

Syllabus

Phil 3640 Environmental Ethics

3 CR, Fall 2016

Instructor: Dr. Mason Cash

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Office Hours: M 2:30-4:30 pm.

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W 2:30-3:30 pm. Classroom: ENG1 435.

Webcourses: <https://webcourses.ucf.edu/courses/1220170>

Course Description

This course is a critical examination of philosophical ethics concerning conceptions of the value of the non-human natural world, exploring how they might guide an appropriate ethical response to that value.

During this course we will explore many approaches to questions such as:

- Can the appropriate ethical response be guided simply by “expanding the circle” of the subjects of ethical consideration?
- What are the appropriate bearers of value (humans only, sentient animals, subjects-of-a-life, ecosystems, the biosphere, etc.)? How inclusive should we be?
- Can traditional ethical theories (developed to regulate human interactions) be expanded to encompass human interactions with non-humans? With non-sentient life? With ecosystems? With the biosphere?
- Can the bearers of value be things other than individual entities? Can collectives (such as ecosystems or species) be appropriate targets of ethical consideration?
- Is the value of the natural world to be assessed only or primarily in terms of the value for people? Or does the non-human natural world have some kind of intrinsic value-in-and-for-itself?
- Should the appropriate ethical responses to the natural world be tempered by people’s moral psychology and the kinds of arguments and attitudes others will find persuasive?
- How ought we balance environmental values against human values and social issues (feeding people, human rights, justice, democracy)?

We will also look at several important test cases in which environmental values need to be applied but *how they are to be applied* causes controversies. E.g.:

- Is sustainability possible? What should “sustainability” mean?
- Can and ought we restore “natural” ecosystems?
- Should we preserve wilderness?
- Are environmentalism and human rights concerns compatible?

Required Text

David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott, *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works* (Oxford, 2012).

Course Evaluation

Theory paper (approximately 2000 words; 20%)

Due Mid October.

A short paper explaining and defending your point of view on one of the questions or issues or approaches to environmental ethics covered in parts I of our textbook “What Really Matters” chs 1-7). (It should include substantial discussion of at least two published peer-reviewed journal articles not covered in class.)

Applications Paper (approximately 2500 words; 25%)

Due Mid November.

A paper that applies some of the theoretical positions and issues we have discussed by engaging and extending one of the topics covered in Parts II of our textbook (“What Really Works” Chs 8-15). (It should include substantial discussion of at least two published peer-reviewed journal articles not covered in class.)

Reflection paper (750 words; 5%)

Due in the last class.

A personal reflection on your own relationship to the environment and the environmental effects of the way you conduct your life. What relationships do you draw between the content of this course and your own personal values, choices, experiences with and impact on the environment? In what ways has the course challenged you to reflect on, better justify, and/or amend how you conduct your life?

Peer Reviews of Paper Drafts (5% each; 10% total)

Draft. You will give copies of your draft for each paper to another class member who will comment on it and help you improve your writing (2% for a draft that your reviewer considers to complete enough to merit serious engagement.)

Review You will give feedback on another student’s draft. (3% for comments that your author reports has engaged their paper and has given helpful suggestions for improvement in a timely manner.)

Two Minute Papers and other class exercises (5%).

These will be given in most classes, often in the first few minutes of class (so don’t be late!). You are expected to have read the assigned readings before the class in which they are discussed. Your reading should prepare you to discuss the main thesis of the reading(s), and to present any interesting observations, objections, concerns, connections to your own experience, and relationships to other readings that you have noticed. You will regularly be called upon to share your thoughts, objections, and insights regarding the course content.

Two minute papers will ask for brief responses to questions that test your preparation for classes, your familiarity with concepts we have been using, your understanding of the main points of papers scheduled for that class, or your considered opinion on questions or issues raised in class. Each will be graded out of 2 points. I will drop your lowest two grades; your total for the remaining ones will be scaled to a grade out of 5 to determine your grade for this section of the course. Missed Two Minute Papers cannot be made up (hint: don't miss more than two).

Two 10 – 15 Group Minute Presentations (5% each; 10% total)

Presentation One: Reading summary and analysis

You will sign up (ideally with one or two others) to present for up to 10 minutes on one of the assigned readings for the course. **One or all of the group's members can conduct the presentation, but all members must attend and must meet to discuss the paper and contribute to the preparation of the presentation.** You should meet at least once outside of class time after reading the paper to discuss the paper and your presentation, and to decide what role you each will play. I suggest you use the Webcourses group's wiki, or Google docs (docs.google.com) or prezi.com to collaborate on the presentation.

In your presentation the group will:

- outline the major conclusion of the paper and the author's main reasons for drawing that conclusion.
- present one or two pertinent issues that arise from the paper: objections, questions, troubling or illuminating examples, differences of interpretation, or relationships to other course readings you have about the paper (especially readings not also assigned for that day).
- end with at least one question or problem that could generate class discussion.

Presentation Two: Analysis of an Environmental Issue

In October we will begin discussing the topics in the latter part of the textbook (chs 8-15). You will sign up (ideally with three or four others) to present on one or another of these issues.

In your presentation the group will:

- Identify at least two representative readings from the textbook that the class should read to get
- Briefly explain the facts about this issue or problem.
- Identify and analyze the values at stake or in tension with one another (scientific, aesthetic, spiritual, lifestyle, economic, recreational, etc.)
- Make policy recommendations that might help address the issue.
- Recommend activist projects that concerned class members could engage in to help address this issue.
- Give an ethical justification of the recommendations you make (this is the main part of your presentation, most of your time will be spent on this).

Deliverables:

- Your presentation slides should be emailed to Dr. Cash (PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi format) by 9:30 am the day of your presentation (so he can plan the rest of the class without redundancy or stepping on your plans).
- The in-class presentation.
- All group members will individually also fill out a survey evaluating their own and others' contributions to the group's presentation and preparation. (Your individual grade will depend on the quality of the presentation and on the results of this survey.)

Final Examination (25%)

Monday, December 12, 2015. 1:00 PM - 3:50 PM

Covers the entire course. Short answer and brief essay questions.

You can bring in one piece of paper with anything written on it.

You will not be permitted to answer essay questions on the topic of either of your papers.

Initial reading schedule:

All readings are from Schmidtz and Willott's *Environmental Ethics*.

See the schedule on Webcourses for details after this.

Date	Topic	Reading
M Aug 22	Course Introduction	
W Aug 24	Ethical Theories and Environmental Ethics	"Ethics for Dummies"
F Aug 26	Ethical Theories and Environmental Ethics	Schmidtz and Willott "Rules, Principles and Integrity" (pp xv-xxiii)
M Aug 29	How did we get here?	Questions (p. 3) White (p. 5) Callicott (p. 11)

A note about assigned readings

This course, like all philosophy courses, will involve a considerable amount of reading; and many of the readings ask you to think, write and talk about several authors' positions on important questions and issues, to encourage you to answer the questions for yourself.

So if you are not prepared to read and study for about three hours or more for each class session, then this is perhaps not the course for you.

Lectures (and presentations) will introduce and explain some of the basic points of assigned readings. But these will make much more sense if the lecture is explaining and elaborating on material you have already read and tried to make your own sense of, rather than

introducing you to it for the first time. Thus by *reading the assigned chapters before class*, you will get more from the lecture and discussion, and will have a better chance of a higher grade.

While you read, make notes. Highlight—even better, underline—the crucial passages. Make notes in the margin or ideally in a notebook. Be able to write down in your own words the issue the author is concerned with, major point the author is trying to make about that issue and the reasons the author gives for thinking that this point is worth serious consideration.

Grading & Evaluation

Your work for the course will total a score out of 100. I use this to determine a letter grade. I think a rigid set of cutoff points for grades is unfair because this would mean that people with very similar score get different grades (someone with 69.75 should not necessarily get a C+, while another student with 70.0 earns a B-).

I think it is better for you to earn a fair grade, even if this means that your final grade is not completely predictable grade. You should have a sense of the approximate grade your performance so far would earn, and should just do you best to improve our grade in whatever assignments or exams remain.

So I try to make principled distinctions between groups of students, rather than using arbitrary cutoffs. Borderline cases are decided using (in order): exam scores, quiz scores, discussion participation, class participation.

VERY ROUGHLY, the following are the *approximate* bounds of the ranges at which I often award grades.

Score	0-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Grade:	F	D- D D+	C- C C+	B- B B+	A- A

IMPORTANT: Final grades may not necessarily precisely follow the above approximate boundaries; they may vary by +/- 3 points or so. Usually lower than advertised here, rarely higher.

Course Policies:

If you have a problem:

Please, please, please, come and talk to me about any problems you have that might affect your success in this course. Please come talk to me when it is a potential or minor concern. Please don't let the small issue become a major catastrophe before you come talk to me. Although I will endeavor to do what I can, usually by the time it's a catastrophe, there is little I will be able to do to help.

Class attendance

You are expected to attend all classes. Absence of more than three classes can adversely affect your grade. Class attendance will be recorded by 2 minute paper participation.

Absences for more than three classes will be accommodated only for *documentable* exceptional circumstances (medical or family emergencies, representing UCF on a sports team, religious holy day, etc.). You only need to contact me for such documentable absences. If you anticipate an absence, let me know beforehand.

Submission of written work:

Your work should be submitted on paper (ideally in class), as well as to WebCourses by 11:55 pm on the due date.

Back up your files: "My hard drive crashed." "My router doesn't work." "My printer is out of ink." These are today's equivalents of "My dog ate my homework." These events really do occur and they are really inconvenient when they do. However, these are not valid excuses for failing to get your work in on time.

If your equipment problems prevent you from using e-mail or completing web-discussions or assignments at home, there are many computer labs on campus for these purposes, and virtually every public library offers Internet access.

Extensions and Late Penalties

Extensions will be granted only for *documentable* exceptional circumstances (medical or family emergencies). Ask for the extension as soon as you are aware of the problem, not on the due date. Anticipated absences are not reasons for extensions (submit it before you leave).

Late assignments will be deducted 5% of their potential value per day late (so an assignment worth a maximum of 10 points loses 1/2 a point a day; four days late its score will be deducted 2 marks. Weekend days count fully.

However, if you feel that your circumstances warrant consideration as an exception, discuss this with me as early as possible.

Communication:

I use your UCF knightsmail address or Webcourses messages to communicate with you (e.g. notices about class readings, changes in schedule, etc.). You are expected to check these address regularly. Webcourses can forward messages to your UCF email address.

If you e-mail me, you should include PHI 3640 in the subject line and give your full name at the end of your message. I may not respond to messages from unidentified students.

Plagiarism & Cheating

UCF faculty support the UCF Creed. **Integrity** - practicing and defending academic and personal honesty - is the first tenet of the UCF Creed. This is in part a reflection of the second tenet, **Scholarship**: - I will cherish and honor learning as a fundamental purpose of membership in the UCF community.

Course assignments and tests are designed to have educational value; the process of preparing for and completing these exercises will help improve your skills and knowledge. Material presented to satisfy course requirements is therefore expected to be the result of your own original scholarly efforts.

UCF's Golden Rule defines **plagiarism** as follows: **"whereby another's work is used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own."** **Cheating** is using unauthorized material, or giving or accepting unauthorized help on assignments or tests. These contradict the educational value of course assignments and quizzes. Students who attempt to obtain unearned academic credentials that do not reflect their skills and knowledge can also undermine the value of the UCF degrees earned by their more honest peers.

I have a responsibility for your education and the value of a UCF degree, and so have a responsibility to discourage and prevent unethical behavior, and to respond to infringements of academic integrity when necessary. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense.

The typical penalty for plagiarism or cheating in this course will be a loss of credit for the assignment AND a deduction of one grade for the course (e.g. a B+ becomes a B), which may result in a failing grade in the course. (So you would do better to do a bad job honestly than to cheat and get caught.) Perpetrators may also be required to take an academic integrity seminar. Serious cases can lead to academic probation, suspension, expulsion from the University, or the revocation of a degree. <http://www.osc.sdes.ucf.edu/> has more about UCF's Rules of Conduct.

I use www.TurnItIn.com and other methods to make it difficult to plagiarize or cheat and relatively easy to detect attempts to do so. I hope you will consider it not worth the risk, and can appreciate that **doing the assignments honestly is part of the educational experience** that you came to university to have. Copies of papers may be retained by Turnitin.

Classroom Behavior

Your responsibilities as a student of UCF are outlined in The Golden Rule. <http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>.

If you wish to make a comment during class, raise your hand and wait to be called upon. Please do not interrupt people while they have the floor.

Please do not converse with others during class time. It disturbs those around you who are trying to pay attention to the class.

I expect you to be engaged in class business during class time. If you are not going to give your full attention to what is happening in class, please attend to your business elsewhere.

Turn off phones or set them to vibrate. Do not answer your phone in class. Either leave the call for voice mail (you *are* busy, after all), or unobtrusively leave the room before you answer it.

Accessibility and Classroom Accommodations

Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must be registered with Student Accessibility Services sas.sdes.ucf.edu and must file an Accommodations Letter Request with SAS. SAS will collaborate with the student and the professor to arrange needed accommodations.