

PHIL 2550.001 Environment & Society

MWF 10:10AM - 11:00AM | GAB 114

Instructor: Arlo Smith (He/They)

Office: ENV 372A

Office Hours: Mon. & Fri. 12:30-2 pm and by appointment, in-person or on Zoom

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Course Description

This class explores ethical, ecological and political dimensions of pressing contemporary environmental issues including public lands, ocean plastic pollution, and climate justice. We will examine underlying assumptions about human-nature relationships, paying particular attention to the interconnections between environmental and social concerns. Over the course of the semester, our focus will shift from defining and analyzing environmental crises to thinking creatively about how to move toward more just sustainable futures.

Course Structure

This is an in-person class. All lecture materials, readings, assignments, and expectations can be found on Canvas. The course is structured into four units over the 15 weeks of the course, which include a unifying theme for course content as well as structured learning goals for enduring and transferable skills of critical thinking.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the learner will be able to:

1. Analyze key concepts and underlying ethical assumptions associated with contemporary environmental issues.
2. Connect environmental issues with social and political concerns.
3. Evaluate possible actions and solutions for addressing environmental issues, and think creatively about visions for justice and Sustainable Futures.
4. Apply critical thinking skills including reading critically, asking critical questions, critically analyzing cases, and synthesizing findings.

Materials

There is NO required textbook. All readings, films and other required materials are available for free, either as PDF or links on Canvas, or through the UNT library.

Technology Requirements

This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. If circumstances change, you will be informed of other technical needs to access course content. Information on

how to be successful in a digital learning environment can be found at [Learn Anywhere](https://online.unt.edu/learn).
(<https://online.unt.edu/learn>).

Course Requirements

Assignment	Points Possible	% of Final Grade
Assignment 1 – Plastic Reflection	20 points	10%
Assignment 2 - Tech Critique Paper	30 points	15%
Assignment 3 - Just Futures Project	30 points	15%
Quizzes (12 x 5 points)	60 points	30%
Discussion Activities (6 x 5 points)	30 points	15%
Attendance	30 points	15%
Total Points Possible	200 points	100%

Further details, including due dates and assignment prompts can be found on Canvas.

There is no final exam for this course, the final project, the Just Futures Project, takes the place of a final exam and is due on December 7th at 11:59 pm.

Extra Credit

There are three extra credit activities distributed throughout the semester meant to help deepen your engagement with its respective week's materials. Participation in these exercises must be on time to count for extra credit. Meaningful engagement may be awarded up to 2 points/1% extra credit for each activity (up to 6 points/3% total) and will also be taken into consideration when making decisions about rounding up borderline final grades at the end of the semester.

Attendance

Attendance is required and makes up 15% of your final grade in this course. The nature and structure of our class make consistent, present, and on-time attendance paramount for your academic success in the course. You should make your best effort to attend every class. However, I also understand the many pressures and difficulties that may stand in your way of attending class, including preserving your mental and physical health as well as the health of our community. If you need to request an excused absence or tardiness, please email me. I do not require doctor's notes and would prefer not to receive them. If you do not wish to disclose the reason for your absence, feel free to use this template email:

Dear Arlo [or Instructor Smith, your preference],

I will not be able to attend class today, [DATE], and would like to request an excused absence for the day. I understand that it is my responsibility to review the material I missed in class today and if I have missed any in-class assignments or quizzes, that I am responsible for communicating with you further to arrange an alternative time to complete that assignment.

Best,
[Your Name]

Assessing Your Work

Final letter grades will be assigned based on the following points/percentages:

A = 180 points / 90% and above
B = 160-179 points / 80-89%
C = 140-159 points / 70-79%
D = 120-139 points / 60-69%
F = 119 points / 59% and below

Late Work & Revision Policy

Late work will only be accepted with permission from the instructor. If you miss a deadline for reasons beyond your control, please email me as soon as possible. Otherwise, all work turned in after the due date/time may receive a grade of zero unless the student has a [university-excused absence](#) and provides documentation within 48 hours of the missed deadline. Extensions may be granted with permission from the instructor. If you think you will need an extension on any assignment, you must contact the instructor as soon as possible with the reason for the extension so a reasonable alternative timeline can be agreed upon.

Opportunities to revise and resubmit long form written assignments may be offered upon request for a potentially higher grade at the instructor's discretion. Substantial revision and a meeting with the instructor are required for consideration of a potentially higher grade.

AI Policy

In this class, assignments are designed to develop your own personal thought process and arguments. As such, the use of Generative AI through tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Gemini, and Claude (including, for example, to generate, organize, translate, edit, revise, or “professionalize” your assignments) is not permitted. All written assignments will be submitted through TurnItIn which has an integrated AI checker. Given the possibility of false positives, I strongly suggest keeping drafts that clearly show your writing process (ie. with track changes or version history). Any essay utilizing generative AI tools at any stage in the composition process will receive a zero, even if you have written some of the contents yourself. In cases where there is any doubt, essays will be checked using AI detection software (GPTZero; Originality.AI; etc.), and the analysis of these programs will be treated as decisive.

Academic Integrity

Communities of trust and respect are integral to college education and academic research alike. I recognize that we all have many responsibilities that can bring a lot of pressure. If you are struggling, please reach out to me for support – don't make bad choices!

Students using other people's work without citation or using generative AI will be in violation of UNT's Academic Integrity Policy. Please read and follow this important set of [guidelines for your academic success](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>). Under UNT policy, use of AI to generate content without permission is considered a form of cheating (receiving unauthorized assistance). If you have questions about this, or how it applies in an online class environment, please email me or come discuss this with me during my office hours. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Inclusive Learning Environments

Philosophy classes and environmental issues alike flourish with a diversity of perspectives. You do not need to share my views in this class, but you do need to be kind! Please work with me to create a culture of open communication, mutual respect, and belonging. Meaningful, respectful discussion is a requirement, but personal attacks are unacceptable. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please let me know. We are all learning together.

Student Support & Wellness

Being a student can include many pressures inside and outside of the classroom. If you are in need of support, please consider utilizing the resources UNT offers. If I can support you directly in our course, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Course Communication Practices

Please reach out via my UNT email as listed on the syllabus if you have any questions about course policies, expectations, or content. During busy times, my inbox becomes rather full, so if you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, please send a follow up email. A gentle nudge is always appreciated.

Office hours are a fantastic way to receive support in all of your courses. My office hour times can be found at the top of the syllabus and I encourage you to use them. If my office hours do not align with your schedule, please let me know and we can arrange an alternative time to meet either in-person or on Zoom.

Canvas Support

The LMS Support team provides technical support for UNT's Canvas learning management system (LMS) and supported third-party LMS integrated tools. You can reach the help desk via phone at (940) 369-7394, email at lms@unt.edu, or using their [chat link](#).

UNT Tech Support Hub

Your [directory of campus tech support](#) for Canvas and Beyond.

Student Support Services & Policies

UNT offers a range of mental health and wellness services to help maintain balance and well-being. Utilizing these resources is a proactive way to support your academic and personal success. To explore campus resources designed to support you, check out [mental health services](#) (<https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies>), visit unt.edu/success, and explore unt.edu/wellness. To get all your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to scrappysays.unt.edu.

This is a great landing page for [all kinds of crucial resources](#), including the ADA policy, how to change your preferred name on your UNT account or add your pronouns to Canvas and more!

UNT Policies

ADA Accommodations

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

Emergency Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Course Schedule

UNIT 1: NATURE AND PUBLIC LANDS & LEARNING TO ANNOTATE	
Week 1: Introduction	
Mon, Aug. 17th	Syllabus Paschen, Elise. "The Tree Agreement." In <i>Poetry</i> . January 2016.
Wed, Aug. 19th	Crist, Eileen. 2017. "The Affliction of Human Supremacy." <i>The Ecological Citizen</i> 1: 61–64.
Fri, Aug. 21st	<u>Discussion</u> : What are our ecosophies? <u>Activity</u> : Introductions & Environmental Issues
Week 2: Environment, Nature, Wilderness	
Mon, Aug. 24th	Marris, Emma. 2013. "The Yellowstone Model," Pp.17-36 in <i>Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World</i> . Bloomsbury.
Wed, Aug. 26th	Alston, Vermonja. 2007. "Environment," Pp. 205-209 in <i>Keywords for American Cultural Studies</i> , edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler. NYU Press. ★ <i>In-Class Reading Quiz #1</i>
Fri, Aug. 28th	<u>Discussion</u> : What changes when we accept that the environment was never wild? How do we perceive different local environments? ❖ <i>Activity Submission #1</i> : Our Local Environments Photos
Week 3: Public Lands and Exclusion	
Mon, Aug. 31st	Finney, Carolyn. 2014. "Bamboozled," Pp. 21-31 in <i>Black Faces, White Spaces: Rethinking the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors</i> . UNC Press.
Wed, Sept. 2nd	[Excerpt] LaDuke, Winona. 1999. "All Our Relations," Pp. 493-496 in <i>Debating the Earth: The Environmental Politics Reader</i> . Oxford

	University Press. ★ <i>In-Class</i> Reading Quiz #2
Fri, Sept. 4th	<u>Discussion:</u> What does an inclusive 'wild' space look like?
Week 4: Should Bears Ears be a National Monument?	
Mon, Sept. 7th	NO CLASS - LABOR DAY
Wed, Sept. 9th	Goetzen, Clarisse. 2021. "Understanding the Bears Ears National Monument Debate." <i>The Alliance for Citizen Engagement</i> . September 16 th . Smith, David and Oliver Milman. 2017. "Trump slashes size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase national monuments in Utah." <i>The Guardian</i> . December 4 th . Herrera, Jack. 2024. "Native tribes are getting a slice of their land back — under the condition that they preserve it." <i>Los Angeles Times</i> . January 3 rd . ★ <i>In-Class</i> Reading Quiz #3
Fri, Sept. 11th	<u>Discussion:</u> Should Bear Ears be a National Monument?
UNIT 2: PLASTIC POLLUTION & CRITICAL QUESTIONS	
Week 5: Plastic Responsibilities	
Mon, Sept. 14th	Maniates, Michael. 2002. "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?" Pp. 43-66 in Thomas Princen et al (Eds.) <i>Confronting Consumption</i> . MIT Press.
Wed, Sept. 16th	Rli. 2015. "Circular Economy: From Wish to Practice." Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli), The Hague. Pp 58-59. ★ <i>In-Class</i> Reading Quiz #4
Fri, Sept. 18th	<u>Discussion:</u> Who holds the responsibility for the plastic problem?
Week 6: Plastic Bodies	

Mon, Sept. 21st	Van Dooren, Thom. 2014. "Fledging Albatross." Pp. 21-44 in <i>Flight Ways</i> . Columbia University Press.
Wed, Sept. 23rd	De Wolff, Kim. 2017. "Plastic Naturecultures: Multispecies Ethnography and the Dangers of Separating Living from Nonliving Bodies." <i>Body & Society</i> 23 (3): 23-47. ★ <i>In-Class 'Quiz' #5: My Day in Plastic Assignment Submission</i>
Fri, Sept. 25th	<i>ASYNCHRONOUS - No In-Person Class</i> <u>Discussion:</u> What are the complexities of the plastic problem? ❖ <i>Activity Submission 2: Plastic Tracker Reflection</i>
Week 7: Is Plastic Recycling the Solution?	
Mon, Sept. 28th	[Podcast] Sullivan, Laura and Sarah Gonzales. 2020. "Waste Land." Planet Money. NPR.
Wed, Sept. 30th	Simmonds, Charlotte. 2019. "How you're recycling plastics wrong from coffee cups to toothpaste." <i>The Guardian</i> . June 17th. Wilkins, Matt. 2018. "Why Recycling Won't Solve Plastic Pollution." <i>Scientific American</i> July 6th. ★ <i>In-Class Reading Quiz #6</i>
Fri, Oct. 2nd	<u>Discussion:</u> Is Plastic Recycling the Solution? ❖ <i>Activity Submission 3: Sort the Trash on Earth Reflection</i>
DUE 10/2/26 @ 11:59pm: Plastic Reflection Paper	
UNIT 3: CLIMATE JUSTICE & CRITICAL ANALYSIS	
Week 8: Global Climate Crisis	
Mon, Oct. 5th	[Film] Rytz, Mattheiu, dir. 2018. <i>Anote's Ark</i> .
Wed, Oct. 7th	Kyle Whyte. 2018. "Way Beyond the Lifeboat: An Indigenous Allegory of Climate Justice." ★ <i>In-Class Reading Quiz #7</i>

Fri, Oct. 9th	<u>Discussion:</u> What are the key challenges of global climate crises? What are some barriers to implementing solutions? ❖ Activity Submission 4: Environmental Justice Atlas
Week 9: Climate Justice	
Mon, Oct. 12th	Shiva, Vandana. 2015. "Soil, Not Oil," Pp. 91-126 in Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis. North Atlantic Books.
Wed, Oct. 14th	No Additional Reading, Review Shiva 2015. ★ <i>In-Class</i> Reading Quiz #8
Fri, Oct. 16th	<u>Discussion:</u> How do global food systems contribute to global climate crises? Who has the power to change these systems?
Week 10: Can Technology Save Us?	
Mon, Oct. 19th	Boucher, Martin J and Philip Loring. 2017. "Climate change isn't a tech problem so we need more than a tech solution." Ensia. March 20th. Fleming, Jim. 2017. "Excuse Us While We Fix the Sky: WEIRD Supermen and Climate Engineering." Environment & Society 4 (23-28). De La Garza, Alejandro. 2023. "A Controversial Technology is Creating a Rift Among Climate Scientists" Time Magazine. March 17th.
Wed, Oct. 21st	No additional required reading, review Boucher & Loring, Fleming, & De La Garza. ★ <i>'Quiz'</i> #9: Submit your Tech Critique Paper Proposal by 11:59 pm
Fri, Oct. 23rd	<u>Discussion:</u> Can technology save us? ❖ Activity Submission 5: The Climate Game
Week 11: Thinking Beyond Technology	
Mon, Oct. 26th	No reading - Review citation resources before class

Wed, Oct. 28th	No reading - Work on Tech Critique Paper ★ <i>Ungraded In Class</i> Citation Workshop
Fri, Oct. 30th	<u>Discussion:</u> What is your tech solution and what are its problems?
DUE 10/30/26 @ 11:59 pm: Tech Critique Paper	
UNIT 4: SUSTAINABLE FUTURES & SYNTHESIS	
Week 12: Who/What Are We “Sustaining?”	
Mon, Nov. 2nd	Crist, Eileen. 2013. “On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature.” Environmental Humanities 3: 129-147.
Wed, Nov. 4th	Alaimo, Stacy. 2012. “Sustainable This, Sustainable That: New Materialisms, Posthumanisms and Unknown Futures.” PMLA 127(3): 558-564. ★ <i>In Class</i> Reading Quiz #10
Fri, Nov. 6th	<u>Discussion:</u> What does it mean to decenter a human perspective? What does it mean to anthropomorphize a nonhuman species?
Week 13: Future Histories	
Mon, Nov. 9th	Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. 2013. “The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future.” Daedalus 142(1): 40-58.
Wed, Nov. 11th	Jones, Adam Garnet. 2020. “History of the New World,” Pp. 35-60 in Joshua Whitehead (Ed.) Love After the End. Arsenal. ★ <i>In Class</i> Reading Quiz #11
Fri, Nov. 13th	<u>Discussion:</u> What does it mean to decenter a present perspective? ❖ <i>Activity Submission 6:</i> More & More Card Game Reflection
Week 14: Just Futures	
Mon, Nov. 16th	No reading - Explore Canvas resources to get ideas for final projects

Wed, Nov. 18th	No reading - Time to work on Final Project Proposal ★ ‘Quiz’ #12: Submit Final Project Proposal by 11:59 pm
Fri, Nov. 20th	<u>Discussion</u> : What would an environmentally just future look like?
Thanksgiving Break - NO CLASS 11/23 - 11/27	
Week 15: Final Project Presentations & Course Conclusions	
Mon, Nov. 30th	Final Project Presentations
Wed, Dec. 2nd	Final Project Presentations Continued Course Conclusions & Feedback Session
Fri, Dec. 4th	NO CLASS - READING DAY
DUE: 12/7/26 @ 11:59 pm: Final Project	