of expression: poems, art-works, photo collages (etc.) welcome! Extra credit for including photos of at least one native bird new to you this semester, one native wildflower, and one native shrub/tree.*





*We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness. We are imprisoned in our small selves, thinking only of having some comfortable conditions for this small self, while we destroy our large self. If we want to change the situation, we must begin by being our true selves. To be our true selves means we have to be the forest, the river, the ozone layer.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

## CALENDAR

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS (TBD) and ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES
Week 1: <i>Week of January 16</i>	Introduction to Course and One Another	<i>No reading due in advance</i>
Week 2: <i>Week of January 23</i>	Soul Health, Mind Health, Body Health, Earth Health	
Week 3: <i>Week of January 30</i>	Ethical Theory	<b>Blog 1 due</b>
Week 4: <i>Week of February 6</i>	Wildness, Wilderness, Biodiversity, Extinctions	<b>Paper 1 (Experience of the Wild) due</b>

Week 5: <i>Week of February 13</i>	Who We Are, Where We Are	<b>Blog 2 due</b>
Week 6: <i>Week of February 20</i>	Climate Change 1: <i>Earth Impacts</i>	<b>Paper 2 (Letter to Grandchild) due</b>
Week 7: <i>Week of February 27</i>	Climate Change 2: <i>Eco-Justice/ Human Impacts</i>	<b>Blog 3 due</b>
Week 8: <i>Week of March 6</i>	Local Watershed: <i>Becoming Indigenous to Our Place</i>	<b>Blog 4 due</b>
Week 9: <i>Week of March 13</i>	Food	<b>Blog 5 due</b>
Week 10: <i>Week of March 20</i>	Water	<b>Blog 6 due</b>
Week 11: <i>Week of March 27</i>	Presentations 1	
READING DAYS: <i>Week of April 3</i>	<i>No class</i>	
Week 12: <i>Week of April 10</i>	Presentations 2	
Week 13: <i>Week of April 17</i>	Ethics, Community, Leadership, and Action	<b>Paper 3 (Environmental Ethic) due</b>
Week 14: <i>Week of April 24</i>	Local Beauty: <i>Slideshows</i>	<b>Local Beauty Slides due</b>

