

Colonnade General Education Curriculum Committee

Report for April 2018

Action Item for Approval

- RELS 341: Religion and the Environment (Connections: Social and Cultural)

Philosophy and Religion Department
Potter College of Arts and Letters
Colonnade Connections Course Proposal on Religion and the Environment
Social and Cultural Subcategory

Contact: Bella Mukonyora | bella.mukonyora@wku.edu | 270-745-5754

1. Course Details:

1.1 Course Prefix: RELS 341 Religion and the Environment

1.2 Credit hours: 3

1.3 Prerequisites: none

1.4 Cross listed: Diversity & Community Studies; Environmental Studies

1.5 Expected number of section offered: one section every year

1.6 New or Existing course: Existing course renamed for accessibility to students.

1.7 Location: Bowling Green Campus

2. Brief course description

This course helps students examine the relationship between religious, historical and cultural ideas about nature and attitudes to the environment that come from the study of different world religions. By combining field work on different ways of thinking about religion and the environment, students will learn to synthesize theological and other theoretical ideas about religion with empirical facts on human responses to climate change.

3. How will this course provide a capstone learning experience for Colonnade students? Students who take Foundations and Explorations courses such as HIST 101/102, World History, RELS 102 Introduction to World Religions, RELS 200, World Religious Literature, GEOG 110 World Regional Geography, and BIOL 122 Evolution Diversity and Ecology are good examples of courses whose learning outcomes prepare students for this course. Each of these courses demands knowledge about the modern and postmodern world and stress the need for students to read and think independently about ways of building bridges between empirical methods of inquiry and analytical ways of thinking about the interconnectedness of humans and the environment. In short, this course will use the knowledge base coming from the above sample of courses, and other colonnade courses help students integrate ideas from world cultures and religions to local attempt to find solutions to the problem of climate change.

4. List the course goals, and explain how they are aligned with the Connections Learning outcomes.

i. Analyze the development of self in relation to others and society

Studying world religions and the environment in an era of climate change gives students an opportunity to address deep questions about nature of human beings on Earth. By focusing on diverse social and cultural ways of addressing questions about

the meaning and purpose of life on earth, students can develop their minds by reading and talking to others in the classroom, visiting local communities of their choice, and spending time outdoors. In short, students will learn to think independently as well as in relation to other members of the society learning more and more about the human causes of climate change.

ii. Examine diverse values that form civically engaged and informed members of society

Bowling Green now has a growing population of civically engaged members of society who see the value of building communities interested in a higher education on environmental justice. For example, the *WKU Community Religious Literacy Project* has organized six regional workshops allowing members of different religious communities to dialogue with environmental scientists; WKU students taking courses on sustainability; local activists and members of the Sierra Club, Kentuckians of the Commonwealth; and other members of the public interested in higher educational respond to climate change. Students will thus have a network of members of society assisting them with their fieldwork on campus and beyond.

iii. Evaluate solutions to real-world social and cultural problems

The requirement to do fieldwork for this course will automatically get students to spend time observing nature outdoors as well as meet members of society looking for answers to climate change. The combination of reading books on research done on other societies and cultures around the world, going outdoors, and visiting local communities for research will give students a unique opportunity to synthesize ideas about real-world social and cultural problems of taking care of planetary life.

5. In addition to meeting the posted learning outcomes, how does this course contribute uniquely to the *Connections* category (i.e., why should this course be in Colonnade)? Discuss in detail. This course draws attention to the challenges facing human beings living on the planet today. Not only are world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism found in most cities in America, including the city of Bowling Green, this course gives students a chance to learn more concrete facts about world religions in an era global warming.

6a. Explain how the department plans to assess each of the Connections student learning outcomes beyond.

Student Learning Outcomes	Identify the “artifacts” (assignment, papers, activities) for use as evidence.	Describe in detail the assessment methods the department will employ for course.
<p>1. Analyze the developments of the self in relation to others and society.</p>	<p>a) Essays will be based on reading books and/or articles found in a variety of readers published by groups of leading scholars of Religion and Ecology. For example, the book <i>Gaia and Climate Change</i> (Primaversi, 2003); <i>Deep Ecology and World Religions</i> (Barnhill, 2001); <i>Religions and Philosophies for the Earth</i> (Kearns, 2007), and, <i>The Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology</i> (Gottlieb, 2006) are library books with thought provoking ideas on world religions and the environment b) Fieldwork will also be key to the development of the self in response to others and society; and seminars will help students build confidence in handling ideas for their intellectual development. Length of essays comparing ideas from two world religions at a time = 5-6 pages per essay. Project papers = 5-6 pages.</p>	<p>Essays x 2 50% Project paper 30% Final exam 20%</p> <p>In order to reflect the importance of connecting with people through fieldwork, and the advancement of literary skills, the professor will collect 10% of graded project papers and 10 % essays to share with department.</p>
<p>2. The diverse values that form civically engaged and informed members of society</p>	<p>Although Christianity is most associated with the rise of a world religion most closely related to the western cultural roots of industrial technologies associated with the destruction of the planet (Lynn White 1966; McFague 2006), this course will focus on problem solving through civic engagement in a pluralistic religious world. Students will be required to learn from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Jainism, Hinduism, Daoism, Buddhism, and practice meeting civically engaged members of the public.</p>	
<p>3. Evaluate solution to real-world social cultural problems.</p>	<p>This course will end with each student presenting their project papers to classmates, and a classroom test linking the reading material used to fieldwork done locally.</p>	

6b. For each assessment, two of the three learning outcomes will be chosen for assessment.

The total of twenty percent of papers divided between essays and project papers randomly selected will be used for assessment. Religious Studies faculty will assess, using a score range of 1-4, the degree to which the students accomplish the suggested learning outcomes.

Criteria/Scale for analyzing the development of self in relation to others and society

Capstone (4) Student shows that they **a)** understand the main goal of the course is to develop a proper understanding of the new field of study called Religion and the Environment; **b)** read either *Gaia and Climate Change* (Primaversi 2009) or *New Climate of Theology* (McFague 2006); **c)** organizes and synthesizes data to show an insightful grasp of grounding of religious studies in the search for answers to the problem of the destruction of the environment.; **d)** synthesizes research data collected from doing fieldwork on the hill and other interesting sites of struggle in the city.

Milestone (3) Student shows that they **a)** understand the main goal of the course is to develop a proper understanding of the new field of study called Religion and Ecology; **b)** read either *Gaia and Climate Change* (Primaversi 2009); *New Climate of Theology* (McFague 2006) or decide to examine up to 5 different articles found in *Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology* (Gottlieb 2006) instead; **c)** organizes and synthesizes data from this literature to show an insightful grasp of the grounding of religious ideas in studies of the problem of the destruction of the environment. **d)** tries to synthesize research data collected from doing fieldwork on the hill and other interesting sites of struggle in the city.

Milestone (2) Student organizes and synthesizes the material to show a good grasp of the significance of at least two different ways of grounding knowledge about religion in questions about the self and other members of society, but fails to do adequate background research on either the reading material or struggles with fieldwork.

Benchmark (1) Student organizes and synthesizes ideas, but fails to show an insightful grasp of the issues raised by the course material

Criteria/Scale for examining diverse values that form civically-engaged members of society.

Capstone (4) Student uses their understanding of three or more scholars of religion and the environment to critique only one of the world religions in depth, and draws their own conclusions about the place local religions in shaping attitudes to the environment.

Milestone (3) The student uses sound knowledge of two well-known scholars to develop an understanding of the socio-cultural effects of knowledge about climate change, but struggles connect ideas when it comes to comparing religions and research data from fieldwork.

Milestone (2) The student uses their knowledge of world religions and the environment to develop an understanding of the socio-cultural effects of knowledge about climate change, but fails to show a good grasp of the reading material.

Benchmark (1) The student uses a limited knowledge of or two world religions to develop an understanding of the socio-cultural effects of knowledge about one religion, and fails to highlight the importance of fieldwork.

Criteria/Scale Evaluate solutions to real-world social and cultural problems

Capstone (4) Student will evaluate solutions to a range of cultural problems often missed by scholars of religion and the environment. These include specific references to materialism, violence, greed, sexism, racism, economic poverty, politics, religious prejudice, or climate change denial.

Milestone (3) Student will evaluate solutions to a range of cultural problems addressed by the list of scholars found in the reader which everyone uses to lead seminars. The problems range from the lack of interest in examining social, cultural and political problems of making religious studies part of the studies about the environment, and other problems to do with climate change denial.

Milestone (2) Student will evaluate solutions to a range of cultural problems addressed by in one or two books/articles only, and either lacks depth of understanding new ways of looking at religion and the environment, or fails to comprehend the general problem of climate change.

Benchmark (1) Student shows a grasp of the reading material, but fails to synthesize ideas with clarity. The written work is superficial.

Criteria and scale for problem-solving

Capstone (4) Student develops an insightful grasp of the central issues associated with religion and ecology in a variety of world religions to determine their social and cultural strengths and weaknesses in dealing with problems associated with the ecological crisis. Student also weighs the impact of ideas learned on the problems they consider most troubling when applying theories of religion and ecology to independent research on sustainability.

Milestone (3) Student uses a more insightful grasp of the central issues associated with religion and the environment to examine the feasibility of religious responses to general problems of our planetary existence.

Milestone (2) Student develops an insightful grasp of the central issues associated with religious studies to examine the uses of religion to respond to problems of climate change.

Benchmark (1) Student shows some grasp of the literature, but fails to provide insightful answers on problem solving any of the problems listed above.

7. Evidence & Argument Artifact: Essays based on **a)** a careful reading of the above-mentioned textbooks or any of the following library books; Roger Gottlieb, *Religion, Nature, Environment* (2004); David Barnhill, *Deep Ecology and World Religions* (2001); Laurel Kearns, *Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (2007), and others listed at the end of the syllabus. **b)**

fieldwork on specific responses to the challenge presented by climate change in specific places and local communities and c) background reading of 3-4 different pieces of writing by these and other leading scholars of religion and the environment in America. Length of each essay = 5 pages. Project paper = maximum 6 pages. To achieve the learning outcome of engaging questions about themselves and others in Kentucky, students will be required to read about global Christianity and an average of three other world religions selected from Judaism, Islam, Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Native American Religions

In short, this course promotes a collaborative, participatory, systematic, and transformative learning experience. Through course materials (readings, lectures seminars, and fieldwork) students gather evidence that supports different approaches to religion and the environment. The process of “diagnosing,” or analyzing and solving problems independently is used to help students become more confident about their intellectual development. Throughout the course students learn to support their choices of subject and articulate the integrated process of input (evidence- gathering), thinking critically, and writing presenting project papers to classmates.

Below is the draft syllabus on World Religions and the Environment for teaching during Fall Semesters.

RELS 341: World Religions and the Environment

Location: TBA

Office: Cherry Hall 319A

Instructor: Isabel Mukonyora

<bella.mukonyora@wku.edu>

Office Hours: Monday-Friday by appointment!

Course description

This course helps students examine the relationship between religious, historical and cultural ideas about nature and attitudes to the environment that are come from the study of different world religions. By combining field work on local sites of struggle with academic literature on different religions, attitudes and ways of talking about the environment, students will learn to synthesize theological and other theoretical ideas about religion with empirical facts on human responses to climate change.

Prerequisites: None

Course Requirements

1. Two essay = 5 pages long 50%
2. Independent project paper 30%
3. Leading seminars reading and final exam 20%

To pass this class, students must complete all three of the above components on time. Late work will be accepted except with prior approval or demonstrated medical emergency.

Grading/Capstone Scale

1. 90-100 A
2. 80-89 B
3. 70-79 C
4. 60-69 D

5. Below 60 F

Free Assistance

There are many resources at WKU that provide all manner of academic aid and inspiration. E.g., check out the free help at The Writing Center in the English Department, and Learning Center: www.wku.edu/tlc

Student Disability Services

In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services in Downing University Center A-200 (phone 270-745-5004; TTY 270-745-3030). Per university policy, please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the OFSDS.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated; students caught doing either will receive an F for the course. It is your duty to know and understand the university's policy on student conduct and discipline. See, <http://www.wku.edu/undergraduatecatalog>, especially p. 29. All cases of plagiarism, cheating, etc., may be reported to the Dean and the Office of Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

Laptop Policy

Using a laptop in class is a privilege, not a right (unless authorized by Student Disability Services—see above). This class also demands rather a lot of active participation. Students may use laptops for taking notes only.

Tentative Schedule for Seminars

Week 1:

- Tuesday: Religion and Ecology – What is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?
- Thursday: Tirosch-Samuels, Judaism and Ecology: Historical Overview

Week 2:

- Tuesday: Pope Francis Encyclical *On Care for our Common Home*, 2015.
- Thursday: John Chryssavgis: The Earth as Sacrament: Insights from Orthodox Christian Theology and Spirituality”

Week 3:

- Tuesday: Chapple: Jainism and Ecology: Transformation of Tradition.
- Thursday: Smart: “Sensations and Brain Processes”

Week 4:

- Tuesday: *Renewal of World Religions* DVD Series from Harvard University
- Thursday: Dwivedi, “Hindu Religion and Environmental Well-Being”
First paper due: next class.

Week 5:

- Tuesday: Kaza, “The Greening of Buddhism”
- Thursday: Folz, “Islam”

Week 6:

- Tuesday: Miller, “Daoism and Nature”
- Thursday: Berthrong, “Motifs for a New Confucian Ecological Vision”

Week 7:

- Tuesday: Grim, “Indigenous Traditions: Religion and Ecology”
- Thursday: McGuire: Population, Religion and Ecology”

Week 8:

- Tuesday: Shannon, “Genetic Engineering and nature: Human and Otherwise”
- Thursday: Linzey, “So Near and Yet so Far: Animal Theology and Ecological Theology”
Second paper due: Next Tuesday.

Week 9:

- Tuesday: Radford-Reuther, “Religious Ecofeminism: Healing the Ecological Crisis”
- Thursday: Rolston, “Science and Religion in the face of the Environmental Crisis”

Week 10:

- Tuesday: “Religion and Ecology: Survey of the Field”
- Thursday: Barnhill, “The Spiritual Dimension of Nature Writing”

Week 11:

- Tuesday: Sideris, “ Religion, Environmentalism, and the Meaning of Ecology”
- Thursday: Gottlieb, “Religious Environmentalism in Action”

Week 12:

- Tuesday: Lorentzen et. al, “Religion and Environmental Struggles in Latin America”
- Thursday: Daneel: “African Initiated Churches as Vehicles of Earth Care”

Week 13:

- Tuesday: Dewitt, “The Scientists and the Shepherd: Emergence of Evangelical Environmentalism”
- Thursday: Taylor, “Religion and Environmentalism in America and Beyond”
- Individual project due: Thursday of week 14.

Week 14:

- Tuesday: Final project paper writing day (no class).
- Thursday: Presentations of project papers. And summary statements on lessons from seminars.

For further research, the following books are available in the WKU Library.

Abdul-Matin, Ibrahim. *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet*. California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. 2010.

Albanese, Catherine. *Nature Religions in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Apffel-Marglin, F. & Marglin, and Stephen A. (Eds.) *Decolonizing Knowledge: From Development to Dialogue*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Ba Kader, Abou Bakr Ahmed. *Environmental Protection in Islam*. Washington, DC. Island Press, 1995.

Ball, Ian et.al. *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology*. London: SPCK, 1995.

Barnhill, David and Roger Gottlieb, (eds.) *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Ground*. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2001.

Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Translated by Phillip Berryman). Maryknoll,

- New York: Orbis 1997.
- Buun, Ole and Arne Kalland (eds.) *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach*. Richmond Surrey: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies 1995
- Chapple, Christopher Key & Tucker, Mary Evelyn, eds. *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press 2000
- Cobb, John B. *Sustainability: Economics, Ecology and Justice*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1992.
- Dale, Jamieson (Ed). *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. London: Blackwell 2001.
- Goodenough, Ursula. *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Gottlieb, Roger, S. (Ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kearns, Laurel & Keller, Catherine (Eds). *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*. New York: Fordham University Press 2007.
- Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Theology*. Urbana, III: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.
- _____. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress
- McGrath, Alister. *The Reenchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis*. New York NY: Doubleday, 2002.
- McKibben, Bill. *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job and the Scale of Creation*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Radford-Reuther, Rosemary. *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.
- _____. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.
- _____. (Ed). *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*. Maryknoll NY: Orbis 1996.
- Russell, Colin. *The Earth, Humanity and God: The Templeton Lectures, Cambridge*. London: UCL Press 1994.
- Taylor, Bron Raymond. *Ecological Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press 1995.
- Tucker, Evelyn. *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*. Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2003.
- _____. & Grim, John A (Eds). *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy and the Environment*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1994.
- Wallace, Mark. *Christianity and Ecology* eds., Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford-Reuther, Cambridge Mass: Harvard Press, 2000.
- Berry Wendell, ed. *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community*. New York: Pantheon, 1993.