We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human. ~ David Abram

Course Description and Aspirations
Togethe we will explore the psychological dimensions of humankind’s relationship with the rest
of nature, and the ecological dimensions of human psychology. The well-being of humankind and that of
the rest of nature co-arise in concert, in a mutually dependent relationship. So too the lack of well-being.
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.

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. Less evident, but equally perilous, is the psycho-spiritual trauma of losing
our conscious relational contact with earth’s glorious beings and presences. Clearly, our ecological crisis is
not only a biological crisis, but more deeply a crisis of consciousness, culture, and relationship – all key
area 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 enhancing the well-being
of humans and the rest of nature together. In the words of Thomas Berry, this is “the great work” of our era.
This profound ethical calling is the context for the recent emergence of ecopsychology, and for the present
course.

An essential aim of the 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 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; and realize the potential for a generative collaboration between
ecopsychology and clinical practice, socially engaged research, and contemplative spirituality. Most
importantly, students will develop a depthful understanding of the material from this course as it is relates
to their work in psychology (and their personal life too), and to the lives of others (both human and more-
than-human).

Teaching/Learning Procedures
This seminar will explore ecological psychology by way of interactive lecture/discussion, textual
study, and experiential activities. 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, field trips, guest speakers, etc. For example, we will engage
in a required, off-campus, experiential ecopsychology workshop. 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 stores)
Abram, D. (1996). The spell of the sensuous. Perception and language in a more-than-human-
ISBN: 0679776397

ISBN: 0375713697

NY: SUNY Press.
Assessment Process

“Have I found a way to make this course relevant in my daily life, my current Ph.D. training, and future professional work?” In my view, your answer to this question is the preeminent criterion by which your participation in the course should be evaluated. This is a self-assessment and, of course, cannot be graded. Therefore, I will assess your work on one scholarly paper, twice-weekly informal reflections, “sitting spot” reflection paper, scholarly symposium presentation (of a condensed version of your paper), and course participation. Specific guidelines for all assignments will be discussed in class. All written assignments will be evaluated according to the according the quality and depth of your critical/creative thinking. This includes the clarity, cogency, and evocativeness of your writing.

Your final grade will be determined in the following manner:

- Class participation - quality, consistency, and attendance (20% of your final grade)
- Brief informal reflections, two per week, due Wednesdays and Sundays (20%)
- “Sitting spot” reflection paper, about 7-9 pages, due November 20 by noon, although portions may be submitted earlier as explained in class (20%)
- Scholarly paper, 13-15 pages, due December 9 by noon (30%)
- Symposium presentation (of scholarly paper), last week of class (10%)

Attendance: Attending every meeting of class is required, as this is necessary for individual success and for a successful course overall. If an extraordinary circumstance makes it impossible for you to be in class, please notify me as soon as you can.

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 Duquesne’s formal policies, please consult the Academic Integrity PDF on the University web site: http://www.duq.edu/about/administration/academic-affairs/policies-and-procedures

In our current Google/YouTube/Facebook/Twitter/etc. 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.

The course as described in this syllabus may be revised during the semester according to the needs and interests of the class. I look forward to our collaboration this semester!

~ Dr. Adams