



ET 631-2 Environmental Ethics: Leadership and Justice for Life on Earth

SYLLABUS, Spring Semester 2026

Instructor:

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Office Hours: By Appointment (Zoom or in person)

Meeting Dates and Times:

Wednesday | 7:00 – 9:00pm, 77 Sherman Street, Room 205, AND via Zoom:

<https://hartfordinternational.zoom.us/s/97354777716>

Course Format:

Hybrid Synchronous

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 as humans, with G*D/mystery/wildness, with our own bodies/hearts, with creation;
- from denial, complicity, distraction, panic/rage, or despair to **truth-telling, discernment, love, 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:

MAP:

1. Build the internal resources necessary to engage conflict constructively.
 - Assess how your faith tradition and culture influence your motivations, mindsets, biases, and reactions.
2. Apply conflict transformation tools and processes.
 - Apply conflict analysis tools to case studies and real-world problems.

MAIRS:

1. Articulate your own worldview or religious belief system while empathically and respectfully engaging people whose worldviews, religious practices, and religious beliefs differ from your own
2. Subheading 3: Illustrate how religions help people promote peace or harm, both within and between communities.
6. Express your ideas and perspectives clearly in oral and written communication.
 - a. Write sustained, coherent arguments or explanations in clear academic English, with well-formed sentences and paragraphs.
 - b. Create or deliver clear, engaging, and succinct presentations that may utilize visual, written, and spoken elements.
7. Conduct research on the Masters' level.

MAC (BCCI Competencies):

ITP4: Incorporate a working knowledge of different ethical theories appropriate to one's professional context.

ITP 6: Articulate how primary research and research literature inform the profession of chaplaincy and one's spiritual care practice.

OL4: Promote, facilitate, and support ethical decision-making in one's workplace.

PIC8: Communicate effectively orally and in writing.

Required Text:

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

Additional required readings are posted in Canvas or in the Digital Theological Library (DTL)



Assignments and Means of Assessment:

- **Quiz on Ethical Theory** (open book, easy), **due by class time on January 28 = 5%**
- Five (of seven total) **Discussion Board posts**, *your choice of which weeks to skip* = **30%**
- **Narrative: Experience of Encounter with the Wild** (due in class February 4) = **5%**
- **Research and Class Presentation** (due in class April 8, 15, or 22) = **30%**
- **Eco-Experience: Ten Immersions in Outdoor Beauty** (due in class April 29) = **10%**
- **Attendance and Participation** = **20%**

Note: Additional Leadership for D.Min. Students TBD.

Discussion Boards (Initial Post + One Response): Please complete five weekly posts (600-800 words each; D.Min. 1000 words), due on Mondays by 11:59pm in the weeks they are assigned (see calendar), plus a response to one classmate, due by Tuesday 11:59pm. Reflect on what stirs in you from the readings, including *at least one quote from each*. In your response to a classmate, please honor their experience and use one new quote from one of the readings (not already cited) to take the reflection further. Rubric will be provided.

- a. *You can choose the weeks you want to skip this assignment;* you are still expected to complete the readings for the week you skip blogging.
- b. Each posting/response is worth 6% of the final grade (x 5 weeks) = **30% of grade.**

Narration of an Encounter with the Sacred Wild. In *five minutes spoken aloud*, 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 course readings on wildness, including at least one quote from each reading. 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. How does this experience (or wildness more broadly) evoke or center or stretch what *the sacred* means for you? To be read out loud in class on September 21 and turned in. **5% of grade.**

Research Presentations:

Research an ecological problem or crisis affecting your home, region, nation (or, MAP students, the place/context where you will be focusing your Capstone project), along with religious resources and/or proposed initiatives helping – or hoping – to address it. How, if at all, does the pre-colonial human history of your context shape how you think about this problem? Presentations are to include attention to the underlying science of your topic; political, cultural, religious, or economic factors contributing to it; local implications or impact; and proposed action steps you consider most important to address it. Please include an analysis of a) ethical considerations at stake in your topic, including any conflicting needs between diverse human and/or non-human stakeholders; and b) how your proposed action steps help address these concerns. Each person will have 25 minutes of class time to present, engage, and mobilize us around your topic. For grading purposes, the PowerPoint you submit should include a bibliography of all sources you used in your research.

Eco-Experience: Contemplative Local Beauty.

- 1) Take part in *ten* separate outdoor experiences** this semester (or nine for international students – you can use one photo to give us a glimpse of your home context, rather than from here in the U.S.). 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, one native wildflower, and one native shrub/tree that are new to you this semester.*



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

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

CALENDAR

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS AND NOTES
Week 1: <i>January 21</i>	Introduction to Course and One Another	
Week 2: <i>January 28</i> Blog 1 due on January 26 (response to classmate on January 27)	Who We Are, Where We Are	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rasmussen, “Prelude” and “The Creature We Are” (selections), in <i>Earth-Honoring Faith</i>• Berta Cáceres, Bertha Zúñiga Cáceres, Wahinkpe Topa, Darcia Narvaez, “Courage and Fearless Trust in the Universe,” in <i>Restoring the Kinship Worldview</i>• Hanh, chapters 1-2 <p>OPTIONAL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Either Bernstein, “The Bible Does Not Justify Exploitation” or Redwan, “Environmental Ethics in Islam” (sections)
Week 3: <i>February 4</i> Quiz due by class time 2/4	Ethical Theory and the Great Turning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gudorf & Hutchingson, “Theory in Environmental Ethics”• Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics”• Rights of Nature Movement (pp. 1-8) <p>OPTIONAL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tucker and Grim, “The Movement of Religion and Ecology”

Week 4: <i>February 11</i> Experience of the Wild, due by class time 2/11	The Wild and the Sacred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berry, “The Wild and the Sacred” • Plumwood, “Being Prey” • <i>Your choice of one of these:</i> Snyder, “Etiquette of Freedom” <u>or</u> Sanders, “Wilderness as Sabbath,” <u>or</u> Loorz, “Into the Mountains to Pray”
Week 5: <i>February 18</i> Blog 2 (Letter to Grandchild) due	Climate Change 1: <i>Earth Impacts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rasmussen, “Epoch Times” • <u>Five Tipping Points</u> • Religious Statements on Climate Change (Canvas): <i>Either</i> ELCA Statement on Climate Change <i>or</i> Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth; • Hawken, <i>Drawdown</i>: 2-3 essays from “Energy,” “Cities,” or “Transport” • OPTIONAL: <u>Thomas Berry interview</u> (video 2, up through 30:50)
Week 6: <i>February 25</i> Blog 3 due	Climate Change 2: <i>Eco-Justice/ Human Impacts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christoph Stueckelberger, “Who Dies First? Who Is Sacrificed First? Ethical Aspects of Climate Justice” • Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si'</i>, ¶62-64, 84-95, 137-46, 156-162 • Riley, “Politics of Afrocentric Ecowomanism” • Hawken, <i>Drawdown</i>, 76-83 on girls/women • Hanh, two chapters: 4, 5, 6, or 8
Week 7: <i>March 4</i> Blog 4 due	Ecology/Economy: <i>Creative Futures</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “Economic Life as Spiritual Practice” • Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi, <u>Rethinking Sustainability: Islamic Perspectives</u> • Ethan Miller, “Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues”
Week 8: <i>March 11</i> Blog 5 due	Local Watershed: <i>Becoming Indigenous to Our Place</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deloria, “American Indians and the Wilderness”; • Kimmerer, “Sitting in a Circle,” or “The Sacred and the Superfund,” from <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> • Kingsolver, “Knowing Our Place” • Regeneration, “Indigenous Sovereignty”: <u>https://regeneration.org/nexus/indigenous-sovereignty</u>
<i>March 18</i>	READING WEEK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Class this Week

Week 9: <i>March 25</i> Blog 6 due	Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dahill, “This Creek Is the Baptismal River” • <i>Your choice from among:</i> Christine Gudorf, “Water Privatization in Christianity and Islam,” 19-26 (<i>or</i> 31) OR Mary McGann, “The Theopolitics of Water” OR Laster, Jewish article • Regeneration, “Freshwater”
Week 10: <i>April 1</i> Blog 7 due	Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hanh, chapter 3; • Kimmerer, “Honorable Harvest,” 175-201; • Leah Penniman, interview in <i>The Sun</i> • Web links TBD
Week 11: <i>April 8</i>	Research Presentations	
Week 12: <i>April 15</i>	Research Presentations	
Week 13: <i>April 22</i>	Research Presentations	
Week 14: <i>April 29</i>	Glimpses of Beauty Through Each Other’s Eyes	



COURSE POLICIES

On Communication:

I prefer e-mail communication over campus phone/voice mail, which I do not check regularly. I generally return e-mails within two business days, usually quicker; I may or may not be online on weekends, however. ***Please do not use email to discuss grades.***

On Attendance:

Your presence truly matters *every class session* to me and your classmates. This is a class that includes substantial experiential material in class. You can't easily make up a missed session, which is why class participation is a key part of the course assessment.

Details: One class may be missed for any reason (no excuse needed). Beginning with the second, the attendance/participation portion of your final grade will drop for each absence. I generally include Participation together with attendance. That is, everyone who shows up in person or with your camera on via Zoom will get usually get full participation credit. Camera off in Zoom means I can't track your presence visually and will grade you for participation based on your actual engagement in the session.

On Timely Completion of Assignments:

The Discussion Board assignment is geared around timely completion so that others can comment on your blog. The grade drops 10% (a full letter grade) per day for late submission – however, I am generally happy to give you an extension *without penalty* if you request it in advance of the weekly deadline.

The grades for the narration of childhood experience and the in-class presentations at the end of the semester are similarly tied to actually presenting on the assigned date – but if something arises, let me know *in advance* and we can almost always find ways to be flexibles.

On ChatGPT and Other Forms of Generative Artificial Intelligence Software:

HIU has not established a school-wide policy on AI use. I am open to conversation about any desire to use ChatGPT or some other form of generative artificial intelligence software this semester. These software programs can be useful research or editing tools if wisely used. However, AI use can also short-circuit the kinds of learning that come from reading texts and creating pieces of writing that express one's own spiritual/religious/theological voice. For those who are not native speakers of English, it is OK in this class to write your text in another language and use translation AI programs into English, but of course you must still make sure the resulting English text is expressing accurately what you want to say.

I expect you to **refrain from using generative AI to allow you to avoid doing the readings**, and I expect that **the written work you narrate in Week 4 and turn in via Discussion Board posts, your responses to classmates' posts, and your final presentation is fully your own voice**. *If the class agrees to allow limited use of AI software to (say) create a rough draft of a submission, you will be required to note that fact clearly, along with documenting the prompt/s you used to generate it.* You will not be penalized for doing so in that case. You are responsible for the truthfulness and accuracy of submitted work, including all AI-generated assertions (as you may know, AI programs often “hallucinate” and create assertions or citations that are not true). AI-assisted writing is still your work, for which you are being credited as (co-?) author – *and unless you document your AI use clearly, you are taking credit for work that is not your own, which is an ethical problem.*

HIU Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Additionally, if students receive editorial help with their writing they should also acknowledge it appropriately.

Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. Faculty will report all instances of plagiarism to the Academic Dean. The Academic Dean will then collect documented details of the case and advance any recommendations for further action to the Academic Policy Committee. Through this process the situation will be reviewed and any additional penalties that may be warranted (up to and including expulsion from the school) will be determined.

For clarity as to what constitutes plagiarism, the following description is provided:

1. Word for word plagiarism:
 - a. the submission of another person's work as one's own;
 - b. the submission of a commercially prepared paper;
 - c. the submission of work from a source which is not acknowledged by a footnote or other specific reference in the paper itself;
 - d. the submission of any part of another person's work without proper use of quotation marks.
2. Plagiarism by paraphrase:
 - a. mere re-arrangement of another person's works and phrases does not make them your own and also constitutes plagiarism;
 - b. paraphrasing another person's words, ideas, and information without acknowledging the original source from which you took them is also plagiarism.
3. See Part II of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (7th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2007), for an explanation of the proper ways to acknowledge the work of others and to avoid plagiarism.
4. Reuse of your own work: Coursework submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course. While technically not plagiarism, this type of infraction will be treated in the same manner as plagiarism and will be subject to the same penalties. If you are using small amounts of material from a previous submitted work, that work should be referenced appropriately. When a student is writing their final program requirement (paper, project or thesis) it may be appropriate, with their advisor's permission, to include portions of previously submitted materials if properly referenced.

HIU MA and PhD Grading Scale:

A (95-100)	Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
A- (90-94)	Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
B+(87-89)	Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
B (83-86)	Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.

B-(80-82)	Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
C+(77-79)	Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
C (70-76)	Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
F (below 70)	Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

HIU Inclusive Language Policy: Inclusive language is encouraged when the writing is the student's own. In general, do not use the terms "man" or "mankind" for human beings; use instead "human beings," "humans," "persons," "people," "individuals," "humanity," "humankind," "figures," etc.

- Pronouns: generally, use the non-binary pronouns "they/them/their" when referring to people whose gender/gender preference is unknown or unrelated to the context, or when the preference is expressed as non-binary.
- Avoid using the third person singular masculine or feminine, unless you are certain that the person referred to is male or female or expresses as male or female exclusively. For example, revise a sentence like: "A student must ask questions if he expects to learn" to something like: "Students must ask questions if they expect to learn," or "A student must ask questions if they expect to learn."
- When a source you quote uses exclusive language, you may quote it as it appears, or substitute/add bracketed words, e.g., "[humanity]" – unless to do so would, in the judgment of the student, defeat the purpose of the quotation or violate the integrity of the student.
- Students who prefer to use male pronouns for the deity should consult with their professor/ advisor on a case-by-case basis.

For all other questions of policy, see the HIU Student Handbook

<https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/student-resources/student-handbook> and/or the HIU Academic Policies website <https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/academics/academic-policies>).

Note: This syllabus is subject to change. I will make every effort to alert you to changes promptly. Each week's Module in Canvas contains what you need (along with the Thich Nhat Hanh textbook) to complete that week's readings and to submit your blog posts.

*I look forward to this semester
and to the growth and insight we will experience together*