

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Course Outline 2020-21

Philosophy of Ecology and Conservation

Winter 2020
Asynchronous

Instructor: Eric Desjardins
Office: WIRB 7158
Office Hours: Tue, Thu 2-3PM, on Collaborate
edesjar3@uwo.ca

DESCRIPTION

This seminar explores foundational and methodological issues in theoretical and applied ecology. First, we will try to answer some foundational questions: What is ecology? What representations of nature have been entertained and presupposed by scientific ecology and since the 20th century? How do these representations compare to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)? Exploring these questions will allow us to take a critical look at the idea of “balance of nature” and it will be the occasion to reflect on the ontological status of ecological entities. From there, we will borrow the path of philosophy of science and look at discussions about model building, generalizations, explanations, and experiments in ecology. In the last portion of the course, we will turn to philosophical issues arising in conservation biology and restoration ecology. What justifies the actual concern for biodiversity? What is biodiversity? Is the Anthropocene forcing conservation biology and restoration ecology to change their goals? Their theoretical frameworks? This portion of the course will include discussions about the complex relationship between humans and the rest of nature and it will introduce students to the resilience thinking movement and the framework of adaptive co-management which have emerged from significant shifts in worldviews, practices, and environmental values that took place toward the end of the 20th century. This seminar is also a great opportunity to develop advanced skills in identifying and formulating philosophical issues as well as exchanging ideas with peers in structured group discussions.

TEXTS

Articles and book chapters available on OWL

OBJECTIVES

Students will discover the fascinating world of philosophy of ecology through engaging readings and by participating in structured discussions. At the end of this course, students will have a broad understanding of some of the core philosophical issues that arise in contemporary ecology and they will be able to reflect critically about the normative implications of various worldviews about ecological systems and the relationship that humans have to them. This course is also a great opportunity for students to develop advanced critical thinking and communicative skills, including:

1. Identifying, evaluating, and formulating philosophical issues related to ecology and conservation biology.
2. Writing balanced and well-supported argumentative essays.
3. Leading a focused discussion on issues related to reading materials.

4. Presenting and challenging ideas in a respectful and constructive way.

REQUIREMENTS

The final grade will be based upon the following scheme:

- **Mid-term paper** (35%), on an issue of your choice discussed during the first half of the course. Due on Week 7
- **Term paper** (35%), on an issue of your choice discussed during the second half of the semester. Due on Week 12
- **Discussion leading** (10%): each student will be responsible to lead a discussion (either on VoiceThread or Collaborate) once in the semester.
- **Weekly preparation and participation in discussion** (20%)

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>.

It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested.

The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at

http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

SELF- REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less.

The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances:

http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_322

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.