

CHID 480A/GWSS 490C: Grappling with Environmental Destruction

Winter 2017 • University of Washington

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Overview

Course Overview:

This course turns to environmental studies, feminist studies, and critical animal studies in order to grapple with the realities of environmental destruction. We will look at multiple sites of unsustainable practices including pollution, toxic waste dumping, resource extraction, water dams, and animal agriculture both through a critical theoretical lens as well as through grounded analysis of how these industries affect the Pacific Northwest landscape in which this class is situated. In analyzing patterns of environmental destruction as well as environmental protection discourses, we will strategically apply an intersectional framework to assess how both value certain lives and disregard others. More specifically, we will analyze how racism, colonialism, sexism, transphobia and speciesism shape our environment and our discussions of protecting it. Course materials will include scholarly texts, activist works, and popular media and will be supplemented by guest speakers and optional field trips to the Ballard Locks, to the Duwamish River Superfund site, to Pigs Peace Sanctuary, and to the Mount Rainier National Park.

I intend for this to be a collaborative classroom environment, where we will together hone our critical thinking and writing skills together to explore how writing can be a useful medium to resist environmental destruction. In order to hone our writing skills, we will be regularly writing and reviewing each other's work in class (primarily on Wednesdays) as well as reviewing each other's collaborative writing projects. Throughout the course, we will be engaging with many different types of writing — academic texts, popular science, poetry, zines, spoken word, speculative fiction — in an effort to provide you with many models to adapt for your own use. Additionally, I will meet with each of you twice over the quarter to discuss your writing in detail, once in groups and once individually. Because students inevitably bring different strengths and struggles, I will offer optional readings about writing to help bolster your writing skills throughout the quarter.

Moreover, this course includes an optional service-learning component for students who are interested in more extensive reflection through working with a local environmental protection organization. Over the course of the quarter, we will be examining our embodied relationships to the natural world. Participating in a Service-Learning project will deepen this experience. Students who opt to do so will be expected to keep a weekly journal on their projects as well as to incorporate their work in their final project.

Role of Service-Learning in the Course

For service-learning organizations:

Because there are a variety of different organizations, students' research topics will range from conservation work to toxin cleanup to broader environmental justice concerns. Students' participation in your organization is not just to ground their learning in the class; as a course grounded in social justice, I expect students to contribute in ways that are useful to your organization through practical service or research, which will also expose them to important aspects of the topic. I will be asking students to keep a regular journal and incorporate their service-learning experiences into their final papers in a way that is respectful of members of the organization. I am, of course, happy to discuss this with your volunteer coordinator.

Assignments Related to Service-Learning

