Environmental Classics

Macalester College  Prof. Christie Manning
Wednesday 7-10 pm  Olin-Rice 243
Preceptor: Mariko Yatsuhashi

Course Description

What is the history and evolution of environmental thinking and writing? How have writers shaped the ways we understand our relationship with the natural world? This course explores these questions, drawing in roughly equal measure on ‘classic’ texts from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The ideas introduced by these classic texts are still present, implicitly and explicitly, in much of today’s environmental discourse.

This course will use a selection of books and papers that have had a major impact on academic and wider public thinking – primarily in the USA. Through engaged discussion, we will trace the impact of each text, beginning with the context in which it was written and ending with its influence on our contemporary understandings of the environment. In addition, we will seek to understand the characteristics of ‘classic’ texts that hold attention, encourage new ways of thinking, and facilitate social change.

About me: Dr. Christie Manning

Please call me Christie!

I am a cognitive and biological psychologist by training, and I have been teaching at Macalester for nearly 15 years. From 2020 until this semester, I was the temporary Director of Sustainability at the college.

Outside of work, I am the parent of two young adults (Clara and Maeve). I love to walk, and my partner (Frank) and I also enjoy exploring places by bike. In the summer, I spend a lot of time trying to grow native pollinators and vegetables in my garden. In the winter, I’ve learned to make peace with the cold through various winter sports.

My contact information

cmanning@macalester.edu

You can always reach me by email. I will usually get back to you quickly - I strive to reply within 24 hours on weekdays.
Office Hours

My standing office hours this semester will be on Monday, 2:00-3:30 in person in OLRI 158A, or you can claim an appointment spot in my google calendar on Wednesday or Thursday. If the scheduled times don't work, send me an email suggesting a few times that will work for you so that I can check them against my calendar.

Talking to students is one of my favorite things about being a professor. No question is too small, and no pretext to talk is too flimsy: if you want to talk, we can talk!

Challenging Times

These are challenging times. As one wise colleague put it, we aren't all in the same boat, but all of us are confronting the same storm. The pandemic has been rough, and continues to be a worry. Climate change is rough. Racial inequality is rough. The US political climate is rough. Conflicts and difficulty around the world are rough. Despite these challenges, let's try to be kind and patient with one another, and with ourselves. Let's learn and explore and aim as high as we're able, while acknowledging that there are limits on our time, energy, capacity, and attention that external circumstances will dictate. If things aren't working for you, whatever the reason, please let me know.

This syllabus does not stand on its own!

Our Moodle site (moodle.macalester.edu) is an important resource for this class. It is where you can find our complete weekly schedule, as well as links to all of our readings, discussions, activities, and assignments. Please make it a point to become familiar with the Moodle site, and let me know if you have questions or run into problems.

Course Goals

- To trace the influence of the ideas, authors and texts that have shaped the environmental movement and the field of environmental studies.
- To question the process of canonization, and to explore the work of thinkers whose ideas were not immediately and widely embraced in the traditional environmental canon, but whose contributions are nevertheless worthy of consideration.
- To engage in participatory and collaborative learning through group discussion, debate, and the practice of respectfully expressing and listening to divergent opinions.
- To gain familiarity with a range of key ideas that shape conversations within Environmental Studies.
- To consider and (re)define the essential qualities of a classic.
Learning Objectives

- Critically evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of traditional classic works, both with respect to the context in which they were written as well as to issues of today.
- Recognize the value of voices and ideas overlooked by the traditional environmental canon.
- Identify how the ideas presented in environmental texts are relevant to our own lives.
- Connect insights encountered in environmental texts to other sources of environmental thinking and rhetoric.
- Develop and improve public presentation skills, writing clarity and facilitation practice.

Policies

Required Text

You are not required to buy a text for this class.

All course readings (and our reading schedule) are available on Moodle.

Attendance, Participation, and Engagement

Participation in class discussions is a vital component of this class. Our project in class meetings will be to discuss the major themes of the course, to answer questions, to clear up any confusion, and above all to engage with course readings. Please remember that we are all in this together, and we are all responsible for the success of the course.

We will discuss together the mutual rights and responsibilities that you would like to see govern our discussions, but given the importance of discussions to the success of the class, at minimum it is important that we all respect one another's time, space, values, and ideas by showing up regularly for discussions prepared to engage in respectful, intellectually challenging exchange. Given the unusual and ongoing challenges of these pandemic times, attending every class discussion might not be possible. If you must miss class, please reach out to me privately so that we can figure out how to accommodate whatever challenges you are facing and develop a plan for you to succeed in the class.

Policy on class recordings: I have no current plans to make any recordings of what we do in class. Should that change for any reason, such as to accommodate a documented disability, I will notify you in advance and any recording will be in a manner consistent with Macalester’s classroom recording policy. That policy states that no one may record any classroom activity, in whole or part, without the prior written approval of the Office of Disability Services and the knowledge of the instructor, and that any such recordings are limited to personal academic use only, may not be shared, replicated, or published, and must be destroyed or stored by the Office of Disability Services at the end of the semester.
Helpful Resources

Many wonderful resources exist that will help you with this class. To book an online appointment with a writing counselor at the MAX Center, visit WCOnline. You can find the center’s guide to working remotely with a writing tutor here. Our research and instruction librarians are also a great resource for many writing-related questions. You may book an online appointment with one of them here. Another useful resource is Macalester’s Write Well video series.

Accommodations

I am committed to supporting all students in my class. If course design ever poses barriers to your ability to access or to demonstrate mastery of course content, please let me know. I will make reasonable academic accommodations in such cases. If you have a known disability and think that you may need formal accommodations, email disabilityservices@macalester.edu, call the office at 651-696-6275, or use their online scheduler. Given the unusual circumstances these times, you may find yourself needing things that you normally would not. In those cases, please let me know what is going on. I may be able to make reasonable accommodations that will help.

Religious Observance

You may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during the semester. If you have a religious observance/practice that conflicts with your participation in the course, please contact me before the end of the second week of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Covid Considerations

Given the uncertain and ongoing nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, this syllabus may have to change, although I am hopeful that no significant changes will be necessary. In the meantime:

- We will follow Macalester’s community commitment and 2022 COVID policy and wear face coverings in class, regardless of our vaccination status, through at least September 14. We will remain a mask-friendly class throughout the semester. You are invited and encouraged to wear a mask so that we are protecting the health of those among us who may be at higher risk for complications from illness.

- Stay home if you are not feeling well. Nothing is more important than your own health and well-being and that of those around you. I will work with you so that you can get all the resources and help you need to make-up for missed class. Please let me know if you miss class because you're not well!

- Remember: it is our collective responsibility to care for one another and ease the stress/trauma of these times.
Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty erodes the basic foundations of higher education: exchange, debate, and the thoughtful consideration of what we know, how we know it, and why it matters. It has no place at Macalester or in this course. Find Macalester’s academic integrity policy here. For help avoiding plagiarism, visit the Library’s Academic Integrity materials here. For the Quick Guide to the Chicago Manual of Style, the citation system used by historians, visit here (requires login).

Title IX

Macalester is committed to providing a safe and open learning and living environment for all students. If you (or someone you know) has experienced any form of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please know that you are not alone, and that help and support are available.

Please be aware that as a faculty member, I am a non-confidential resource. This means that if I become aware of incidents or allegations of sexual misconduct, I am required to report the matter to the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Title IX Coordinators. This College policy is intended to ensure that you receive the resources and support you may need.

If you would like to speak with a confidential resource (someone who is not required to share what they are told with the Title IX Coordinator), the following people and organizations are available to you on or off campus:

- Macalester College Center for Religious and Spiritual Life Contact: Kelly Stone, College Chaplain and Associate Dean for Religious & Spiritual Life, kstone1@macalester.edu, 651-696-6298. All of the chaplains in the CRSL are confidential resources.
- Macalester College Hamre Center for Health & Wellness counselors, physicians, registered nurses, or nurse practitioners, 651-696-6275.
- SOS Sexual Violence Services of Ramsey County Trained advocates offer information, referrals, legal advocacy, support groups, one-on-one counseling off-campus, and a 24-hour confidential hotline at 651-266-1000.

Reporting Incidents of Bias

[From the Bias Response Team website]: Macalester strives to foster an inclusive and welcoming community where any student, staff, or faculty member, regardless of background, can live, learn, and thrive. To that end, the Bias Response Team (BRT), a group of professional staff members, focuses on addressing incidents that undermine the values of inclusivity and human dignity that our campus holds.

Although we continue to pursue the goal of an inclusive community, we recognize that no campus is immune to larger systemic issues that include but are not limited to racism, anti-semitism, islamophobia, heterosexism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, classism, and ageism. These systemic issues may be manifested in the forms of bias incidents. Anyone who feels they have been
affected by an incident of bias is encouraged to make a report to the Bias Response Team, so the college can offer assistance.

Assignments

This course fulfills Macalester’s Argumentative Writing (WA) General Education requirement. That means we will spend some class time discussing the conventions of good argumentative writing and honing our writing skills. In addition, it means that you will do various kinds of writing for this class, which range from relatively informal reflections (which are designed to help you think through ideas to understand them more clearly) to more formal assignments (which ask you to present your ideas in polished, carefully edited, thoughtfully considered prose). You will also have the chance to revise and improve some of your written work based on feedback from me and your peers.

Reading Preparation (20%)

Before each class, you will post a short but substantive written response to the reading assignment. This required response is the major writing assignment for the course, and is structured to help you synthesize the readings and to begin to articulate your own position with respect to the issues presented. Check Moodle for each class’s response format before composing your post. (I strongly recommend that you compose your response in a separate, saved document and then paste it into Moodle when you are finished.) It may also be helpful to look at the questions on Moodle before doing the reading. Please post your reading response to Moodle no later than midnight the day before class.

These 600 to 1000 word responses are your opportunity to demonstrate an ability to analyze and critically evaluate the ideas, arguments, and points of view from the week’s readings. Your response should display your own genuine reflection upon the material of the week. The best reading responses are both substantive and focused; it is better to choose a few key points and develop them well, rather than describe a set of disconnected and underdeveloped ideas. Strong reading responses call upon the week’s readings and refer to specific passages as evidence or to illustrate a point. Where relevant, reading responses should explicitly connect to ideas and readings from previous readings and discussions.

These reading responses are an example of “writing to learn” writing rather than formal academic argument. Consequently, what is important is the thoughtfulness of the ideas and questions you raise rather than on writing style or polish.

There are total of 10 reading responses throughout the semester. You are welcome to skip one of them if you need to!

Participation and Engagement (25%)

We continue to be in pandemic times, so attendance may be complicated this semester. That said, attendance – that is, being present and engaged in class – plays an essential role in learning, especially in a relatively small, discussion-based, and community-building class such as this one. Attendance will be important not only for your learning, but also for our ability to build community
within the Environmental Studies major and to maintain a sense of connection and commitment to one another. Your presence in class matters.

The foundations of strong participation and engagement include:

- Preparation for discussion by carefully and critically reading the class readings, making notes, thinking about the ideas and arguments ahead of time.

- Willingness to offer your thoughts. Well-considered comments are best, but it's also OK to share ideas that are not yet fully-formed, and to call upon your peers to help you think them through.

- Support of others’ contributions through attentive and respectful listening, offering responses that refer to others’ contributions, not dominating the discussion, and allowing others to have a turn to speak.

- Willingness to (respectfully, civilly) disagree with your peers, and for your peers to disagree with you.

For those who are less comfortable speaking in class, remember that asking a good question is also a valuable way to contribute to the discussion. However, if you are having serious difficulties with participation, please talk to me outside of class so that we can develop a strategy for improvement.

I also recognize that there are unavoidable circumstances that may sometimes make it impossible for you to attend class. Although I hope it isn’t the case, please stay in touch with me and we will navigate the ups and downs of the semester together.

**Essays (30%)**

Over the course of the semester, you will write two formal essays (5 pages each). For the first essay, you will complete written evaluations of your peers’ work, and will revise your essay based on feedback from your peers and from me. For the second paper, you will receive more extensive feedback from me on your draft. Both papers are designed to give you a chance to demonstrate a deeper understanding and synthesis of course themes and readings.

As part of the peer review process (paper 1), you will meet with others in your assigned peer review group to discuss one another's writing and strategies for improvement. For paper 2, you will meet with me to discuss your essay and your personal writing goals for the class.

For each essay, you must compose a brief "dear reader" paragraph and include it at the end of the document—preferably a new page within the document that comes after the references. The dear reader letter should (1) re-state the thesis of your paper, (2) comment on the strengths of the paper and what you enjoyed during the writing process, and (3) describe what you struggled with or where you see weaknesses in the essay.

Topics for the papers will be discussed in class approximately 2 weeks before they are due. The assignment dates and deadlines are listed in Moodle.
Alt Classic Presentation (10%)

Sometime during the semester, each student will make a 6-7 minute formal presentation to the class describing a piece of environmental writing that has been suggested as a classic but is not included in the course reading list. The list of “alternative classics” is flexible; students should decide by the end of the second week which classic they would like to investigate, summarize, and present to the group. The in-class presentation specifications focus on organization, depth, interest/appeal, and professional style. Students should practice their presentation ahead of time and hold to the time limit.

Here is a completely incomplete list of suggestions. Use the link to choose and claim a text. You may also suggest a text not on the list. Just be sure to get it approved by Christie!

Leading a discussion (15%)

Each student will take charge of leading a one-hour (approximately) discussion during one week of the semester (in pairs or groups of 3). You will choose the structure of your one-hour session and design activities and questions. Mariko and I will be available to help with planning and to provide resources. More details available on this assignment soon.

Assignment Feedback and UNgrading

What does this mean!?
In most learning situations in life outside of school, you are not assigned a grade. In academic settings, they are the norm. Yet conventional grading structures are often counterproductive. They may lead students to think more about their grades than about their writing or learning, or to focus on impressing (or fooling) a teacher rather than engaging wholeheartedly with the material, or to fear failure and thus be reluctant to take risks with writing or ideas. Many decades of psychological research in education suggests that grades can actually harm learning.

One of the possible (small?) silver linings of the COVID-19 global pandemic is that it has disrupted some of the conventions in education, and many of us are rethinking grading. Thus, I would like to work with you all this semester to try UNgrading.

It turns out that a culture of support in the classroom - learning with a group of people who care about the wellbeing of each other – helps you learn. One of the best ways to learn is to teach others. I hope that through ungrading, we all can become members and collaborators of a learning community, kindly sharing our skills, abilities, experiences, perspectives (etc.) with each other.

How it works:

Throughout the semester, I will stay mindful of your (physical and digital) engagement and participation in class, will respond to several of your weekly reading responses (and will note whether or not they are completed on time), and will offer you feedback on your written work (reading responses, papers) and your other assignments (discussion leading, alt classic presentation). We will talk together about what you all – and I – think it might mean to “do well” in this class. Around the middle of the semester and at the end of the semester, I’ll ask you to engage in a self-reflection that will include a question about what letter grade you would give yourself for
the course - in essence, you will assign your own grade, based on the reasoning you present in your reflection. Although I would ideally like to give everyone the grade they give themselves, I reserve the right to raise (or lower) grades as I see fit.

## Schedule

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|           |                                                                      | SouthWest Organizing Project, Letter to Big Ten Environmental Groups, 16 March 1990.  
| 10 Weds 11/2 | Rethinking Environmentalism on a Global Stage                        | 1) Chico Mendes (1988).  
|           |                                                                      | 3) Vandana Shiva (2000).  
|           |                                                                      | Paper 2 outline due by 7pm: *A Fork in the Road*.  
|           |                                                                      | Kate Raworth, "A Safe and Just Operating Space for Humanity" (2012).  
|           |                                                                      | Paper 2 draft due by 7pm: *A Fork in the Road*.  
| 12 Weds 11/16 | Peer Review Meetings + Revisions                                     | No class tonight - peer review meetings this week.  
| 13 Weds 11/30 | Student choice                                                        | Students choose this week’s readings.  
|           |                                                                      | Paper 2 due - final version (by midnight): *A Fork in the Road*.  
| 14 Weds 12/7 | Revisiting "environmental classics"                                   | Final discussion - no readings.  

| Finals week | Final learning reflection due on Thursday, 12/15 by 7:30pm (our final exam time slot) |