

**RE 225: Religion and Ecology  
Spring 2012**

**Instructor: Dr. Mary Zeiss Stange  
Ladd 213**

**Office Hours: Wed. 2:00-4:00, Fri. 9:00-Noon, and by appt.**

**Office Phone: x5408**

**Home Phone: 587-6380**

**E-mail: mstange@skidmore.edu**

An exploration of the critical connections between religion and the natural environment. How do religious beliefs, symbol systems, and ritual behaviors shape human perceptions of, and interactions with, the nonhuman environment? How might the primary models provided by western, eastern and indigenous religions help us to address specific local and global environmental concerns? Using primary texts drawn from a variety of sacred traditions, and writings from a broad spectrum of historical and contemporary naturalists, poets and theologians, the course will cover such topics as ecotheology, deep ecology, ecofeminism, nature mysticism, new age religious movements, bioregionalism and social ecology.

While the perspective of this course is necessarily global, throughout the semester our emphasis will be on “bringing it all back home,” i.e. applying the principle of thinking globally and acting locally. Our models and guides for this process will be four authors—Dillard, LaDuke, Nelson and Snyder—who have taken to heart the deep cross-cultural kinship between religious and ecological awareness.

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- *Describe* and *critically evaluate* some of the major issues and themes constituting the developing field of religion and ecology.
- *Appreciate* the diverse and complex relationship between religion and ecology as this relationship plays out in specific social, cultural, and geographic contexts.
- *Recognize* and *analyze* different forms of “eco-theology,” and emerging modes of “eco-religious” belief and practice, in light of on-going debates over “green” forms of religiosity and the political implications of “the sacred.”
- *Designate* ways in which environmental, economic and social justice issues intersect, with special emphasis on the religious responses that have recently emerged to address this intersection.
- *Understand* elements of racism, sexism and colonialism undergirding some forms of Western environmentalism, and *strive for* a stance of critical accountability in their engagement both with their own religious/cultural traditions, and with spiritual and cultural traditions other than their own.

**Texts:**

Mary Evelyn Tucker & John A. Grim, Eds., *Worldviews & Ecology [W & E]*  
Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*  
Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*  
Richard Nelson, *The Island Within*  
Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*

Also—

- Additional readings to be distributed in class
- Videos to be shown in class, and/or reserved for outside viewing
- At least two of the following: *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, nightly network news broadcasts on television, CNN, *The News Hour* on PBS, MSNBC, Fox News, *Morning Edition* and/or *All Things Considered* on NPR, or other mass media and Internet news resources.
- The world about you

**Format:**

Classes are a mixture of lecture, discussion and student presentations; regular attendance and active participation are vital to success in this course.

**Attendance Policy:**

Because regular attendance and active participation are vital to success in this course, no more than three unexcused absences will be tolerated. Exceeding this limit will result in an automatic lowering of your semester grade, 3 percentage points for each additional class day missed.

**Etiquette:**

Plan to arrive in class on time, and to stay in class the entire time.

Feel free to bring a beverage and/or light snack, but not a meal.

Be sure your cell phone is turned off, and stowed out of sight, before class begins.

Use of a laptop during class is prohibited, unless you can document a medical reason.

Use of any and all other electronic devices during class is strictly prohibited.

**Evaluation:**

Exams (2).....	40%
Class participation.....	20%
News reports.....	10%
Final project.....	<u>30%</u>
	100%

The **exams** are based on the readings and class discussions. The midterm is an in-class exam; the second exam is a take-home exam. Each is worth 20% of the semester grade.

**Class participation** entails coming to class fully prepared, active listening and engagement in large- and small- group discussion both via questions and comments. It may also include, if possible, an element of service learning (more info on that to follow).

We will begin each class day with a few minutes' discussion of **current events--news** we can use. Each student will be responsible for bringing to class a total of five news items, over the course of the semester. They can be drawn from any medium. In a one-page statement, you should summarize the content/point of the story you're submitting, make some comments about its specific relevance to the course, and comment on the article's "spin," or perspective on the news.

The **final project/presentation** will be a substantial piece of field research on a subject of the student's choice, developed in consultation with the professor and according to guidelines to be provided. Projects will be presented, as works in progress, in class during the last three full weeks of the term, and handed in, in written form, after classes end.

### Syllabus:

- Jan 24: Introduction. Film, *Australian Atomic Confessions*  
26: Tu Wei-ming, "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality," *W & E* 19-29;  
*Australian Atomic Confessions*, concluded.
- 31: J. Baird Callicott, "Toward a Global Environmental Ethic," and John A. Grim,  
"Native North American Worldviews and Ecology," *W & E*, 30-54.
- Feb 02: LaDuke, "What Is Sacred?" and Part I, "Sacred Lands and Sacred Places,"  
*Recovering the Sacred*, 11-63.
- 07: LaDuke, Part I. A-V: *Buffalo Bull*.  
09: LaDuke, Part 3, "Seeds and Medicine," 153-210.
- 14: LaDuke, Part 4, "Relatives," 213-253.  
16: Jay McDaniel, "The Garden of Eden, the Fall and Life in Christ: A Christian  
Approach to Ecology," *W & E*, 71-82; Ralph Metzner, "The Emerging Ecological  
Worldview," 163-172; and Thomas Berry, "Ecological Geography," 228-237.
- 21: Dillard, Chapters 1-5.  
23: Dillard, Chapters 6-8.
- 28: Dillard, Chapters 9-12.
- Mar 01: Dillard, Chapters 13-17 & Afterwords.
- 06: **Exam #1 (in class)**  
08: Brian Brown, "Toward a Buddhist Ecological Cosmology," *W & E* 124-137.  
Film: *Footprint of the Buddha*.

13: *Spring Break.*

16: “ “

20: Snyder, 3-83.

22: Snyder, 84-165. **Final Project proposals due.**

27: Snyder, 166-198.

29: Nelson, xi-86.

Apr 03: Nelson, 87-202.

05: Nelson, 203-280.

10: Presentations **Exam #2 (take-home) due.**

12: “

17: “

19: “

24: “

26: “

May 01: Wrap-up.

**Final Projects** are due in the PH & RE Office no later than 4:30 Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup>.