Course Goals

* To attain familiarity with the breadth and depth of Christian theological reflection upon the ecological crisis, and to understand the resources of the Christian faith for responding creatively to this crisis.
* To develop an understanding of environmental issues as justice issues and as theological and ethical issues of deep concern to Christians.
* To learn about the environmental challenges of the Chicago region and some of the resources and groups working to address these challenges.
* To listen to unfamiliar voices from within and without the Christian tradition and to be educated by these voices from the margins about our responsibilities toward the creation and the other beings with whom we share the planet.
* To participate in the educative process by which the above goals will be met, through active involvement in class discussion and through teaching a class as part of a group research project.

Required Texts

Adams, Carol J. (ed.). Ecofeminism and the Sacred (Continuum, 1993)
Greenberg, Joel. A Natural History of the Chicago Region (U. of Chicago, 2002). (Available more cheaply on Amazon.com than in the Seminary bookstore.)
Hessel, Dieter and Larry Rasmussen (eds.). Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church’s Response (Fortress, 2001)
Hessel, Dieter and Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds.). Christianity and Ecology (Harvard, 2000)
Rasmussen, Larry. Earth Community, Earth Ethics (Orbis, 1996)
Weaver, Jace (ed.). Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice (Orbis, 1996)

*Only available on reserve at the library, or may be ordered by calling (707) 573-3162.

Recommended Texts

**Requirements**

**Class Participation:** Participation in class discussions and research group presentations is expected. This assumes the student has read the required reading by class time and can work with it in discussions that are collaborative and constructive, with a view to the course goal. In assessing class participation, the degree to which the student participated actively and equitably in the group research project will also be taken into account.

**Environmental Autobiography Paper** A worksheet to guide you in this exercise will be handed out the first day of class. Guided by the worksheet, we will discuss our environmental autobiographies the following week, on September 11. Reflecting on the worksheet exercise and the class discussion, you will then write a five page environmental autobiography paper summarizing your insights. Due September 18.

**Group Research Project** Teams of 2-4 people will research a local environmental issue related to one of the four core areas of the syllabus; i.e. land, water, air and fire, or animals/biodiversity. Teams will be expected to make field visits to the relevant site(s) in Chicago or the surrounding area, and to interact with at least one environmental organization working on this issue. The purpose of this assignment is to contextualize our study of environmental ethics in the Chicagoland area and to educate one another about local environmental issues and organizations. An urban, suburban or rural environmental issue/site may be chosen as long as it is within the Chicagoland vicinity. The research teams will prepare both a class presentation and a final written report.

**Class Presentation** The class presentation should include the following elements in the order chosen by the group:
1) A ritual component in which we together participate in an embodiment, in symbol and practice, of the environmental issue selected by the group and the religious response to this issue (5-15 minutes).
2) A teaching component in which team members present the environmental issue or problem they have studied, the efforts of local environmental organization(s) or activists to address the problem, and a reflection/analysis of how Christian and/or other religious/cultural traditions (i.e. Native American, ecofeminist) could contribute to effecting a "conversion to the earth" that would bring about needed transformation in this area of environmental concern. This discussion should utilize and build upon course readings but may also be informed by outside reading done by the team (approx. 45 minutes).
3) An assessment by group members of new insights gained from working on this project and the experience of working together as a team. For example, what did you learn by doing an assignment that had a field research component and a group component that you do not typically learn by doing individual written assignments? What challenges or difficulties did you encounter? (approx. 15 minutes).
4) A suggested agenda for how religious communities such as churches and seminaries could creatively address and positively impact the issue under discussion using all of the means at their disposal; i.e., worship, education, activism, influence in the community, interfaith alliances,
coalition-building with community partners, etc. (approx. 15 minutes).

**Group Report** A ten to twelve page group report should summarize both the learnings from the research project as well as the insights gained from the experience of teaching the class. The report should include the four dimensions listed above under Class Presentation as well as provide information and analysis on the research process itself, such as how you identified your topic, which sites or organizations you visited, who your contacts were, what outside reading you did, etc. Every member of the group should participate in some aspect of the written report. An appendix describing the work of each group member on the entire project, including research, the class presentation, and the final report should be attached at the end of the paper. Due December 4.

**Individual Paper** A paper of approximately ten pages (for master’s degree students) or fifteen pages (for doctoral degree students) should treat one dimension of the group research project at a deeper level than group presentation allows. Choose an area of the group project that sparks your interest and provide a treatment of that topic that involves more in-depth reading and investigation than required by the group project. In particular, focus upon bringing one aspect of the environmental issue you have studied into dialogue with a particular voice or set of voices speaking to this issue from a religious perspective. Further, how do religious scholars and activists bring theological and ethical analyses to this issue that secular activists do not employ? What does a religious perspective on this issue offer that is unique? Master’s degree students should feel free to explore aspects of this topic relevant for current or anticipated work in ministry, while doctoral students are encouraged to write as though preparing an article for publication in a theological journal. The paper should draw upon course readings as well as outside readings. Due December 16.

**Schedule of Classes and Assignments**

September 4:

Introductions
Video: "Keeping the Earth"

September 11: Earth and Its Distress

Rasmussen, Earth Community, Earth Ethics, Preface, Introduction, Part I, "A Slow Womb," "Sweet Betsy and Her Avalanche," "Three Revolutions or Four?", 23-74
Handouts on Johannesburg Summit 2002/World Summit on Sustainable Development

September 18: Points of Christian Moral Reference
*Environmental Autobiography paper due
*Sign-up sheet distributed to indicate interest for group projects.
Rasmussen, Earth Community, Earth Ethics, Part II, "The Vine Languishes, the Merry-Hearted Sigh," 188-194.
Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), A Small World After All: Women Assess the State of the Environment in the U.S. and Beyond, Foreword, 5; Introduction, 6-7; "Women Shaping the Future," 8-9; "Sustainable Development and Peace," 12-13.Recommended Reading:

September 25: Earth

Video: In the Light of Reverence
*Time allotted for research groups to meet the last hour of class.

Recommended Reading:

October 2: Earth II

Guest speakers: Clare Butterfield and Bill Eyring from CNT
*Time allotted for research groups to meet the last hour of class.
Choose one of the following two chapters of Greenberg, A Natural History of Chicago: Ch. 3, "In Quality Diminished: Prairie Settlement and Conservation", 37-63, or Ch. 10, "Lake Michigan’s Rim: Beaches, Dunes and Bluffs," 242-271.

Recommended Reading:

October 9: Water
Guest speaker: Rev. Dr. Mari E. Castellanos, Minister for the Justice and Peace Action Network, Justice and Witness Ministries, UCC.

*A 1-2 page draft proposal for the group research projects should be submitted to the professor.

Recommended Reading:

October 16: Water II
Weaver, Jace, ed., Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice, Young, ch. 5, "'Beyond the Water Line," and Sam-Cromarty, ch. 6, "Family Closeness," 85-106.

Recommended Reading:
October 23: Air and Fire


Recommended Reading:

October 30: Animals


Recommended Reading:

November 6: Biodiversity


Recommended Reading:

November 13: Group Presentations/Biodiversity II

236-242.
Shiva, Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge, chs. 4-7.

Recommended Reading:

November 20: Group Presentations/Population-Consumption Debates

November 27: Reading Week/Thanksgiving Recess

December 4: Conversion to Earth: The Constructive Tasks

*Group Reports due
Weaver, Defending Mother Earth, Fassett, "Afterword: Where Do We Go From Here?" 177-191.

Recommended Reading:
Rasmussen, Earth Community, Earth Ethics, "Song of Songs," 295-316.

December 11: Conversion to Earth: The Constructive Tasks II

Hessel and Rasmussen, eds., Earth Habitat, Hessel, "Conclusion: The Church Ecologically Reformed," 185-206.

Recommended Reading:
December 16: Final Papers due in Professor Parker’s faculty mailbox by noon.