

Indigenous Ecologies

Professor: Leigh Bloch

Class Time: M & W 5:00-6:20 PM

Class Location: Brown 115

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Office Hours: Mondays, 2:30-4:30 or by appt.

Office Location: Brown 327



Serpent Mound in Ohio

Course Description

This course presents critical frameworks for understanding (1) environmental justice from the perspective of Indigenous movements for self-determination and (2) environmental science from the perspective of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in place. In a moment in which toxic ecologies and anthropogenic climate shifts proliferate across the globe, Indigenous scholars argue that apocalypse is not a future event but a historical one. This means re-situating environmental anxieties within the context of colonialism, and particularly extractive economic projects undertaken on stolen land that disrupt Indigenous peoples' place-based, multi-species relationships and ways of knowing. Building on Indigenous critiques in the philosophy of science, this class will discuss complex ways of knowing and relating to human and nonhuman others in worlds shaped by colonial entanglements and deep Indigenous histories. As dominant narratives the nature of nature crumble and scholars across disciplines increasingly question categories of nature/culture, human/animal, and subject/object, how might Native American and Indigenous studies (NAIS) intervene in the theory and practice of living together in more than human worlds? When can Indigenous knowledges be integrated into dominant conservation efforts and scientific discourses of colonial nation-states and when do they exceed these practices and present radical alternatives?

Course Goals

In this course, students will read, discuss, and analyze interdisciplinary scholarship that bridges issues in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Describe how environmental justice issues intersect with settler colonial practices of dispossession, capitalist logics of extraction, and Indigenous sovereignty struggles;
- Explain how social understandings of land, nature, and environment have historically been constructed within settler colonial contexts as well as Indigenous resistance to these constructions;
- Articulate how Indigenous studies scholars intervene in key debates across the humanities, social sciences, and environmental sciences about the Anthropocene, living together in multispecies worlds, the nature/culture binary, and the politics of knowledge;
- Intelligently discuss the politics of knowledge and environmentalism within colonial nation-states, as well as research methodologies that center environmental science on Indigenous ways of knowing and being (i.e., Indigenous sciences).

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course. Students who have completed prior coursework in Native American and Indigenous studies, anthropology, sociology, critical race theory, gender and sexuality studies, environmental studies, or the philosophy of science will be particularly well positioned for this course.

Grading

Students will be graded on participation in class discussions and written assignments.

Participation	35 points
Blog post #1	10 points
Blog post #2	10 points
Blog post #3	10 points
Final essay	30 points
Post-Essay Reflections	5 points

A: The student consistently makes creative contributions to class discussions and moves the conversation forward in significant ways. The student draws connections course materials to extend key concepts. Engages with both the instructor *and* with fellow students.

B: The student consistently contributes to class discussion and demonstrates a solid understanding of course materials. The student thinks through the readings, other students' comments, and one's own points well. Engages with both the instructor *and* with fellow students.

C: The student sometimes participates in class discussion and understands the basic facts of the readings, but perhaps not the big picture.

D: The student only infrequently participates in class discussion or makes statements that are unrelated or do not advance the project of the course. Only has a partial understanding of the materials. Spotty attendance.

F: The student does not consistently come to class, does not participate in or disrupts class discussion, or misses the point of course materials.

Participation

Class time will privilege discussion, with some time devoted to lecture as needed. As such, students must come to class having completed the readings and be prepared to discuss them. Please print out articles and essays so that you may reference them in class.

Departing from a “banking” model of education in which knowledge is “deposited” in students’ brains and “withdrawn” in tests, the goal of these discussions will be to practice the tools of critical analysis. Students are expected to reflect upon, deepen, and identify tensions or limits of the frameworks and critiques developed in the readings.

Talking about how one fits in within systems of colonial domination may make some non-Native students feel uncomfortable. I encourage students to “lean in” to this discomfort as part of the learning process. At minimum, students are expected to work to understand the arguments presented through the course.

Writing Assignments

All assignments must be proofread. The final essay must be double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins and numerated pages.

Blog Posts

Students will write three short essays over the course of the semester in the form of blog posts. Posts should stay within a limit of 750 words, not including citations. These will focus on course readings.

Please note that there are five deadlines for blog posts over the course of the semester, but you only have to complete three. If you complete four posts, I will drop your lowest grade. However, I will not accept five posts.

In addition to writing blog posts, I expect students to read and comment on their peer’s posts.

Final Paper

The final paper will be between 8-10 double-spaced pages in length. This assignment will take a synthetic approach to the semester.

Alternative Creative Option

Students may opt to take a more creative approach to the final essay, such as making a comic, painting, photo essay, etc. Students electing this option must write a 3-4 page explanation of their project, including how it relates to course materials and themes. Students must get approval from the professor before taking this option.

Late Policy

Late assignments will be docked five points for each day they are late.

Post-Assignment Reflections

Within 36 hours of completing each essay, please submit a brief response to the following two questions: 1) What do you think you did well in this assignment? 2) What could you have done better if you had more time?

These will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. Reflections that I consider good faith efforts will pass. I will only read your response after I grade your assignment. The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on your own learning process and identify areas you might continue to think through in the future.

Extra Credit

I may give you two points extra credit for attending events on Indigenous issues or settler colonialism held at Brandeis or in Greater Boston. You will have to write a 1-2 paragraph response that both summarizes and responds to the event. I retain discretion to determine whether or not any event is eligible for extra credit, so please consult with me beforehand.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University [Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at [LTS - Library guides](#).

Communications

Updates regarding the class, including syllabus changes and snow days, will be communicated by email.

Email Policy

I will respond to reasonable email inquiries within a reasonable timeframe: usually within 24 hours. I expect your emails to be courteous and professional: it is good etiquette to include a salutation and signature and to make the subject line relevant to the content. Proofread all emails before sending. Although grammar and email etiquette standards are ultimately a means of reproducing social hierarchies, I promise that having these skills will make your life easier.

Students with Disabilities

I do my best to make the classroom accessible, so please let me know what you need early in the semester. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

Trigger Warnings

Some of the materials we cover may be emotionally difficult and could trigger past traumas. If you need to step outside during class, you may always do so without academic penalty. You do not need to discuss your reactions with me afterwards, but if you wish to, I welcome such conversations as an important part of the coursework.

Assigned Texts

- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed.
- Hoover, Elizabeth. 2017. *The River is in Us: Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books.
- Voyles, Traci. 2015. *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Course Introduction

January 16:

- No readings

PART I: COLONIAL ECOLOGIES

Week 2: Water is Life

January 21 (no class)

January 22:

- Nick Estes. 2016. "Fighting for Our Lives: NoDAPL in Historical Context." *The Red Nation*.
- Essays in *Cultural Anthropology*'s blog series, "Standing Rock, #NoDAPL, and Mni Wiconi"

January 23:

- Winona LaDuke. 2002. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Environmental Futures." *Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law and Policy* 4(1): 127-48.
- Ranco, Darren J., Catherine A. O'Neil, Jamie Donatuto, and Barbara L. Harper. 2011. "Environmental Justice, American Indians, and the Cultural Dilema: Developing Environmental Management for Tribal Health and Well-Being." *Environmental Justice* 4 (4): 221-230.

Week 3: Apocalypse as a Historical Event: Rethinking the Anthropocene

January 28:

- Couthard, Glen. 2014. "Introduction" and "For the Land."
- Optional: Wolfe, Patrick and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui. "Patrick Wolf on Settler Colonialism." In *Speaking of Indigenous Politics*, edited by J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, 343-364. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

January 30:

- Whyte, Kyle Powys. 2017. "Our Ancestor's Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation in the Anthropocene." In *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, edited by Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann. New York: Routledge.
- Davis, Heather and Zoe Todd. 2017. "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *AMCE: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16(2):761-780.
- Wildcat, Daniel. 2009. "The Truth is Not Inconvenient—It is Deadly." In *Red Alert*, 23-38. Golden, CO: Fulcrum.

Week 4: The Social Construction of Nature

February 4:

- Voyles, *Wastelanding*, pages vii-86

February 6:

- Guest Speaker: Jennifer Weston

Week 5: Laying Waste

February 11:

- Voyles, *Wastelanding*, pages 87-150

February 13:

- Voyles, *Wastelanding*, pages 151-218

Blog Post 1 Due Feb 13: The Water Is Life Movement/Rethinking the Anthropocene

Week 6

NO CLASS

PART II: DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES

Week 7: Power, Knowledge, Decolonization

February 25:

- Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, "Colonizing Knowledges" and "Research Adventures on Indigenous Lands"
- Optional: Smith, "Notes from Down Under"

February 27:

- Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, "The Indigenous Peoples' Project: Setting a New Agenda" and "Responding to the Imperatives of an Indigenous Agenda: A Case Study of Maori"
- Optional: Smith, "Twenty-five Indigenous Projects"

Blog Post 2 Due Feb 27: Wastelanding

Week 8: Community-Based Research in Indigenous Contexts

March 4:

- Guest Speaker: Larry Spotted Crow Mann

March 6:

- Indigenous Science Statement on the March for Science
- Hoover, *The River is in Us*, Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1 (up to page 68)

Week 9: Caring for Water and Land

March 11:

- Hoover, Chapter 1, 69-122

March 13:

- Hoover, Chapter 3, 123-166

Blog Post 3 Due March 13: Decolonizing Methodologies

Week 10: Caring for Water and Land

March 18:

- Hoover, Chapter 4, 167-218

March 20:

- Hoover, Chapter 5 and conclusion, 219-276

Week 11: Braiding Knowledges

March 25:

- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Preface” and “Planting Sweetgrass”

March 27

- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Tending Sweetgrass”

Week 12: Indigenous Science

April 1:

- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, part of “Picking Sweetgrass,” 121-175

April 3

- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, finish “Picking Sweetgrass” and first part of “Braiding Sweetgrass,” 175-223

Blog Post 4 Due April 3: The Water is In Us

Week 13: Land and Health

April 8:

- Guest Lecture: Maria John

April 10:

- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, finish “Braiding Sweetgrass,” 223-303

Week 14: Land and Health

April 15:

- Film: Putuparri and the Rain Makers

April 17:

- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Burning Sweetgrass” and “Epilogue”

Week 15

NO CLASS

PART III: CIRCLING AROUND

Week 16: Indigenous Materialisms

April 27:

- Lisa Brooks. 2008. “*Alnôbawgôgan, Wlôgan, Awikhigan*: Entering Native Space.” In *The Common Pot*, 1-50. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

April 29:

- Watts, Vanessa. 2013. “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!).” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 2 (1): 20–34.
- Todd, Zoe. 2018. “Refracting the State Through Human-Fish Relations: Fishing, Indigenous Legal Orders and Colonialism in North/Western Canada.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 7 (1): 60-75.

Blog Post 5 Due April 29: Braiding Sweetgrass

Week 17: Making Life in Worlds of Extinction

May 3

- Rose, Deborah Bird. 2011. “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?” and “Looking into Extinction.” In *Wild Dog Dreaming*, 1-28. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Murphy, Michelle. 2017. “Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations.” *Cultural Anthropology* 32 (4): 494-503