

Huxley College of the Environment, Western Washington University
ENVS 487/ ESTU587 (CRN 42042 / 43729) -- 4 cr. -- Aut, 2014
CONSERVATION PSYCHOLOGY

Location: AH 15. Time: Tues & Thurs, 10:00-11:50 am

Instructor: Gene Myers, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: Tues., Weds., Thurs 2-3:30 – sign-up sheet on door. Or, arrange with me.

OVERVIEW:

Conservation Psychology (CP) is a field of research and practice that uses the theories and methods of psychology to understand and improve the relationships between people and natural systems. It draws on many areas of psychology, and has connections to many allied fields. It has important links and parallels to conservation biology, whose primary concerns are understanding and conserving biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. Those conservation biology goals, however, clearly cannot succeed without marshalling our best understandings of human beings and our actions in a whole range of systems. It is human mind, emotion, behavior patterns, language, social patterns, biases, and so on that generate challenges and solutions. Included in the list of human assets would be environmental education -- thus CP provides part of the foundations for this profession.

As a science, CP is both basic and applied. Basic = rigorous and critical, and exploring relatively uncharted territory--uncharted since the human relationship to nature has not been a central topic in psychology. Findings here have the potential to modify our fundamental ideas about what it means to be human. We have at best incomplete answers to questions like whether and how it matters if children today have fewer encounters with rich natural systems; what is the place of wildness and wilderness in the human psyche; do children really form deep connections to nature--and if so how, and what explains it—and what happens to that across the life-course; what are the basic experiences and benefits of experience in natural systems, and what are the consequences if these are lacking; and what roles does culture play in mediating experiences of nature? The scientific orientation does not rule out humanistic perspectives within psychology.

CP is also practical and action oriented, and prioritizes questions in an attempt to be useful (i.e., not only seeking knowledge for its own sake). CP contributes to applied fields such as policy, planning, communications, management, design, environmental education, and other interventions. Conservation psychologists may work in close partnerships with practitioners, organizations and agencies. Topics may be very targeted such as people's proper maintenance of their septic systems, reducing conversion of habitat, stemming trade in endangered species, or increasing support for accelerative global climate policy. Or they may be broad and integrative, such as what it means to live a good and fulfilling life on a finite planet, and how we get closer to such whole-picture ideals. A whole range of psychology (and other social sciences) is essential to promote conservation and also to understand conservation as a social phenomenon.

This course is organized around three large questions that partake of both basic and applied aspects of CP. One draws on central efforts in CP, while the other two push it in new directions. None of these three questions has a clear-cut answer, or even only one formulation. Psychology and allied disciplines provide different lenses and languages, theories and empirical findings, which are assumed to be linked in the “real world.” These three representative core questions will be familiar, but will clearly benefit from sustained, informed, reflective thought, discussion and writing. See the section on paper assignments below for what these three large questions are.

OBJECTIVES:

This course should help you:

- 1) Be able to understand, compare, and apply psychological perspectives, theories and findings describing and/or explaining the human relationship to the natural world.
- 2) Better understand how people think about, feel about, benefit from, experience, and connect to nature, and what inspires or inhibits conservation action.
- 3) Be able to apply the tools of psychology to make recommendations and to constructively criticize conservation strategies, including policy approaches and environmental education practices as well as assumptions about human beings that are embedded in cultural environmental practices & discourses.
- 4) Understand some basic principles of psychological research including a variety of approaches and the kinds of questions for which they are appropriate.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Clayton, S. & Myers, G. (2009). *Conservation psychology*. Wiley-Blackwell. 2nd edition
- Norgaard, K. (2011). *Living in denial*. MIT Press. Bookstore; on reserve.
- Selected articles as listed in the schedule, available on Canvas.

EXPECTATIONS:

a) Attendance, readings, and participation in discussion

Come prepared to discuss all assigned readings and participate in class every session. Background knowledge and experience of class members will vary and your peers will be a major learning resource. Challenge yourself to be open to different points of view, and to express as well as question your own. Participation may include group work. A variety of activities may be introduced in class. Out of class, continue to study, digest, think about, and try applying ideas from the course.

b) Activities / exercises

Several brief assignments / activities will be introduced & instructions provided.

c) Papers

Note: as suggested by words in italics below, the mode of writing in these papers is expository, analytical, descriptive, argumentative, and/or critical but also oriented towards *understanding, transfer and application*. This does not mean that first-person voice is inappropriate, but it does mean that the focus is less on your personal thoughts or point of view by themselves, and more on engaging the ideas (perspectives, concepts, theories, findings, etc.) in the course. Writing on the possible topics for papers may entail reading of more material beyond the assigned readings, as is typical of advanced undergraduate or graduate-level work.

(1): Understanding and deepening the human psychological connection to nature. *Apply* theories, concepts and findings about how people do or can experience, understand, feel about, benefit from, are constituted by/embedded in, identify with, or care and act morally about natural, supported by citations from the readings or materials you research to either:

a) *explain, critique and suggest improvements* to an existing environmental education or other sort of program (your choice).

b) *design* a research-based educational or other intervention that would affect one or more psychological variables relating person to nature. Explain why you expect your design should have the intended effects. Suggestion: think of this as the foundation for a grant proposal.

c) *analyze and explain* what you think are the most important psychological processes leading to an experienced connection with nature, how such processes may interact, and what may interfere with them. (This is the less 'applied' option.)

- Relevant materials for paper 1: Clayton & Myers chapters 2-4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11. In addition you may use writings cited in the text, or other helpful books & peer-refereed articles. **Due Oct. 16**

(2): Psychology, society and behavior change. Write an essay addressing these two questions, grounded in real-world examples: How do multiple levels of factors (potentially including cultural-discursive, political-economic, societal, and social group) interact with psychological level ones inter-relate around climate change or another socio-ecological problem? Based on these analyses, what approaches might you recommend for changing social/psychological obstacles to addressing this problem? Additional options:

a) *explain, critique and suggest improvements* to an existing environmental education approach (or policy or other approach) to climate change (or another problem that entails social-psychological factors);

b), *design* an educational or other intervention that would affect social and individual behaviors about climate change (or another problem). Explain why you expect your design should have the intended effects.

- Relevant materials: Norgaard; Clayton & Myers chapters 9, 10; sources on climate change communication & psychology (e.g., Yale CCCC; APA Taskforce; PSR; CRED, etc.); and/or other sources you find independently. **Due Nov. 13.**

(3): Conservation that builds on strengths and helps people flourish. *Assess and apply* insights from positive psychology to environmental education, or to environmental policy, or another sort of intervention. What failures / mistakes do you see in current strategies? Be conceptually specific and illustrate concretely. What structures or strategies might make conservation / sustainability intrinsically fulfilling, or otherwise more effective, for many more people? Further ideas will be offered

- Relevant materials: readings; Clayton & Myers chapter 12; additional works. **Due Dec. 9**

PAPER TECHNICALITIES:

Length: 1,500-2,000 words (approximately 3-4 single-spaced pages) not counting reference list. Substance and clear writing matter more than length. Single space; number pages. Please submit papers electronically by email attachment on due date; include your name in the filename & “[487/587] paper 1” (eg: “Smith 587 paper 1.docx”). Hard copy not required.

Alternative to c)Papers: exams and independent project

If you prefer you may do a major independent project (conceptual, empirical, or applied) related to conservation psychology. Submit a brief proposal to the instructor in the first 2 or 3 weeks of the term and then meet with instructor to come to agreement. Small group (2-3 students) proposals are okay; you will be asked to evaluate your own and each other’s performance and to defend your own grade to your peers. If you choose this major project option you are still accountable for the readings, and will receive a graded take-home exam consisting of 2-3 short answer (about 250 words per question) essay questions for each of the major sections of the course as designated in the above papers. These will have the same due dates as the papers above. Major project final products will be submitted on or before the finals date for the course, listed on the syllabus.

In all assignments for the course, please use the American Psychological Association’s citation and reference formats (including for electronic sources), as presented in its *Publication Manual, 6th Edition*, Second or later printing (the first contained errors). A short but thorough version of APA features is at: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/>

EVALUATION AND COURSE GRADE

Each paper counts for 25% of your grade; the remaining 25% combines attendance & active participation, and the various short assignments. For independent projects, 25% on exams, 50% on project, 25% on attendance, etc. Papers will be evaluated generally according to the writing rubric below. Expectations are commensurate with upper-division status (487) or graduate status (587).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The principle aim of your education is to develop your own capacity for reasoned and enlightened judgment about matters of importance to yourself and your world. Your actions in this class should be consistent with this goal as well as with respect for the similar integrity of others. Thus, you should make yourself familiar with WWU's policies on academic honesty such as citation of sources and plagiarism, and understand the potential consequences. See <http://www.wvu.edu/integrity/>; and University Catalog, [Appendix D—Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure](#)

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:

Any student with a documented disability is encouraged to speak to the instructor in the first week of class, or to the Office of Student Life (360-3083) to arrange for suitable accommodation.

STUDENT SERVICES:

Western encourages students to seek assistance and support at the onset of an illness, difficulty, or crisis, and provides services through the Health Center, the Counseling Center, the University Police, and the Dean of Students.

You are responsible for all the information in this syllabus.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

Subject to revision with advance notice

Unless noted, readings are to be completed before the class for which they are listed

Thurs. Sept. 25 Course introduction. After-class reading: Clayton & Myers, ch. 1

Dimensions of the human connection to nature

Tues. Sept. 30 Experience in different nature settings

-Clayton & Myers, ch. 2, 3, 4

Thurs. Oct. 2 Challenges in international conservation: poaching, bushmeat & trade in endangered species

-readings on canvas, recommended order: Bennett; Brook et al; Pailier et al., Fitzherbert et al., Kahler & Gore; Gore, Ratsimbazafy & Lute; Gibbs & Gore.

Tues. Oct. 7 Concepts of nature; perceptions of env. problems.

-Clayton & Myers, ch. 's 5 &6

-*Due:* Childhood environment mapping

Thurs. Oct. 9 Environment and identity; moral psychology of env. problems

- Note: meet in Canada House, main floor, behind PAC parking lot, kitty-corner across High St. from Haggard Libr.

-Clayton & Myers, ch. 7, 8

-*Due:* "measures of relation of self to nature.doc"— fill in your results from each instrument into list at very end of the document and email to Gene by Weds night.

Tues. Oct 14 Continued discussion on previous topics

-suggested optional readings useful for paper: Ch. 11 pp. 12-21 on psych foundations of EE, and Ch. 12 pp. "333-335" only, on nature as a positive environment.

Thurs. Oct. 16 Discussion of papers
-Due: Paper #1
Receive instructions for norm violation and behavior self-change projects

Social psychology & behavior change

Tues. Oct. 21 – Gene to Soc. For Human Ecology. No class; alternate evening session.

Thurs. Oct. 23 Guest: Jill McIntyre-Witt, Climate Reality Project
Applied behavioral analysis & social marketing
-Clayton & Myers, ch. 9; browse “book” at <http://www.cbsm.com/public/world.lasso>

Tues. Oct. 28 Norgaard, Prologue Intro, ch. 1-2; Appendix on methods. Discuss these and Oct 23 rdngs
-Due: Norm violation activity

Thurs. Oct. 30 Norgaard, ch. 3

Tues. Nov. 4 Norgaard, ch. 4

Thurs. Nov. 6 Norgaard, ch. 5, 6 & conclusion
-Due: Behavior self-change project. Emphasize connection to main course concepts.
5pm discussion and potluck. Gene, Mardi, Eva & Mimi’s place, 2728 Walnut St. Detailed directions will be sent
Continued discussion of whole book
Discussion of paper ideas

Tues. Nov. 11 No class – Veterans Day.

Thurs. Nov 13 Transition
-Due: Paper #2

Positive psychology and conservation

Tues. Nov. 18
Clayton & Myers ch. 10 Community psychology and international biodiversity conservation;
Ch. 12 The positive psychology of conservation
Recommended:

Jørgensen, I. S. & Nafstad H. E. (2004). Positive psychology: Historical, philosophical, and epistemological perspectives. In P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 15-34). New York: John Wiley.

Thurs. Nov. 20 Positive emotion & well-being – Guests Nick Stanger & Joy Beauchamp
Frederickson, B. L. & Kurtz, L. E. (2011). Cultivating positive emotions to enhance human flourishing. In S.I. Donaldson, M. Csikszentmihalyi & J. Nakamura (Eds.), *Applied positive psychology* (pp. 33-45). New York: Psychology Press.

Seligman, M. (2011). What is well-being? In *Flourish* (pp. 5-29). New York: Free Press.
Recommended:

Fraser, J., Pantesco, V., Plemons, K., Gupta, R., & Rank, S. J. (2013). Sustaining the conservationist. *Ecopsychology*, 5(2), 70–79.

Schusler, T. M., & Krasny, M. E. (2010). Environmental action as context for youth development. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 41(4), 208–223.

Tues. Nov. 25 Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations
Kasser, T. (2002). Personal well-being. In *The high price of materialism* (pp. 5-22). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 49(3), 182–185.

Recommended:

Darner, R. (2009). Self-Determination Theory as a guide to fostering environmental motivation. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 40(2), 39–49.

Nakamura, J. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2009). Flow theory and research. In Lopez, S. J. & Snyder, C. R. (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology*, 2nd Ed. (pp. 195-205). New York: Oxford University Press.

Thurs. Nov. 27 No class - Thanksgiving

Tues. Dec. 2 Meaning, hope, human strengths

Hall, C. (2013). What will it mean to be green? Envisioning positive possibilities without dismissing loss. *Ethics, Policy & Environment*, 16(2), 125–141.

Christens, B. D., Collura J.J. & Tahir, F. (2013). Critical hopefulness: A person-centered analysis of the intersection of cognitive and emotional empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 52, 170-184.

Recommended:

Ojala, M. (2012). How do children cope with global climate change? Coping strategies, engagement, and well-being. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 32(3), 225–233.

Peterson, C. & Park, N. (2011). Character strengths and virtues: Their role in well-being. In S.I. Donaldson, M. Csikszentmihalyi & J. Nakamura (Eds.), *Applied positive psychology* (pp. 49-60). New York: Psychology Press.

Thurs. Dec. 4 Discussion of papers & Concluding discussion

Tues Dec. 9 No final exam. *Due: Paper #3 and Independent projects by 5pm.*