

GLOBAL ENV ETHICS: POLITICS, POLICY, & JUSTICE

PHIL 243-DL1 | ONLINE COURSE | Dr. James (Jamie) C. Olsen

Office Hours

On Zoom, by appointment

Required Assignments

- Reading Quizzes 30%
- Lifestyle Experiment 10%
- Field Trip Reflections 12%
- Env Ethics Podcast 22%
- Policy & Ethics Op-Ed 26%

More details below and on Blackboard

Required Texts

Subscribe to

—[EHN Good News headlines](#)

Purchase

—Niesenbaum, Richard. *Sustainable Solutions*. OUP (2019).

—Hourdequin, Marion. *Environmental Ethics*. Bloomsbury (2015).

—*Subscribe to Environmental Health News (ehn.org) to receive the headlines daily in your email (and read those headlines regularly!)*.



When Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, the environmental movement was itself relatively silent. Today, however, environmentalism is among the most pressing and prominent issues in public discourse—both local and global. We’re undergoing a transformation as large and significant as the industrial revolution at the speed of the digital revolution. Governments and policy makers scramble to cope with these changes, and the environment has come to dominate international affairs.

This course will focus on the both the moral and global political dimensions, as well as solutions to the complex problems we face. We will read about the theories foundational to the environmental movement as well as contemporary moral philosophers on the nature of ethics and justice both for humans and with regard to non-human nature. Key to our analysis will be questions concerning global justice and what it demands of international policy. In addition to this macro-level examination, we will drill down to the personal level: What responsibilities do you have to other humans, plants, animals, and ecosystems, how do these responsibilities bear on your personal lifestyle? Jumping into the midst of a complex and interdisciplinary brawl, you will learn to communicate clearly and effectively on one of today’s most salient issues.



A note on engagement

You will spend an awful lot of our time working on the course this semester, and I want it to be worthwhile and enjoyable, a course in which you truly learn, which means I want you engaged. The elephant in the room here is that **this is an entirely**

asynchronous online course:

outside of office hours we will never meet at the same time!

For some, this is a huge breath of fresh air and flexibility. For others, this might be rough. Nothing kills a course like silence and feeling like there's no human on the other side of your Blackboard screen. So I promise I'll do my best to make sure you know that I'm here! And I ask you to be similarly proactive—reach out for clarification, for help, or just to get to know me better and shoot the breeze about the environmental stuff you care about!

I recommend two strategies:

- *Designate a Philosophy/Environmental friend.* Literally. This will work best with someone with whom you already talk on a regular basis. Commit them to checking in with you every few days (e.g., twice a week) to find out how things are going in the class. Talk specifics.
- *Stay on top of things.* In the past, the students who have been most successful in my asynchronous online classes are those who have treated it like a job, with regularly scheduled work hours and a plan for completing each module and each module's assignments. This level of rigidity won't be possible for some of you (either because of the erratic nature of your schedule or your personality). But *stay on top of things!*

Course Learning Objectives

Overall, my goal is a class that deeply interests and engages you at the same time that it improves your ability to responsibly and competently contribute to the human dialogue mentioned above.

Whether I am successful will be a function not only of my design and implementation, but also of your personal engagement with the material and with one another. On my part, I'm pedagogically committed to ensuring that before you leave this class you will:

1. Reflect deeply:

—Consider not only the causes of and approaches to coping with environmental degradation, but the values (explicit and implicit) embedded in this degradation and those that stand behind various options being urged

—Gain a more thorough understanding of the contemporary politics, policies and ethical stakes involved in questions of the environment – allowing you to analyze the moral underpinnings of policy design, and other forms of collective action

—Ponder your own personal obligations, as connected to your individual lifestyle as well as your institutional and political engagements

—Think through options on how to live well given the extent of human suffering and species extinction stemming from human actions

2. Argue:

—Analyze the various approaches to environmental ethics

—Articulate the role that ethics plays in policy and politics

—Develop your own moral argument in an area specific to global policy

3. Communicate:

—Become significantly more aware of and able to discuss the types of environmental challenges related to climate change that we currently face

—Articulate your thoughts in the form of personal reflection, public exhortation, and academic argument

4. Savor the absolute privilege of learning and thinking seriously and arguing about humanity's greatest non-nuclear crisis while in the company of incredible people

Oh, and one more...

5. Consider becoming a hard-core, fire-breathing, pulpit-pounding, breathtakingly creative, polymathical, existentially committed environmental activist!



Course Schedule:

UNIT-MODULE 1 Environment, Science, and Governance	
<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niesenbaum Ch 1: “The Problems We Must Solve” • Niesenbaum Ch 2: “Developing Sustainable solutions” • Niesenbaum Ch 12: “Sustainable Development and Global Sustainability” • <i>Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics</i> OHEE, Parker, “Environmental science: Empirical claims in environmental ethics” • OHEE, Butt, “Law, governance, and the ecological ethos” 	<p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Quiz • Field Trip 1 (a place in nature) • 3-Day Lifestyle Project
UNIT-MODULE 2 Environmental Ethics	
<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hourdequin – Ch 1 “Bringing Values to Light” • Hourdequin – Ch 2 “Classical Ethical Theories and the Environment” • Hourdequin – Ch 3 “Anthropocentrism and Its Critics” • Hourdequin – Ch 4 “The Social Dimensions of Environmental Problems” • Hourdequin – Ch 5 “Ethics, Institutions, and the Environment” 	<p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Quiz • Field Trip 2 (an institution) • 7-Day Lifestyle Project
UNIT-MODULE 3 Justice	
<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OHEE, Bell, “Justice on One Planet” • Simon Caney, “Two Kinds of Climate Justice: Avoiding Harm and Sharing Burdens.” • Moellendorf: “Climate Change and Global Justice” • OHEE, Norton, “Sustainability as a Multigenerational Public Interest” 	<p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Quiz • Field Trip 3 • Podcast Milestone 1 • Op-Ed First Draft

UNIT-MODULE 4 Collective Action Problems and Responsibility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sinnott-Armstrong – “It’s Not My Fault • Hourdequin – “Climate, Collective Action, and Individual Ethical Obligation” • Niesenbaum Ch 9: “Sustainability at the Most Local Level—The Individual” • Young – “A Social Connection Model” and “Responsibility Across Borders” pgs 123-125, 142-151 	Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Quiz • Podcast Milestone 2 • Op-Ed Revision & Reflection • Read & discuss Op-Ed with a peer
UNIT-MODULE 5 The Future & Hope	
Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on the Biodiversity Treaty • Update on the Plastics Treaty • Update on climate negotiations • Hourdequin Ch 8, “Engaging Environmental Concern, Promoting Change” • Walker, “Hope’s Value” 	Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Quiz • Submit Op-Ed to a <i>local</i> newspaper • Post Podcast online by May 8

Note: Classes end on April 29, at which point all assignments are due except for the **Podcast posting online, which is due 11:59pm on May 8.**



Note on Readings:

I have intentionally shortened the readings for this course. **We'll only be reading about 3/4 of what I would normally assign** (and I normally only assign a doable amount of reading). This is not because I intend for this to be “easy;” but **because I absolutely demand that you perform the readings; and because I want us to focus on analyzing, digesting, and understanding the material that we study.**

Assignment Notes:

1. **Reading Quizzes:** Studies show that we get a large learning bang for our buck with quizzes. Consequently, each unit or module will include a Reading Quiz. The quizzes are objective, and the questions are focused on elements that I think are important for you to know—they are not meant to trip you up or test you on minutia. That said, it will be hard to do well on these if you don't carefully read and take notes on the reading (see above; also, these are entirely open-note, open-book; but not open-person or open-internet). *They will also ask you to share specific articles from your reading in the headlines.*
2. **Field Trips:** You'll be asked to design and take 3 field trips during the semester: one to a place you consider “natural,” one to an institution to interview/visit with someone, and one to an activist meeting or event. In the wake of your field trips, you'll reflect on connections between your experience and the texts we read, and then write a reflection making those connections clear.
3. **Lifestyle Experiment Projects:** You'll be given two opportunities to perform a change in your lifestyle—one for three days and one for seven days. In each case, you'll have a range of options in terms of what you do. Once again, after each, you'll write a response that makes explicit connections between our course texts and your experience.
4. **Podcast:** As noted above, an ability to communicate generally what we study and learn is a critical goal for our class. You'll have the opportunity to do this with both a podcast and an op-ed. There will be two milestones along the way before the actual podcast itself is due.
5. **Op-Ed:** We'll read a number of op-eds as part of class, and you'll see many more in the EHN headlines that you're reading. In addition, you will write and revise and ultimately submit your own op-ed to a local newspaper (i.e., *not* a national paper like the WashPo or NYT or WSJ).

Further information on each of these can be found on Blackboard. It is imperative that you carefully read the instructions before engaging in any of these assignments.



Note on Grades:

Grades have a long and complicated history, and higher education needs a grading overhaul. Among other things, I'm convinced that at least with regard to grades, Goodhart's Law is accurate: "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure."¹ Grades are meant to tell you *how* you're doing; but for numerous reasons, in our system they've become the *target*, the goal of classes. This is perverse. **Especially when studying the existential crisis humanity faces with environmental challenges, I want you focused primarily on learning rather than your grade. I want you to learn all you possibly can in 14 weeks time about our greatest collective challenge** and what you can do to help us steer toward a better rather than a worse future.

Outside of the Reading Quizzes, the assignments here are designed to be meaningful, authentic experiences that will help you learn, and that I hope you will want to share with others. If you do the work according to the instructions, you will get the points.

Grade scale:

96.8-100 A+	86.7-89.9 B+	76.7-79.9 C+	65.1-69.9 D
93.4-96.7 A	83.3-86.6 B	73.3-76.6 C	60.0-65.0 D-
90.0-93.3 A-	80.0-83.2 B-	70.0-73.2 C-	<60 F

Course Policies

1. **Take notes by hand** unless you have serious need to use your laptop; studies are clear that handwritten notes help you learn better.
2. **Please do not turn in assignments** between 12-7am. Sleep during that time. Whenever possible, sleep a solid 8+ hours before coming to class.
3. **Flexibility:** I do not believe it is my job to teach you how to meet deadlines. **You can always hand assignments in up to 24 hours late, no questions asked.** If you need more time than that, simply reach out to me. That's what I do in my job—I keep my boss informed if I'm going to miss a deadline. What I care about is you doing the work and doing it in a way that you feel good about. So just reach out and keep me updated.
4. **All assignments are handed in via Blackboard.** If there are any technical difficulties, feel free to email me an assignment.
5. **Email is my preferred way of being contacted.** That said, I regularly receive over 200 emails each day, half of which require a response. **DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS WITHOUT FIRST TRYING TO FIND THE ANSWERS** in the syllabus or on Blackboard. More than courtesy, this

¹ Critical to all academic writing is citing the sources of your information and attributions. It's really quite simple: anytime you make an empirical claim or attribute a claim to someone else, make a footnote, just like this one, and tell the reader where it's coming from. In this case, my citation of Goodhart's Law is being taken from the following article on assessment in higher education in the UK system: Strathern, Marilyn. "'Improving Ratings': Audit in the British University System." *European Review* 5, no. 3 (1997): 305-21. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1234-981X(199707)5:3<305::AID-EURO184>3.0.CO;2-4. In addition to keeping you from inadvertently plagiarizing, citations are incredibly helpful in improving the accuracy and sophistication of your writing, and a critical element in the development of knowledge.

is an issue of logistical feasibility. I work hard to respond to inquiries within 24 hrs. **If it's been 48 hrs, please email me again!**

Campus Resources:

Life is real and struggle is universal. I've been teaching college classes for more than a dozen years, and every semester—including summers—I've had students lose a family member or loved one. My wife's father just died, and two weeks later I had a serious surgery from which I'm still recovering. I've lost loved ones recently, including two grandfathers to Covid and a cousin to suicide. And of course, there are a host of other challenges that we face, from the tragic frequency of sexual assault to growing challenges related to mental and other health conditions on college campuses. Racism takes a serious toll and illness poses its own challenges. **I'm not a counselor or a health care practitioner. But I care deeply about my students—all of them.** You're welcome to come to me with any concerns that you have, and I promise to help you seek out and find university services that might help or simply listen and brainstorm with you. You're also welcome to be vague but let me know you're struggling, and I promise to be as flexible as reason will allow me to be.

Academic Integrity

I care a great deal about increasing your intellectual capacities and general knowledge base and am concerned overall with helping you to flourish as a human being. That means I also care very much about your academic integrity. Because I care about you and your flourishing (and the flourishing of society to which you contribute), I will not tolerate dishonesty in any form.

The [Honor Code](#) is the central statement of the university's Honor System. All students are expected to subscribe to it upon entrance to the university. For me, this isn't about legal regulation; it's about what makes a good life. Doing your best work and doing it to learn and grow makes a good life. Merely checking boxes and jumping hoops and cutting corners to do so makes for a bad life.

