Duquesne University
Psychology & Nature (PSYC 275) Fall 2018
A University Core Theme Area Course in Social Justice
A Foundational Community-Engaged Learning Course

Teacher: Will W. Adams, Ph.D.
Meeting Time & Place: Tuesday & Thursday, 9:25-10:40, Fisher Hall 721
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:00-100; Thursday, 10:45-11:45; and by appointment.
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We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human.
~ David Abram

Course Description and Aspirations
Our “Psychology & Nature” course will explore the psychological dimensions of humankind’s relationship with the rest of nature, and the ecological dimensions of human psychology. Well-being and justice for humankind and for the rest of nature co-arise in concert, in a mutually dependent relationship; so too the lack of well-being and justice. Psychologists often emphasize that our relations with others may bring forth health or suffering, for both oneself and others. This is also true in our relations within the shared earth community. While we often forget it, we all know that contact with nature enhances our health. Remember how wonderful it feels be blessed with a fresh breath of air, to see a deer bound through the woods, to really trust your deep sense of things when making an important choice, to enjoy a fun day at the beach, and to taste a delicious bite of salmon. In contrast, contact with a ravaged natural world is immensely painful in obvious and not so obvious ways. Mass extinction of species, climate disruption, water shortages, poisoned air and water: These devastating phenomena are evident in our home towns and around the world. Also evident is detrimental impact on our physical health, for example, with cancers coming from environmental toxins and asthma from polluted air. Less evident, but equally perilous, is the psycho-spiritual trauma of losing our conscious contact with earth’s glorious beings and presences, those who have been our relational partners throughout the ages. Clearly, our ecological crisis is not only a biological crisis, but more deeply an ethical crisis of consciousness, culture, and relationship – all key areas of psychology’s expertise. Thus, the relatively new field of ecopsychology (or ecological psychology) is now contributing to an interdisciplinary “psycho-cultural therapy” devoted to the mutual well-being of humans and the rest of nature. This profound ethical calling is the context for the recent emergence of ecopsychology, and for the present course. Indeed, this is the “great work” of our time, as Thomas Berry so powerfully put it. It is also a special opportunity and responsibility for college age citizens like each of you.

While social justice should be fostered for all, concerns about injustice are often rightly focused on groups that are particularly oppressed, exploited, and/or discriminated against. Psychologists have demonstrated that those we deem “other” – that is to say, other than “me” or “us” – are often seen through fearfully prejudiced eyes, and thereby treated unjustly. The non-human natural world is one of the most egregiously exploited...
“others” in contemporary life, to the mutual impoverishment of both humankind and the rest of nature. Compounding this problem is the fact that far more ecological destruction and deprivation occurs in underprivileged communities as compared to those with privilege and power. Links between the oppression of women and of the natural world will be explored by way of ecofeminism. In light of these intersectional perspectives, this course is oriented to address issues of social/ecological justice. Indeed, our guiding theme will be an exploration of the inseparable relationship between personal, interpersonal, socio-cultural, and ecological well being (or the lack thereof). Our community engaged activities will support your learning and growth in each of these key dimensions.

This course serves as a Social Justice Theme Area Course in the University Core Curriculum and as a Foundational Community-Engaged Learning Course. An essential aim of the present course is to help students develop a reflective, inquiring, and critically thoughtful attitude about the psychology of humankind’s relationship with the rest of nature. Students will come to appreciate the profound intertwining of psyche and earth; understand the reciprocal interrelationship between psychopathology (broadly defined) and ecological degradation; cultivate a sense of how (eco)psychological practice may foster the mutual well-being of humankind and the natural world together; learn the value of engaged work for social/ecological justice in the community; and realize the potential for a generative collaboration between ecopsychology and clinical practice, socially engaged research, spirituality, and engaged action for social/ecological justice. Most importantly, students will develop a depthful understanding of the material from this course as it relates to their personal lives, to their chosen or anticipated academic major, and to the lives of others (both human and more-than-human).

Teaching/Learning Procedures

This course will explore ecological psychology by way of interactive lecture/discussion, textual study, experiential activities, and collaboration with the other learning community courses. As a participatory course, I expect you to be actively involved in class through commentary, questioning, and dialogue. Our in-class work will be supplemented by various activities such as films, experiential exercises, and guest speakers. And we will engage in a required, off-campus experiential ecopsychology workshop on a Saturday or Sunday in October. In order to optimize your learning it is important that you read each assignment thoughtfully prior to the class meeting in which it will be studied. This preparation will help you develop a deeper understanding of the material, formulate questions to bring to class, and to engage more fully in class discussions. Outside of class your learning will be fostered by reading, writing, experiential practices, and reflecting upon and talking about ecopsychological issues.

Required Texts (available in the bookstore or via online sites)


We will also study many shorter readings – PDFs on Blackboard – from authors such as David Abram, Thomas Berry, Wendell Berry, Andy Fisher, Max Horkheimer & Theodore Adorno, David Loy, Wangari Maathai, Carolyn Merchant, Thomas Merton, Mary Oliver, Linda Riebel, Helene Shulman, Gary Snyder, Mary Watkins, Ken Wilber, E.O. Wilson, and others.
Formal Responsibilities and Assessment Process

“Am I making this course relevant in my day to day life and relationships, my participation with my community and the larger natural world, and my preparation for future professional work and/or graduate school?” In my view, your answer to this question is the preeminent criterion by which your participation in the course should be evaluated. Of course, this cannot be graded by a professor, as it is an ongoing self-inquiry that each student can only do for herself/himself. Therefore, your grade for the course will be determined by the quality of your work on the following assignments. The percentages indicate the proportion that each assignment counts towards your final grade.

Your final grade will be determined by way of the following assignments:

- **Overall course participation.** Attendance; timely completion of all assignments; quality and consistency of participation in class; involvement in out-of-class activities, including our community engaged learning; use of Blackboard for various course activities. (100 points of your final grade)
- **Reading responses.** Very brief, structured responses to our readings, turned in by hard copy each class. (50 points total)
- **Two structured reflection papers, plus weekly journals, on your “sitting place” experiential encounters** with the more-than-human world: Integrated with a discussion of course readings and including a hard copy of your sitting place journal entries. (75 points each, 150 total)
  --Structured reflection #1 due: Oct. 2, in class, in hard copy
  --Structured reflection #2 due: Nov. 8, in class, in hard copy
  --Remainder of your weekly journals due: Dec. 6, in class
- **Midterm exam.** Essay and short answer exam assessing both content and critical/creative thinking, including questions emphasizing the inseparable link between personal growth and well being, social justice, community engagement, and ecological well being. (250 points)
- **Reflection on our off-campus, experiential ecopsychology workshop.** Short written reflection on your experiences, learning, and questions related to our ecopsychology workshop. (50 points)
- **Final exam.** Essay and short answer exam assessing both content and critical/creative thinking, including questions emphasizing the inseparable link between personal growth and well being, social justice, community engagement, and ecological well being. (250 points)
- **Preliminary report on your community engaged project.** (25 points)
  --Due: Nov. 1
- **Structured paper on your community engaged project** (100 points)
  --Due: Dec. 4, in class, in hard copy
- **Class presentation on you community engaged project.** (25 points)
  --Presentation on either Dec. 4 or Dec. 6

Specific responsibilities for all assignments will be explained and discussed in class, with handouts as appropriate. All written work is to be typed, double-spaced, with 12-point font. Plus and minus grading will be used for final grades, as follows: A = 920-
I strongly encourage you to participate actively in class through commentary, questioning, and dialogue. In order to optimize your learning it is important that you read each assignment thoughtfully prior to the class meeting in which it will be studied. This preparation will help you develop a deeper understanding of the material, formulate questions to bring to class, and to engage more fully in class discussions. Consistent attendance is required as it is necessary for individual success and for a successful course overall. Your presence or absence affects not just you as an individual, but your peers and our whole class community. Thus, for each unexcused absence 20 points (or 2%) will be deducted from your final grade. If an extraordinary circumstance makes it impossible for you to be in class, please notify me as soon as you can. To create the best learning environment for everyone, use of cell phones, text messaging, the internet, and related activities are completely prohibited during class.

**Learning Goals and Outcome Assessment**

Upon completion of this course, and viewed from a psychological perspective, students should be able to meet the following goals (which are overlapping and interrelated):

**Psychology Department Goals**
* Understand some of the fundamental concepts, issues, and interest areas of psychology. (Assessed via all assignments.)
* Think critically and creatively about human psychology and life as a whole. (Assessed via all assignments.)
* Communicate effectively. (Assessed via all assignments.)
* Be critically and socially engaged with the contemporary world, including being appreciative of its many forms of diversity. (Assessed via all assignments.)
* Work with and apply ethical principles, both personally and in service. (Not formally assessed, but applicable in course participation and community-engaged learning activities.)
* For psychology majors, become more prepared for careers and/or graduate study in psychology, social work, and counseling, and in related fields such as education, business, law, health care, and human services. (Assessed via all assignments.)
* Cultivate one’s potential as a distinctive individual and participant in society. (Not formally assessed, but relevant to all course activities.)

**Course Specific Goals, including Community Engaged Learning**
* Describe how human well-being and justice, and justice for and the well-being of nature are interdependent. And so too our lack of well-being and justice. (Note: Well-being, for the purposes of this course, involves physical, psychological, socio-cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions.)
* Describe key characteristics of humankind’s conflicted relationship with the rest of nature.
* Describe how one’s sense of self and mode of consciousness can foster either estrangement from, or personally and socially responsible intimacy with, the natural world, and how the health of the natural world is influenced accordingly.
* Describe how conventional dualistic separations generate ecopsychological maladies (e.g., mind/body, self/world, humankind/nature, masculine/feminine, matter/spirit); and go on to articulate ways of overcoming these common, dualistic dissociations.
* Describe the interrelationship between personal psychology and collective/cultural values and practices, specifically as these relate to the ecological well-being and justice.
* Articulate the value of consistent, intentional, and conscious contact with the rest of nature.
* Describe the major aspects of a “psycho-cultural therapy” designed to sponsor the mutual well-being of humankind and the rest of nature.
* Describe the ways in which community engagement is important for cultivating the mutual well-being of humankind and the rest of nature.
* Describe the civic issues(s) or public problem(s) that were discussed in this class.
* Describe how the disciplinary-specific knowledge or skills of the class are relevant to addressing the civic issues or public problems being explored.
* Describe the ways civic values and civic empathy (which are also Spiritan Catholic values) influence possible approaches to public problem solving. Civic values include intellectual humility, openness, an orientation toward justice, and respect for human dignity. Civic empathy is the capacity to imagine oneself in the place of others who face vastly different circumstances.
* Describe why working with diverse stakeholders and across cultural approaches, ways of knowing, or kinds of expertise are central to addressing civic issues or public problems.
* Examine your willingness to contribute to a more just world.
* Define and describe “community”, “public sector”, or “methods of social change” as they relate to the civic issue or public problem of concern to the class.
* Make this course personally relevant in their daily life and relationships, their participation with their community and the larger natural world, and their preparation for future professional work and/or graduate school.

Social/Ecological Justice Theme Area Goals

* Articulate the importance of being informed, active, critical, questioning citizens in a complex globalizing society.

* Demonstrate comprehension of the varied meanings of justice, both in theoretical terms and in practical application, at home and abroad;

* Explain the basis for defending the dignity of the nonhuman natural world, and identify theoretical challenges and practical implications in making such a defense today;

* Demonstrate the application of reasoning, affective attunement, relational sensitivity, and other reflective skills to make judgments about what ought to be done in a situation in the light of what is morally/ethically at stake in the situation;

* Analyze social/ecological justice issues by applying social science theories and research methods;
* Examine how social, political and economic institutions can support or undermine a justly ordered society through the study of one or more of the following: political repression, economic inequality, environmental degradation, or social discrimination on the basis of race, gender and/or class.

**Academic Integrity, Special Accommodations, and Encouragement to Consult**

I expect you to act with academic integrity in this course (just as I trust you are cultivating a life of integrity). To be aware of University policies, please consult Duquesne’s web site at: [http://www.duq.edu/academics/university-catalogs/2017-2018-undergraduate/academic-policies/academic-integrity](http://www.duq.edu/academics/university-catalogs/2017-2018-undergraduate/academic-policies/academic-integrity). In this Google/YouTube/Facebook/Twitter culture, it is easier than ever to violate a policy, perhaps without being fully aware that you are doing so. However, even an unintentional breach of integrity is subject to sanctions. I will not tolerate academic dishonesty of any kind. This refers to cheating, plagiarism, and all other types of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, using material from the web, another person’s work, or from books or articles without properly acknowledging the source. If I suspect that you have violated a policy I will follow the investigation and sanction procedures outlined by the University. I strongly encourage you to speak with me, at any time during the course, if you have questions about issues or situations regarding academic integrity.

Students are encouraged to make use of the Writing Center. Consultations there can benefit writers at all skill levels. For more information, call 412-396-5209, visit 216 College Hall, or go to [http://www.duq.edu/academics/resources-and-technology/writing-center](http://www.duq.edu/academics/resources-and-technology/writing-center).

The details of our course as described in this syllabus and course schedule will be revised during the semester according to the needs and interests of the class. If you need accommodations for a disability or other special need, please speak with me. You may also contact the Office of Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6657). Please speak directly with me if you have any questions about the syllabus or about anything else regarding your participation in this course.

I look forward to our work together this semester!

~ Dr. Adams