

CIN 4900: Ecocinema

M/W 9am-11:47am, MSC 93



"we can be ethical only toward what we can see" - Aldo Leopold

Instructor: Prof. Hunter Vaughan

Office Hours: 127 ODH, W 12-1, 4-5pm, y or by appointment

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Course Overview: Ecocinema offers students a complex look at the intersection between screen culture and the environment, addressing the most pressing global problem of the twenty-first century through a variety of film, media, and literary texts. Looking at problems of how films and other media represent nature, the ecological impact of a text's life cycle from production to disposal, and how film and other media act as a tool to educate and enact ecological values, behaviors, and policies, Ecocinema cultivates an understanding of important environmental issues and sharpens appreciation for the multifaceted impact of moving-image culture on the natural world. Students will read important environmental and critical studies texts, will watch fiction and documentary feature films and televisual and digital shorts, will interact with online interfaces, and will have the opportunity to produce original video content.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this course, students should be able:

- to identify the geopolitical, cultural, and industrial contexts that have influenced representations of nature and the environment in screen media;
- to have a raised ecological awareness and heightened engagement with the connection between screen culture and the environment;
- to understand & write confidently about key concepts in film, cultural, and environmental studies, and
- to refine your research, writing, and critical thinking skills, and prepare a final paper that could be used as a writing sample for jobs or graduate school apps.

Overview of Course Policies:

- * Regular attendance is expected. Be prompt and stay through the class time.
- * Check your email--class announcements might be posted electronically.
- * Be present and respectful. Students are expected to be considerate of the instructor and other classmates—this is a collective experience and depends on everyone's contribution. Cell phones must be OFF during class. Shut it down, turn it off: we're going to go fully present in this class: actual people, interactive, and in real time.

Assignments and Grade:

100 pts.

Participation & Attendance	=	15 pts.
Presentations (10 pts apiece)	=	30 pts.
Media & the Environment Reflection & Video	=	15 pts.
Research Plan/Multimedia Presentation (11/24)	=	5 pts.
Paper 2: Research Paper (12/10)	=	35 pts.

Assignments: Assignments/Coursework: Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to participate, having done all reading and viewing assigned. Students will take turns leading discussion on weekly readings, which will include three discussion questions, a presentation, and an example of a media text or format as a launch pad for exploring key concepts for the week. Students will also make three presentations, as designated in the Weekly Schedule; these will include ten-minute audio-visual presentations including PowerPoint or Keynote, online content, and/or clips. Students will write a Self-Study paper as well as a Research Paper, as well as a Research Plan and presentation for the latter.

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due. All essays are to be typed, double-spaced, 1" margins all around, and in a font no larger or smaller than 12 pt. Times New Roman. For environmental reasons, double-sided printing is preferred. This is a university course: well-crafted and coherent prose is highly valued at this level of scholarship, and all writing should be free of typos and basic errors.

*Late submissions: work turned in after the due date will incur a grade reduction of 1/3 letter grade per day; electronic submissions will be graded, but receive no feedback.

*Note on citation style: writing assignments should use footnotes and must cite works according to the Chicago Style. For more information, quick manual, and examples, visit this link: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Participation and Conduct: Participation is worth 15% of the course grade: students are expected to come to class on time and prepared, to be attentive in class and to contribute to class discussions. Students are expected to be respectful of the instructor and other classmates—this is a collective experience, and depends on everyone's contribution. Cell phones and pagers must be off (*not* set to vibrate) during class, and laptop computers are not allowed. Shut it down, turn it off: we're going to go fully human in this class: actual people in real time, interactive and in the flesh. Any student with a ringing cell phone or typing a text message will be dismissed from class and an absence will be recorded.

Research Paper: Students will submit a 12-15 page final research paper at the end of the semester that demonstrates historical and critical understanding of the environmental ramifications of screen culture.

Reflection Essay: Students will write a 3-page reflection essay on how they engage with environmental media, whether as something for education, entertainment, or aesthetic experience. This should include a specific textual example and detailed textual analysis of how the film, television, or online text creates and communicates its environmental message.

HONOR CODE AND PLAGIARISM STATEMENTS: Students enrolled in this course are expected to abide by the University of Miami Honor Code. The purpose of the Honor Code is to protect the academic integrity of the University by encouraging consistent ethical behavior in assigned coursework. Academic dishonesty of any kind, for whatever reason, will not be tolerated. No honest student wants to be guilty of the intellectual crime of plagiarism, even unintentionally. Therefore, we provide you with these guidelines so that you don't accidentally fall into the plagiarism trap. Plagiarism is the taking of someone else's words, work, or ideas, and passing them off as a product of your own efforts. Plagiarism may occur when a person fails to place quotation marks around someone else's exact words, directly rephrasing or paraphrasing someone else's words while still following the general form of the original, and/or failing to issue the proper citation to one's source material.

In student papers, plagiarism is often due to...

- turning in someone else's paper as one's own
- using another person's data or ideas without acknowledgment
- failing to cite a written source (printed or internet) of information that you used to collect data or ideas
- copying an author's exact words and putting them in the paper without quotation marks
- rephrasing an author's words and failing to cite the source
- copying, rephrasing, or quoting an author's exact words and citing a source other than where the material was obtained. (For example, using a secondary source which cites the original material, but citing only the primary material. This misrepresents the nature of the scholarship involved in creating the paper. If you have not read an original publication, do not cite it in your references as if you have!)
- using wording that is very similar to that of the original source, but passing it off as one's own.

The last item is probably the most common problem in student writing. It is still plagiarism if the student uses an author's key phrases or sentences in a way that implies they are his/her own, even if s/he cites the source.

Academic Conduct: Students must adhere to the University's Academic Conduct policy, the details of which are available at <http://www.oakland.edu/?id=1610&sid=75>. Plagiarism (or the representation of someone else's work as your own) is prohibited, and will result in failing the course.

Add/Drop: The University add/drop policy will be explicitly followed. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the University deadline dates for dropping the course.

Attendance Policy: An attendance sign-in sheet will be circulated during each class. Students are responsible for making sure that they sign in. Two or more unexcused absences will result in a lowering of the overall course grade by 1/3 grade (B+ becomes a B). Conference or similar event proof or medical documentation is required for an excused absence. Excessive absences will result in grade deduction. STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE CLASSROOM REGARDLESS OF HIS OR HER PRESENCE.

Policy on Make-Ups: Make-up assignments will not be accepted, except in the case of excused absence (which requires official documentation) and the permission by instructor.

DSS Accommodations: Students who have learning, psychological, and/or physical disabilities may be eligible for accommodations that provide equal access to educational programs and activities at Oakland University. Students should notify me *early on* in the semester with a Faculty Notification Letter from the Office of Disability Support Services (DSS) regarding accommodation requests. Eligibility for services can be discussed by contacting DSS at 248-370-3266, room 103A North Foundation Hall.

****Syllabus may change, with ample forewarning, at the discretion of the teacher.***

Weekly Schedule

PART 1: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL REPRESENTATIONS

Sept 5 **An Introduction to Ecocinema - *Promised Land*** (Van Sant, 2012)

Sept 10-12 **Environmentalism & Representation - *A River Runs Through It*** (Redford, 1992)

Readings Ingram, "One: Discourses of Nature and Environmentalism,"
 "Two: The Cinematography of Wilderness Landscapes,"
 Berila, "Engaging the Land, Positioning the Spectator"

Sept 17-19 **Documenting the Natural - *Blackfish*** (Cowperthwaite, 2013)

Readings Ingram, "Seven: North American Ocean Fauna"
 Cubitt, "The Blue Planet"

Wednesday In-class screening: *Blue Planet*

Sept 24-26 **Eco-Materialism and Poetics of Nature - *Singin' in the Rain*** (Donen/Kelly, 1952)

Readings Vaughan, "500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust"
 Gabrys, *Digital Rubbish*: "Introduction"

Wednesday In-class screening: *Digital Dumping Grounds*

PART 2: IDENTITY POLITICS OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Oct 01-03 **Narration and Identification - *An Inconvenient Truth*** (Guggenheim, 2006)

Readings Dunaway, "The Strange Career of *An Inconvenient Truth*"

Wednesday In-class screening: *Racing Extinction* (Psihoyos, 2015)

Oct 08-10 **Temporality, Race/Ethnicity, and the Environment - *Baraka*** (Fricke, 1992)

Readings Sturgeon, "The Politics of the Natural..."
 Niocle Seymour, "It's Just Not Turning Up"

In-class viewing: *Safe* (Todd Haynes, 1995)

Oct 15-17 Gender and Nature in Animation - *Wall-E* (Stanton, 2008)

Readings Moore, "Green Screen or Smokescreen?"
Sells, "Where the Mermaids Stand"

Wednesday: Presentations: Animation! (*Bambi* / *Ferngully* / *Spirited Away*...)

Oct 22-24 Globalization and Environmental Morality- *The Cove* (Psihoyos, 2009)

Readings Smail, "Emotion, Argumentation, and Documentary Traditions"

Due Wednesday 10/24: Media & the Environment Reflection Essay

**PART 3:
SCREENING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & ACTIVISM**

Oct 29-31 Screen Rhetoric and Activism – *Merchants of Doubt* (Kenner/Oreskes, 2014)

Readings: Minster, "The Rhetoric of Ascent"
Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate*

Wednesday In-class screening: *Gasland* (Josh Fox, 2010/13)

Nov 05-07 Environmental Celebrity – *Before the Flood* (Stevens, 2016)

Readings: Dunaway, "Meryl Streep...Rise of Green Consumerism"
View: 1990 *Earth Day Special*

Wednesday In-class screening: *When the Levees Broke* (Spike Lee, 2006)

Nov 12-14 Impact Assessment 1 – *Food, Inc.* (Kenner, 2008)

Readings Blakley et al, "Changing Appetites and Changing Minds"

Wednesday In-class screening: *Cowspiracy* (Kip Andersen, 2014)

Nov 19-21 Research and Multi-Media Presentations

Monday Multi-Media and Research Plan Presentations

Wednesday *NO CLASS: HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!

Nov 26-28 Impact Assessment 2 -*The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004)

Readings Anthony Leiserowitz, "Surveying the Impact of *THDAT*"

Presentations: Natural Disaster Movies!! (*Snowpiercer, Titanic, Deep Impact...*)

Dec 3-5 Media Resource Use: *Cradle to Cradle* - *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009)

Readings Jennifer Gabrys, *Digital Rubbish*: "Introduction"

Dec 10 FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS - FINAL PROJECT REPORT DUE