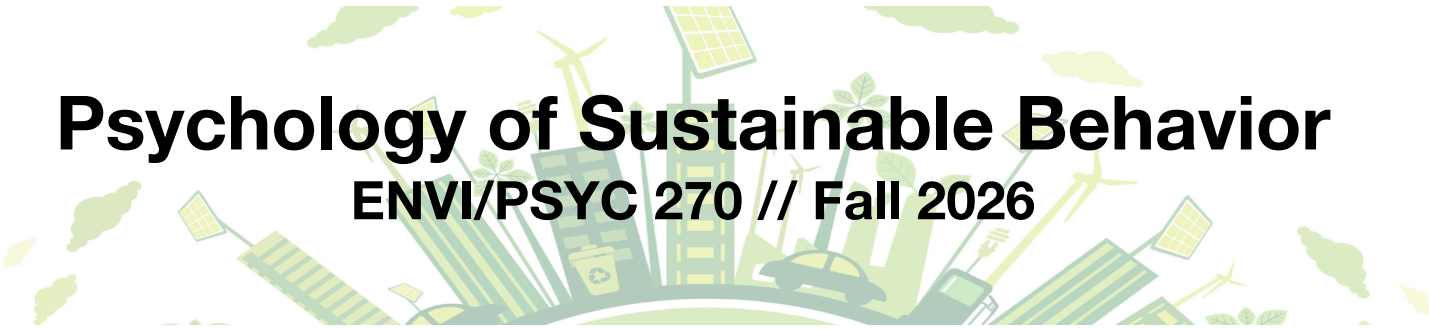




Psychology of Sustainable Behavior

ENVI/PSYC 270 // Fall 2026

Tuesday & Thursday 1:20 – 2:50 pm // OLRI 243

Prof. Christie Manning

Contact: cmanning@macalester.edu // campus phone: 651-696-6164

Office hours in OLRI 247: Thursdays 3:15-4:00, or by [appointment \(calendar link\)](#)

Course description

Psychology of Sustainable Behavior is built around the argument that so-called “environmental problems” are actually *human behavior* problems. Global crises such as climate change, ocean acidification, plastic pollution, and deforestation ultimately stem from individual and collective human actions. Understanding the foundations of behavior is thus critical in addressing these issues. In addition, the deterioration of ecological systems has significant social justice implications; the world’s poor and those already targeted for marginalization and economic disadvantage are disproportionately impacted.

This course approaches environmental degradation and environmental justice through a psychological lens. We will use psychological principles, theories, and methods to explore the complex web of factors underlying how people satisfy their needs, express their identities, participate in their communities, and experience nature. We will also apply psychological knowledge to real-world sustainability case studies at the individual level, on our campus, and in our larger community. Throughout the course we will emphasize the central importance of justice, equity and anti-racism, often overlooked in environmental initiatives.

Psychology of Sustainable Behavior is a project-based class. Students will participate in an individual self-change project (3 weeks) and a campus- and community-based collaborative project (5-6 weeks).

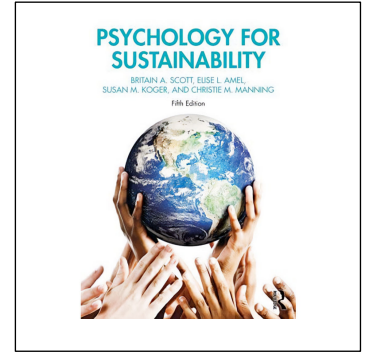
Course goals

- Introduce students to psychological perspectives on the global environmental crises caused by waste
- Examine human thinking and behavior at multiple levels: individual, social-network, organizational, community, governmental
- Explore the varying experiences with, and perspectives on, sustainability held by different US social groups and identities
- Develop and enhance student analytical skills through critical reading and discussion
- Demonstrate the practical implications and limitations of psychological theory with real-world testing and application of course material
- Encourage students to reflect upon their personal values and lifestyle choices

Course materials

Book: Amel, E.L., Scott, B.A., & Manning, C.M. (2026) Psychology for Sustainability. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

All other materials will be posted on our course Moodle site (<https://moodle.macalester.edu>).



Meet your Professor: Dr. Christie Manning

I have a PhD in cognitive and biological psychology and I have been teaching in the Environmental Studies Department since 2008. My research focuses on how people respond to climate change and climate injustice, and I am particularly interested in the psychological circumstances that motivate collective action. In my personal life, I am the parent to two young adults, Maeve and Clara (ages 21 and 26), and partner to Frank, who grew up in Germany. I speak decent/not great German. When not working, I love walking with Frank and our dog (Biene), listening to books on the Libby app, taking long-distance bike rides, putting in the garden, and exploring Minnesota state parks.

Note: **Please call me Christie! (she/her)**



Course Details

Assignments

Full assignment descriptions will be posted on Moodle.

- Attendance and participation in class (26 possible points)
- Reading responses (16 possible points)
- In-class reading/concept quizzes (10 possible points; you may drop one quiz)
- Self-change project (draft and final report, 3 possible points)
- Campus/Community project (draft, final report, and presentation, 4 possible points)
- Portfolio of in-class activities (2 possible points)
- In-class topic presentation (1 possible point)
- Attendance at 3 EnviroThursdays (3 possible points)

Grading philosophy and specifications grading

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. Many decades of psychological research in education suggests that grades, in the way they are traditionally given/used, can actually harm learning.

Thus, I have chosen to use an alternative system called “Specifications Grading” (“specs” for short) to determine final grades for this class. I have chosen specs because I believe it will encourage engaged learning, reward good effort, and acknowledge excellent work, while also being flexible and responsive to the ups and downs of normal life in college.

How it works:

1. You have the flexibility to opt out of a certain number of assignments, depending on the final grade you would like to earn in the class.
2. Everything that normally receives a grade (class participation, reading responses, project reports, presentations, the portfolio, etc.) will be evaluated on a credit/no credit basis. “Credit” is given for work that fulfills all of the specifications for an assignment according to a clear rubric (available on Moodle). The specifications for all assignments are set at B+ quality work. If you do B+ quality work or higher, you will get credit. You will not receive credit for work that does not earn at least a B+.
3. Every time you earn credit for a graded course component by meeting its specifications, you will earn a point in the appropriate category. Your final grade will be determined by how many points you earn across each of the assignment categories of the course. (See the table above.)
4. I will give you feedback on the final versions of your formal written assignments and if they are not B+ quality work, you may turn in a revision one week after you receive my feedback.

Flexibility tokens

Because lots of life happens during the semester, it isn’t always possible to complete everything we intend to do, or to complete things on the schedule we hoped to follow. Tokens are designed to recognize this reality and give you some additional flexibility to meet the goals you set for yourself for this class. Everyone in the class will begin the semester with five tokens. You can use these in whatever combination you’d like at the following ‘rates of exchange’.

■ 1 token = 1 extra revision on a formal writing assignment; OR a point/question on one quiz; OR a 48-hour extension on a reading response

■ 2 tokens = 1 participation point; OR 1 week extension on a formal writing assignment; OR a missed draft; OR an EnviroThursday presentation

■ 4 tokens = not being part of the group presentation (you must inform me and your group well ahead of time if you will miss your presentation); OR a missed reading response; OR a quiz

Please note: If you fall behind and don’t feel like you can catch up, even with the help of tokens, PLEASE talk to me. I will work with you to earn extra tokens and get back on track.

Specs

Attendance & Participation	Reading Responses	In-class concept/reading quizzes	Self-change project	Campus/ community project	Portfolio	In-class topic presentation	EnviroThurs-days	Course grade
24	15	9	3	4	2	1	3	A
23	14	9	3	3	1	1	2	A-
23	13	8	2	3	0	1	2	B+
22	13	7	2	3	0	1	2	B
22	12	7	2	3	0	1	1	B-
21	11	6	1	2	0	1	1	C+
21	10	6	1	2	0	1	0	C/C-
20	10	5	1	2	0	0	0	D

Policies and well-being

Environmental Studies attendance policy

Consistent attendance is important for all students' learning experience. You may miss the occasional class, but more than three absences in a M/W/F course, or two in a T/Th class will affect your grade except under truly unusual circumstances. Students may not receive full credit for the course if they miss more than 20% of course meeting time (= 9 class meetings in a M/W/F course, and 6 in a T/Th course).

Health and well-being

First and foremost, this class is a community of human beings. Let us be kind to ourselves and one another as we learn together and navigate this era of national and global political uncertainty, violence in many parts of the world, growing climate change impacts, and many other issues outside of this class that may on your mind. I strongly encourage you to make your well-being a priority. Reach out to me if you are struggling.

We are fortunate to have on our campus the [Laurie Hamre Center for Health and Wellness](#), where you can access many health and wellness services. I highly recommend visiting their website or visiting them in person (in the Leonard Center) to learn more about their resources.

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 understanding 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 disabilityresources@macalester.edu, call the office at 651-696-6275, or use their [online scheduler](#). Given all that is happening in the world, you may find yourself needing extra support. If this is the case at any time, please let me know what is going on. I may be able to make reasonable accommodations that will help.

Tutoring @ Mac

Macalester has many resources to support students academically. For example, the Writing Center (WC) provides one-on-one peer tutoring for writing at any stage of a project or paper; the Science and Quantitative Center (SciQ) supports group tutoring for many math, science, and econ courses; and Academic Coaching provides one-on-one support for study skills, time management, reading, note taking, and effective learning strategies. Seeking help is a sign of strength and maturity, and everyone is encouraged to take advantage of the (free) resources available. Check out the [Academic Success page](#) for more information about our services.

Academic integrity

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. Academic dishonesty 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](#). Note that the unauthorized or unacknowledged use of generative AI tools is a form of academic dishonesty.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) use policy

AI tools (such as Gemini, Claude, or ChatGPT) are now prevalent, and we need reasonable guidelines for their use in our classroom. Though there are many harms stemming from AI use (environmental and climate, labor, intellectual property, social justice, detracting from learning, etc.), I recognize that AI can be helpful. I also believe it is important to develop critical literacy around AI and its tradeoffs. Thus, I am willing to allow limited, thoughtful use of AI in this class.

The Environmental Studies department AI policy states: "We recognize that individual courses and instructors will take different approaches to the use of AI for class work. If we suspect that a student has used AI in a capacity for which it was not allowed, we will refer the matter to Academic Programs for further conversation and/or sanctions." I will adhere to the department's policy in this course.

We will talk about the ways you can use AI in this class and the specific AI guidelines for each assignment. Here are my minimum expectations for *any* AI use:

- *Always* provide an acknowledgement that you have used AI: Include a statement at the end of every assignment (including reading responses) for which you used AI, and state how you used it (e.g., to help you get started, to rephrase an idea, etc.)
- Double check any response you get from AI. It is often inaccurate. If it gives you a number or fact, assume it is wrong unless you either know the answer or can verify with another source.
- Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Don't use it if it isn't appropriate for the case or circumstance, or if it will detract from your learning (which it often will).

Technology in the classroom

To facilitate a community-based and engaged learning experience in this course, I limit the use of technology in this classroom. Even with the best of intentions, having technology open throughout class is an invitation to divided attention. While it is occasionally necessary to open a laptop to access readings or check notes, I want us all to keep these moments to a minimum and to refrain from checking phones or computer notifications during class meetings.

Please do not use your phone, laptop, iPad/tablet, or other technology during class, except during designated times (e.g., when the entire class looks at posted assignment sheets, or checks Moodle or the syllabus). If you are expecting an important text or other communication, please step out of the classroom to receive it. I take note of non-class-relevant technology use on my attendance sheet, and three instances of it results in a missed participation point.

I recognize that a growing number of people prefer to use an iPad/tablet or other device for note-taking, or as part of a documented accommodation need. If this describes you, please talk to me and we will work out an arrangement.

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. For more information, [please see the Title IX page of the Macalester website](#).

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](#) 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.

Religious Observance

Students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this semester. If you have a religious observance or practice that conflicts with your participation in the course, please contact me ASAP to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Schedule

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Readings	Notes and deadlines
1	1T	9/8/26	Course Intro		
	2R	9/10/26	The state of things	RR1: Ch. 1	Introduce self-change project
2	3T	9/15/26	How we got here	RR2: Ch. 2	
	4R	9/17/26	Ecological Principles and EJ	RR3: Ch. 3	
3	5T	9/22/26	Context	RR4: Ch. 5, part 1	Begin self-change project
	6R	9/24/26	Social cues	RR5: Ch. 5, part 2	Self-change check-in
4	7T	9/29/26	HERC field trip		
	8R	10/1/26	Habits	RR6: Article	Last day of self-change project
5	9T	10/6/26	Guest speakers		Self-change snippet due
	10R	10/8/26	Thinking	RR7: Ch. 6	Maybe a walking field trip
6	11T	10/13/26	Thinking/EJ		Self-change draft report due
		10/15/26	NO CLASS - FALL BREAK		
7	12T	10/20/26	EJ	RR8: Article	
	13R	10/22/26	Guest speakers		Final self-change report due
8	14T	10/27/26	Identity	RR9: Ch. 7	Introduce group project
	15R	10/29/26	Motivation	RR10: Ch. 8	
9	16T	11/3/26	Motivation	RR11: Article	
	17R	11/5/26	Revisit context	RR12: Article	Group project check-in
10	18T	11/10/26	Waste sort		
	19R	11/12/26	Group project day		

11	20T	11/17/26	Health and (un)sustainability	RR13: Ch. 9	
	21R	11/19/26	TBD		Group project check-in
12	22T	11/24/26	Reconnecting to nature	RR14: Ch. 10	
	-	11/26/26	NO CLASS - T-DAY BREAK		
13	23T	12/1/26	Collective action	RR15: Ch. 11	
	24R	12/3/26	Project work day		
14	25T	12/8/26	Presentations		
	26R	12/10/26	Getting psyched	RR16: Ch. 12	
Finals		12/16/26			Portfolio due at 1:30pm