

ENVS/REL 329: Religion and Ecology:
Sustainability and Spiritual Practices of Place
A Contemplative Pedagogy Approach

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 9:30 – 10:25 a.m.
Callaway Center S-105

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Office Hours:

Wednesday 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Thursday 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

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Office Hours By Appointment

Alex Vannostrand, Peer Educator
Danny Turton, Peer Educator
Learnlink for Appointments

Questions that Bring us Here

What does the environmental crisis have to do with the places that sustain us? What do we mean when we use the word ‘place’? Do we feel connected to places; and if so, how do those connections reflect and shape with our social, political, and cultural practices?

Do places affect our ethical and spiritual lives (assumptions, actions, and commitments)? How does Environmental Studies relate to Religion and the American tradition of nature religion? How might places become sacred, or can they be sacred in the experience of only some?

Tensions in the Questions

Raising these questions reveals conflicting scholarly, sustainability, and religious approaches to place. How does place relate/interrelate to landscape, terrain, and human geography? What about bodies, spirit, and sacred spaces? Who claims sacred space?

Buddhist and Christian Contemplative Traditions Response

How have previous and contemporary Buddhist and Christian contemplative traditions constructed, connected with, enacted, and challenged experiences and philosophies/theologies of place, space, and sustainability? How and why have the histories of place in both traditions, and in the American Religious traditions, shaped the interrelationships of self, community, nature, and the sacred? How have religious

practitioners cultivated experiences of and ideas about place, sustainability, and religious life?

Our Class and Community

To cultivate knowledge and examine ethics in relation to place, sacred place, and sustainable living for all, we will use analytical techniques and practices of contemplative pedagogies. As a learning and teaching community, we will generate shared motivation and dedication to the content, research, and exploration of our topics. In this class, as in places, interdependencies (in all their complexities of cultures, powers, and insights) are honored; they are reality.

Course objectives: This Class will...

- **Examine** pedagogies relevant to interdependent learning in place: Experiential Pedagogy and Contemplative Pedagogy
- **Examine** American theories and practices of place and sacred place and nature religion
- **Examine** Christian and Buddhist writers and practitioners' assumptions about relationships with nature, place, and sustainability
- **Explore and engage** different places within Emory's campus, Atlanta, and the Piedmont forest within this bioregion
- **Disciplined Discoveries of** inter/intra-relationships of place using phenomenological observation, contemplative practices, and outdoor experiences
- **Create** a portfolio of your learning arc over the semester

Methods to Achieve Goals

Integration

This class will provide structured opportunities for integrating theory, method, and practice relevant to our driving questions.

Analysis

This class will provide structured opportunities for developing skills for close reading, critical assessment, and revision of assumptions based on class texts, experiences, and assignments

Reflection

This class will provide structured and ongoing opportunities for reflection on all class content and experiences, predominantly through the Working and Presenting Portfolio.

Transformation

This class assumes change when considered and practiced attentively increases wisdom and health in self and others, the goals of a liberal arts experience.

All students will abide by the Emory Honor Code.

Assignments

Practicing Place – Discover and Choose a place on campus – anywhere, but it must be on campus. Return to that place on a weekly basis. When you come to the place take a few moments to settle yourself, to pay attention openly to the place as it is. Using contemplative analyses, open your categories and definitions, and explore the place with your senses and intuitions. Examine details and describe it. Then, if you like, you can make connections with readings we have done, memories, scientific knowledge – any tools and perspectives are welcome. You need not write about your engagement with that place every week, though you must visit it every week. A regular report is welcome, but at least once a month, include a portfolio entry about that specific place. It may be one of your required 4 entries, or an extra (5th). By having a single place that you return to weekly – even for a short while – you will develop a different set of insights, descriptions, and ideas in relation to that place, and perhaps all places/spaces, over time.

Readings Found on Blackboard (BB); Albanese Book

Working Portfolio

Due every other week for responses.

300 points

Presenting Portfolio

Due by 3: 00 pm on Wednesday, December 9

In the Department of Religion

400 points

** See handout for detailed instructions on working with a portfolio. **

Class participation

300 points

Includes preparedness for practices and discussions, participation in class activities, commitment to our thriving as a community of learners and teachers, and team leadership of a practice on hikes/overnights

Schedule of Readings and Experiences

*** subject to change as the class unfolds – regularly check the on-line syllabus ***

August 28: Experiencing Place

Meet at Baker Woods (behind Carlos Hall)

Assignment: Due next week: Write no more than a page: What drew you to this class? What do you hope for? What do you worry about? Keep this within your Working Portfolio and revisit it when you're compiling your Final Portfolio. Please your responses to our class conference, "Sharing Stuff"

August 31: Crossing Boundaries

Discussion of Friday Exercise: Boundaries, Places, Identity

1. Starting to Experience-Think Place

“All I am asking is that we think what we are doing” Hannah Arendt

September 2: Experience-Based Learning

Assignment: Theory Practice Learning (BB)

September 4 : Contemplative Pedagogy

Assignment: Zajonc, Arthur: Contemplative Pedagogy

September 9: Place, a Short Introduction

Assignment: Read Cresswell, pages 1-51

September 11: Place, a Short Introduction

Assignment: Read The Lullwater Management Plan

***** September 13 – Walk the Forests of Emory, 2-4:30 pm *****

September 14: Reflecting on Place

Assignment: Read Portfolio Instructions (Class assignments on BB)

September 16: American Contemporary Approaches to Place and Religion

Assignment: "Reinhabitation" (pp.183-191),
from *A Place in Space* by Gary Snyder. Counterpoint, 1995

September 18: The Difference Worldviews make to Place and Religion

Assignment: and "The Porous World"
(pp. 192-198), from *A Place in Space* by Gary Snyder. Counterpoint, 1995.

SEPTEMBER 18: TURN IN PORTFOLIO

2. AMERICANS, NATURE, PLACE, AND SPIRITUALITY

September 21: American Nature Religion

Assignment: Albanese, Chapter 1

September 23: American Nature Religion

Assignment: Albanese, Chapter 2 and 3

September 25: American Liberal Religion: Meditation/Contemplation

Assignment: Schmidt, Leigh E. "Arbor Day.."

3. BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVES

September 28: The Place of the Environment in Buddhism

Assignment: Chapter 5: "Buddhism," (pp. 163-186) in Richard C. Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment*

SEPTEMBER 28 – TURN IN PORTFOLIO

September 30: Chapter 5: "Buddhism," (pp. 163-186) in Richard C. Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment*

October 2: Buddhist Contemplatives in the Forest

Assignment: "Forest Meditations" (Read both Selections)

October 4: 2:30 p.m.: Lullwater – the other side - Walk: – Meet Again at the Lake

Assignment: "Conscious Breathing Meditation" – Chapters 1-3 (pp. 5-25)

October 5: Practices of Place – Contemporary Buddhist Perspectives

Assignment: "Blue Mountains Constantly Walking," (pp. 97-115)
Web address: Look up on Google: Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism- by Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft – type into google search: Blue Mountains Walking by Gary Snyder – this Dharma Rain site will be an early option – text is available there

[[[-- For your own Interest – Over the Weekend – how one person has practiced place as a Zen practitioner -- Assignment: Kurt Hoelting, "Circling Home"

4. CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATIVES

October 7: Christian Contemplatives in the Ridges and Ravines of the Desert

Assignment: Belden Lane – "Connecting Spirituality and the Environment" (pp.9-21),

October 9: Christian Asceticism in the Ridges and Ravines of the Forest

Assignment: “The Countercultural Spirituality of the Desert Christians” (pp.196-204)
“Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers”

OCTOBER 9 – TURN IN PORTFOLIO

**** One of your entries must be Phenomenology Exercise I ****

October 12 FALL BREAK

October14: Christian Asceticism in the Ridges and Ravines of the Forest

Assignment: Phillip Sheldrake, “A Sense of Place” and “Place in Christian Tradition” (read both selections)

*****OCTOBER 16 THROUGH OCTOBER 18 – CAMPOUT*****

NO CLASS: LEAVE CAMPUS BY 1:30 P.M.

October 19: NO CLASS

October 21: Contemporary Christian Nuns and Ecological Renewal

Assignment: Sarah McFarland Taylor, “Reinhabiting Religion: Green Sisters, Ecological Renewal, and the Biogeography of Religious Landscapes

October 23: Practices of Place - Some Christian Perspectives

Assignment: Belden Lane – “Prayer Without Language in the Mystical Tradition”

*****October 23 – Turn in Your Portfolio*****

One of your entries must be Phenomenology Exercise II

October 26 : Practices of Place – Some Christian Perspectives

Assignment: Selections from Thomas Merton (read both)

5. NATURE WRITING AND NATURAL HISTORY

October 28: “Secular” Eco-Asceticism

Assignment: Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (pp. ix - 73)

October 30; Natural History and Love

Assignment: Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia*, selection
Bernd Heinrich, “Sex in Trees”

*******October 31 -- Hike At Stone Mountain: Drawing Meditation*****
With Professor Anne Hall**

6. EMORY AS PLACE

November 2: Emory and Atlanta’s Watersheds

Assignment: David Kaufman, *Peachtree Creek: A Natural and Unnatural History of Atlanta’s Watershed*, “Introduction and Section 1”

November 4: Nancy Seidman: History of Lullwater

November 6: NO CLASS

******Turn In Portfolio******

November 15 :

*******Meet at Hahn Woods: 2:30 p.m. - Hahn Woods (on Houston Mill,
across from Miller Ward Alumni House)*******

See online images at <http://www.creekimages.com/> and online video at <http://www.pba.org/programming/programs/thisisatlanta/peachtreecreek/>

November 9: Peachtree Creek

Assignment: Kaufman, *Peachtree Creek*, “Section 2 and Section 3”

November 11: Race and Place: Environmental Justice in Atlanta and Emory

Assignment: Robert Bullard, *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place*,

November 13: Nathaniel Smith: Living Equity in Atlanta

November 16: Race and Place: Stories of Community Empowerment for Sustainable Ethics

Guest Speakers: Community Fellows

November 18: Ecofeminism and Place

Assignment: Tavis Page, “Has Ecofeminism Cornered the Market”

November 20: Sustainability and Spiritual Practices at Emory

Guest Speaker: Ciannat Howett, Director of Sustainability Initiatives

*******Turn in Portfolio*******

November 23: NO CLASS: WORK ON YOUR FINAL PORTFOLIO

7. HOPE AND PLACE

November 25: Film: Recycling

November 27: Happy Thanksgiving

November 30: Exchanging Places

Assignment: David Abram, “Perceptual Implications of Gaia”

December 2: Personal and Spiritual Guide to Whole Earth Thinking

Assignment: “Experimental Travel”

December 4: Sustaining Whole Earth Thinking

Assignment: John Gatta, “Learning to Love Creation”

December 7: Truth-Telling as Healing Place

Assignment: Joanna Macy: Truth Circle

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9: PRESENTING PORTFOLIO
DUE BY 3 PM -- Department of Religion Office, Callaway South 214