

PHIL 4700: Environmental Philosophy Spring 2026

Instructor Contact

Name: Dr. Kim De Wolff

Pronouns: she/hers

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursday 2:00-2:50 in ENV 310S

Email: kim.dewolff@unt.edu

Course Description

We are living in the Anthropocene, an epoch defined by human impact so great it is considered a planetary-scale geological force. From plastic oceans and melting ice sheets, to extreme weather, mass extinction and unprecedented deforestation, environmental transformations are increasingly impossible to ignore. But is this the kind of world we want to be living in? Who or what might be unjustly impacted? What should human relationships with all the living and nonliving entities with which we share this planet look like? What responsibilities do we have now and to future generations? This class will approach these questions from the perspective of western philosophical traditions, Indigenous relationality, and multispecies justice, in order to creatively explore what kind of relations we might need to face contemporary challenges of the Anthropocene.

Course Structure

This is an in-person class that meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30-1:50pm in Hickory 252. Canvas is organized into weekly modules, each with a clear 'to do' list, links to required readings and other materials, and assignment prompts.

Course Objectives

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

1. Compare and critique multiple approaches to environmental thought
2. Connect ecological issues to ethical, social, and political ones
3. Creatively apply key environmental philosophy concepts to contemporary challenges of the 'Anthropocene'
4. Conduct respectful dialogue across differences
5. Demonstrate improved reading, writing and analysis skills

Materials

All course materials are available for free through Canvas with one exception: the required video game [*Never Alone*](#) is a \$4.99 iPhone/Android download via the App store/Google Play. It is also available for almost every modern gaming platform, including STEAM (you can book time on a gaming computer at the media library if needed).

Course Requirements

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
<i>DamNation in-class exercise</i>	5%
<i>Dam Position Paper</i>	15%
<i>Game Play Notes</i>	5%
<i>Never Alone Reflection Paper</i>	15%
<i>Project Presentation and Feedback</i>	5%
<i>Final Project</i>	20%
<i>Quizzes</i>	15%
<i>Attendance & Participation</i>	20%

Grading

Assignments will be graded on a point basis, with final letter grades calculated as follows:

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89
- C = 70-79
- D = 60-69 F = 50-59

Assignments

Attendance & Participation 20%

Regular attendance and participation in class is required. Missing class without instructor permission or an approved excuse will result in lost points. In case of an emergency or illness (especially contagious), please reach out as soon as possible so we can work out an alternative to in-person participation.

Quizzes 15%

There are five scheduled in-person quizzes interspersed throughout the course. Each quiz consists of 2-3 short answer questions corresponding to the key concepts and reading tips for the weeks specified.

DamNation in-class exercise 5%

Details on Canvas. You must submit the exercise or your paper may not be graded.

Dam Removal Position Paper 15%

Details on Canvas.

Gameplay Notes 5%

Details on Canvas. You must submit gameplay notes or your corresponding *Never Alone* paper will be considered incomplete.

Never Alone Reflection 20%

Details on Canvas.

Project Presentation 5%

Present the main idea for your final project to the class. Your presentation must (1) identify a specific kind of human-nature relationships you'd like to see in the world; (2) identify the readings, concepts, or cases that inspired it; (3) explain your choice of creative format and general vision for the project (remember, you don't have to make something creative, just describe a vision for it!). (4) identify a few questions you have or components you are most worried about to help focus our feedback.

The presentation will be due online via a discussion forum and may take a variety of formats such as: A 5-minute video presentation; A 500-750-word written description with slides and/or images where relevant; A draft version of the final project itself (which can be many forms) etc. You will then provide constructive feedback on your classmates' projects. Feedback must total at least 500-words, but may be divided across presentations as you see most helpful.

Final Project 20%

This semester we have read traditional Western environmental philosophy texts, but we have also found environmental philosophy in films, news articles, a comic, podcast, and even a video game. Write a 1,000-1,200-word proposal describing your vision for a creative work (movie, game, public art piece, etc.) that would teach a specific tenet of environmental thought you find especially applicable for our current Anthropocene moment. The paper should do the following:

1. Clearly describe the good environmental relations your creative work would embody and connect it to current environmental challenges
2. Be sure to describe the audience for your proposed project and why you think this particular creative format would be effective (vs. writing a traditional academic western philosophy text). Why you propose to teach the specific ethical principle via your chosen format is your 'thesis.'
3. Describe the proposed creative piece in detail. Images, drawings, poetry samples, mood boards or other means of illustration are encouraged!
4. Engage with and properly cite the Alaimo or Krawec reading AND least one other course text (the game/documentaries count).

Optional Production Component:

Your final project may itself take an alternative format - a video, podcast, comic, work of art, children's book etc. However, you must clear this with Dr. De Wolff in advance so we can agree on the specific details (such as if a shorter paper component will be required or not; how it will be submitted).

Course Policies

Communication

Please connect with me through my UNT email. You are also always welcome to drop in to office hours, but if you have a more involved question a heads up is appreciated. During busy times, my inbox can be overloaded, so if you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, a gentle follow up reminder is always appreciated.

Inclusive Learning Environments

Philosophy classes (and society!) 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.

Late Work

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 will receive a grade of zero unless the student has a [university approved absence](#) and provides documentation with 48 hours of the missed deadline.

AI Generated Content Policy

In this class, assignments are designed to hone 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, or "professionalize" your assignments) is not permitted **unless otherwise stated in an assignment prompt**. While these tools can be helpful in certain contexts – they might even help you to synthesize the readings for this class, for example – AI does not live your life or think your thoughts. In fact, AI has a troubling tendency to erase nuance and personality in ways that curtail self-expression and make for worse philosophy papers. 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).

UNT Policies

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 without permission of the instructor 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, 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.

Accommodations

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable

accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disabilityaccess) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disabilityaccess>). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Emergency Notification & 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.

PHIL 4700 SCHEDULE

PART I INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Anthropocentrism and Beyond

- 1/13 The Syllabus!
- 1/15 Crist, Eileen. 2017. "The Affliction of Human Supremacy." *The Ecological Citizen* 1 (1): 61-64.

DUE: 1/15 Complete the "Welcome Survey" on Canvas

Week 2: (What is) The Trouble with Wilderness?

- 1/20 Marris, Emma. 2021. "Between Dog and Wolf." Pp. 47-68 in *Wild Souls: Freedom and Flourishing in the Nonhuman World.* Bloomsbury.
- 1/22 Cronon, William. 1996. "The Trouble with Wilderness: or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." Pp. 69-90 in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature.* Norton & Co.

DUE: 1/22 Quiz 1 In Class. Covers materials from weeks 1-2.

PART II WESTERN TRADITIONS

Week 3: Conservation vs. Preservation

- 1/27 Pinchot, Gifford. 1909. "The ABCs of Conservation." Accessed online: <https://www.nationalforests.org/blog/gifford-pinchot-the-abc-of-conservation>
- 1/27 Bertanga, Julie and William Goldsmith. 2014. Ch. 6 "The Mountains are Calling Me!" and Ch. 8 "The Wild Man Who Changed the World" in John Muir: Earth – Planet, Universe. The Scottish Book Trust.

<http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning/teacherslibrarians/teaching-resourcescpd/john-muir/download>

- 1/29 Muir, John. 1912. "Hetch Hetchy Valley" in *The Yosemite*. https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/the_yosemite/chapter_16.aspx
- 1/29 "Giving a Damn: Congress Debates Hetch Hetchy" <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5721/>

Week 4: The Land Ethic

- 2/3 Leopold, Aldo. 1948. "The Land Ethic." *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford University Press.
- 2/5 Short case studies. Details on Canvas.

Week 5: Should Trees Have Standing?

- 2/10 Stone, Christopher. "Should Trees Have Standing" Pp. 1-31 in *Should Trees Have Standing?* Oxford University Press.
- 2/12 Evans, Kate. 2017. "The New Zealand river that became a legal person." (article + short video). BBC. March 20. <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20200319-the-newzealand-river-that-became-a-legal-person>

DUE: 2/12 Quiz 2 In Class. Covers materials from weeks 3-5.

Week 6: DamNation

- 2/17 In-class screening of documentary *DamNation*. Take careful notes for the exercise!
- 2/19 Sherriff, Lucy. 2024. "'Anything that can be built can be taken down': The largest dam removal in US history is complete – what happens next?" *BBC News*. September 3rd

DUE: 2/19 DamNation in-class exercise

PART II INDIGENOUS RELATIONALITY

Week 7 Place-Thought

- 2/24 Mitchell, Sherri. 2021. "Indigenous Prophecy and Mother Earth." Pp. 16-28 in Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine Wilkinson (Eds.), *All We Can Save*. One World.
- 2/24 Mingo, EC. 2021. "Beyond the binary of settler-colonialism." *Yale Review*, February 25th.
- 2/26 Watts, Vanessa. 2013. "Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2(1):20-34.

DUE: 2/26 Dam Position Paper Due before 11:59PM on Thursday, February 26th

Week 8 Indigenous Knowledges

- 3/3 Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. "The Gift of Strawberries," and "The Three Sisters" Pp. 22-32 and Pp 128-140 in *Braiding Sweetgrass*." Milkweed Editions.
- 3/5 Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. "Learning the Grammar of Animacy," and "Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass." Pp. 48-59 and 156-166 in *Braiding Sweetgrass*." Milkweed Editions.

DUE: 3/5 Quiz 3 In Class. Covers materials from weeks 6-8.

-----SPRING BREAK-----

Week 9 Never Alone

- 3/17 Play *Never Alone* for at least one hour before our Tuesday class and for at least one additional hour after. Citation info: *Never Alone*. 2014. Upper One Games. E-Line Media. [name of platform played] <http://neveralonegame.com/>
- 3/19 McGrath, Janet Tamalick. 2019. "Sila." Pp. 256-265 in *Ecotopian Lexicon* edited by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy. Minnesota University Press. DUE: 3/20 Gameplay notes due before 11:59pm on Thursday, March 20th.

Week 10 Relatives

- 3/24 Fornoff, Carolyn. 2019. "Nahual" Pp. 163-175 in *Ecotopian Lexicon* edited by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy. Minnesota University Press.
- 3/26 Tallbear, Kim. 2011. "Why Interspecies Thinking Needs Indigenous Standpoints." *Fieldsights*, November 18. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/why-interspecies-thinkingneeds-indigenous-standpoints>.

PART III MULTISPECIES JUSTICE

Week 11 Who and What are we "sustaining"?

- 3/31 Alaimo, Stacy. 2012. "Sustainable This, Sustainable That: New Materialisms, Posthumanisms and Unknown Futures." *PMLA* 127(3): 558-564.

DUE: 4/2 *Never Alone* Reflection Paper Due Thursday, April 2nd before 11:59pm.

Week 12 What are our responsibilities to non-humans?

- 4/7 Marris, Emma. 2021. "Philosophies of the non-human." Pp. 28-46 in *Wild Souls: Freedom and Flourishing in the Nonhuman World*. Bloomsbury.
- 4/9 Explore the *Feral Atlas*. Curated and edited by Anna L. Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena and Feifei Zhou.

DUE: 4/9 Quiz 4 In Class. Covers materials from weeks 9-12.

Week 13 What are our responsibilities to each other?

- 4/14 Listen: "[Whiskey 🍷, Home, and Showing Up — with Colette Pichon Battle and Jade Begay](#)" episode of *What if we get it right?* October 31st, 2024.
- 4/16 Listen: "[Climate influencers, organizers, education 🧑, and Texas, with Alexia Leclercq](#)" episode of *What if we get it right?* June 11, 2025.

Week 14 Becoming Kin

- 4/21 Krawec, Patty. 2022. "Solidarity: Becoming Kin." Pp. 171-187 in *Becoming Kin*. Broadleaf Books.
- 4/23 Solnick, Sam. 2019. "Apocalypso." Pp. 23-33 in *Ecotopian Lexicon* edited by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy. Minnesota University Press.

DUE: 4/23 Quiz 5 Covers materials from weeks 13-14 + reflection on the semester.

Week 15 Final Project Work

DUE: 4/28 Post Presentation to Online Discussion Forum before 11:59pm.

DUE: 4/30 Presentation Feedback due BEFORE class (before 12:30pm).

Final Project DUE before 11:59PM on Tuesday, May 5th 2026