**Grounding the Sacred: Religion and Ecology in the United States (Verter)**

| **Course Title** | Grounding the Sacred: Religion and Ecology in the United States  
Env/Rel 276 |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Instructor(s)** | Bradford Verter  
Visiting Assistant Professor in American Religion  
Williams College |
| **Discipline** | Religion |
| **Subject(s)** | Environmental Studies; Religion |
| **Pedagogical Level** | Undergraduate |
| **Date** | Spring 2000 |
| **Presentation** | Williams College |

**Overview**

**Course Description**

Combining perspectives from environmental history, environmental ethics, and American studies, this course examines the spiritual dimensions of the relationship between the Earth and its human inhabitants in what is now the United States. First, we will examine the ways cultural and theological assumptions have shaped peoples’ treatment of the natural world. Then we will look at the ways changes in the environment have influenced human social and cultural patterns. Finally, we will critically assess some of the major ethical responses to ecological issues.

**Format**

This course is divided into two parts:

- Part 1: Locating the Divine
- Part 2: Locating the Human

**Prerequisites**

None listed

**Requirements**

Requirements
Attendance, Participation, Response Papers  25%
Short Papers  45%
Final Take-Home Exam  30%

1. **Attendance, Participation, Response Papers**
   Regular attendance and active participation, including the preparation of very brief, one page response papers for each class.

2. **Short Papers**
   Three short, 3–5 page, papers, due on February 25, March 17, and April 21. (Each paper is worth 15% of the total grade).

3. **Final Take-Home Exam**
   Due on May 17

**Evaluation**
See “Course Requirements.”

**Texts**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


_______. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 3d ed. New Haven, Conn.: Yale
University Press, 1982.

In addition, there is an extensive reading packet, available from the distribution center in the basement of Stetson Hall. A copy of the reading packet is also on reserve in Sawyer Library.

Schedule

Part 1: Locating the Divine
Feb 3  Introduction: Constructing Nature
Assigned Reading


Week 1: European Dislocations
Feb 8  The Long, Hard Fall from Eden

Assigned Reading

- *Genesis 1–3

Recommended Reading
- Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 23–43.

Feb 10  Gendering Nature
Assigned Reading


Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 23–43.
**Week 2: European Dislocations 2**

**Feb 15**  
**Mastering Nature**  
Assigned Reading


**Feb 17**  
**Puritans in the Wilderness**

Assigned Reading


**Recommended Reading**


**Week 3: Environmental Change in Colonial America**

**Feb 22**  
**Keepers of the Game**

Assigned Reading


**Feb 24**  
**Changes in the Land**

Assigned Reading

Feb 25  **No Class**  
Assignments Due

- Paper 1 Due (by 5:00 pm)

**Week 4: Pastorals**

Feb 29  **Agrarian Nationalism**  
Assigned Reading


Mar 2  **Domestic Pastoral**  
Assigned Reading


**Week 5: Transcendent Landscapes**

Mar 7  **The Sublime Landscape**  
Assigned Reading


**Recommended Reading**

Mar 9  **Transcendental Landscape**  
Assigned Reading


  Recommended Reading  

**Week 6: Gospels of Nature**  
Mar 14  **Gospels of Nature**  
Assigned Reading


  Recommended Reading  

Mar 16  **Gospels of Nature**  
Assigned Reading


Mar 17  **No Class**

Assignments Due

- Paper 2 Due (by 5:00 pm)

**Spring Break**

**Part Two: Locating the Human**
Week 7: Preservation vs. Conservation

Apr 4  
**The Frontier**
Assigned Reading


Apr 6  
**Showdown at Hetch Hetchy**
Assigned Reading


Recommended Reading


Week 8: Land Ethics

Apr 11  
**A Land Ethic**
Assigned Reading


Recommended Reading


Apr 13  
**Another Land Ethic**
Assigned Reading

Week 9: Pollution
Apr 18 Environmental Apocalypses
Assigned Reading


Recommended Reading


Apr 20 Environmental Justice
Assigned Reading


Apr 21 No Class

Assignments Due

• Paper 3 Due (by 5:00 pm)

Week 10: More Land Ethics
Apr 25 Deep Ecology
Assigned Reading


Recommended Reading


Apr 27  
**Ecofeminism**

Assigned Reading


Week 11: Green Theologies

May 2  
**Greening God**

Assigned Reading


Recommended Reading


May 4  
**Sacralizing the Earth**

Assigned Reading

• *David Spangler, “Imagination, Gaia, and the Sacredness of the Earth,” in *This Sacred Earth*, 611–19.


### Week 12: Answers and Questions

**May 9**

**Bioregionalism**

Assigned Reading


**May 11**

**The Ramifications of Social Construction**

Assigned Reading


**May 17**

**No Class**

Assignments Due

- Take-Home Final Exam Due (by 5:00 pm)
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