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EDUC 3310/ENVI 3310: The Natural Environment and Well-Being

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EDUC 3310/ENVI 3310:
The Natural Environment and Well-Being
DH 306, W 2:30 - 5:30 PM
Trinity University

Course Instructors

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Course Description

The course introduces students to the benefits of natural environments on human health and well-being. Topics of study include the historical and cultural traditions of human's connections to nature, theoretical frameworks and mechanisms of human/nature connections, implementation of interdisciplinary research agendas, as well as implications for education, diversity, health policy, and urban planning. A significant portion of the course will take place in the field, where students will explore local and regional parks, nature-based educational settings, and the practice of forest therapy. While most field work will take place during the 3-hour course time frame, there will be one full-day field trip required, plus additional local field work completed in small groups outside of class time.

Course Format

The course will take place in a weekly 3-hour block to allow for frequent field trips to natural areas and educational settings. One full-day field trip is also required.

Required Texts

- *Last Child in the Woods* (Louv, 2008)
- *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* (Williams, 2018)
- *Healing Trees: A Pocket Guide to Forest Bathing* (Page, 2021)

Class set available for loan (may purchase - but optional):

- *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Finney, 2014)

Units & Essential Questions

- History, Culture, & Tradition: How did we venture so far from nature?
- Research, Theory, & Mechanisms: Why is nature important for well-being?
- Schooling: How can schools connect children with nature and support healthy development?
- Equity, Inclusion, & Reciprocity: How can connecting with nature support people and their broader communities?

Overarching Course Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze the history, culture, and traditions of human's connection to nature or the more-than-human-world, including indigenous peoples and spirituality, to understand the context of human's growing separation from the natural world
- Examine interdisciplinary research on the benefits of nature contact for human health and well-being, including physical and mental health, social well-being, academic achievement, and happiness.
- Compare theoretical frameworks supporting potential mechanisms, including biophilia, attention restoration theory, stress reduction theory, and the phytoncide hypothesis
- Examine implications for education (environmental education including outdoor classrooms and forest schools) and child development
- Analyze differences in power and privilege among groups and how these differences, past and present, may lead to inequitable access, safety, purpose, and comfort among marginalized groups in outdoor settings
- Gather and evaluate information from scholarly sources concerning equity and diversity issues (i.e., historical perspectives over time, supporting well-being across common humanity, best practices in education, supporting equity in local communities).
- Explore:
 - The practice of forest therapy with certified guides
 - Local and regional natural environments including the Trinity campus; San Antonio parks, gardens, and natural areas; and Texas State Parks
 - Nature-based educational settings

OVC Objectives

- identify and use the elements of effective oral and visual communication.
- create and deliver effectively structured oral presentations using language correctly and appropriately.
- use visual media that are effective, appropriate, and well integrated into the presentation.
- analyze and critique oral and visual components of presentations.
- respond effectively to questions and comments from audience members.

UD Objectives

- identify and articulate the diverse human experiences, identities, and cultures in the United States.
- analyze how social and cultural systems adapt to changing historical circumstances.
- analyze differences in power and privilege among groups and how these differences may lead to the domination, exploitation, and exclusion of some groups by others.
- gather and evaluate information from scholarly sources concerning diversity.

State and National Standards Addressed

- *TEA (Texas Education Agency)*
TAC 228.35(i), 1, A & C
- *NAAEE (North American Association for Environmental Education)*
Professional Development of Environmental Educators: Guidelines for Excellence
Themes 2, 3, and 4
- *TAAEE (Texas Association of Environmental Education)*
Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Plan
Goals 1, 2, and 3

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and will need accommodations in this class, we expect that you will make an appointment with an instructor and deliver your accommodation letter *early in the semester* so we can discuss how to meet your needs. Please make these arrangements as soon as possible once you have met with the SAS Coordinator and have picked up your accommodation letter. All discussions will remain confidential. If you have not already registered with Student Accessibility Services, contact the office at 999-7411 or SAS@trinity.edu. You must be registered with SAS *before* we can provide accommodations.

Honor Code

All students are covered by a policy that prohibits dishonesty in academic work. Under the Honor Code, a faculty member will (or a student may) report an alleged violation to the Academic Honor Council. It is the task of the Council to investigate, adjudicate, and assign a punishment within certain guidelines if a violation has been verified. Students are required to pledge all written work that is submitted for a grade.

TITLE IX/Sexual Misconduct Reporting

As a Responsible Employee who is committed to creating an environment where every member of our community can thrive, we want to let you know that the instructors are Mandatory Reporters. What that means is that we are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual intercourse, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, stalking, and related retaliation that I am aware of to the Title IX Coordinator. So, if you share information with us about any incidents that implicate the Sexual Misconduct or Anti-Harassment Policies, we are required to report all information to the Title IX Coordinator to make sure you have information about support resources and complaint resolution options. My report does not initiate the complaint process, and you are in control over how you choose to engage with our Title IX Coordinator. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, we encourage you to share this information directly with the Title IX Coordinator or one of the individuals who has been designated as a confidential resource. [The reporting form is here.](#)

Academic Support

Trinity faculty hold students to the highest academic standards, but we also know that the very best students seek out help when necessary. The following resources are in place to support your academic success:

[Academic Success](#): time management, student skills, test anxiety, note taking, tutoring

[Career Services](#): major exploration, career guidance

[Counseling Services](#): mental health concerns, mental health referrals

[Quantitative Reasoning and Skills Center](#): quantitatively demanding coursework

[Student Accessibility Services](#): accommodations for a diagnosed disability

[Wellness Center](#): nutrition, sleep, stress management

[Writing Center](#): starting a paper, finding a thesis, drafting and editing

Electronic Recordings

Please be aware that all classroom instruction, including student participation in classroom activities, is subject to recording and dissemination on the University's secure course management system (T-Learn). The recordings will be made available only to students enrolled in the course to facilitate online learning and review. Students are expressly prohibited from capturing or copying classroom recordings by any means; violations will be subject to disciplinary action. Instructors who wish to use a recording outside of class must obtain the written consent of any students who are personally identifiable in the recording.

Grading and Attendance

Attendance is essential to successful completion of the course, and students are expected to attend each class session, have completed all assignments, and be ready to engage in discussion and application with peers. Students should notify the instructors of all anticipated absences in advance. Each student has ONE excused absence during the semester (see COVID exception below). As this course meets once a week and half of the work will be completed in the field, one absence is the equivalent of three typical absences and will have a large impact on learning. More than one absence (exceptions for university purposes and COVID) will affect your participation grade. Therefore, attendance is critical. *Missing three class sessions will result in dismissal from the course (true emergency exception).*

Absences due to travel for official university purposes (e.g., sporting event) do not count; however, students are still responsible for all assignments and work (students will not be penalized for Exit Slips). Note that being consistently late to class may equal an absence at the discretion of the instructors. If after reviewing the syllabus, you don't think you can meet the attendance expectation, please consider opening your space for someone on the wait list and re-enrolling a different semester.

Excused Absences per University Policy

For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following exception to the Excused Absences from Class policy has been approved: Students who are ill will be excused from classes. To protect community health, we urge students to request an excused absence by informing instructors of the illness via email. Students must adhere to University health and wellness procedures for self-evaluation, follow-up, and quarantine as necessary. Please note: Untruthful student claims about illness may be regarded as a violation of the Academic Honor Code, which prohibits “falsification of academic records.”

Students who experience a family emergency that interferes with academic performance are encouraged to contact Jennifer Henderson, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Demi Brown, Dean of Students.

Course Requirements	Grade Percentage
Participation (attendance, leadership, engagement)	10
Class Assignments (weekly)	15
Sit Spot Journals/Reflections (due weekly)	20
Projects	
Unit 1: Nature Connection/Disconnection Timeline	5
Unit 2: Data Collection, Analysis, and Reflective Paper	10
Units 3 & 4: Greenspace Design Project	20
Photo Story (ongoing and final)	20

TLearn

TLearn, Trinity's LMS, will be used for course scheduling, assignments, and most assessments. Please make sure to refer to EDUC 3310/ENVI 3310.

“Oops” Pass

All assignments must be turned in on time to count. *Late work is not accepted.* That said, each student has one “Oops” pass for the semester, that allows an assignment to be turned in up to *one week past the due date*. Students must notify the instructor by email that they are using an Oops pass and that the work will be late before the assignment is due. “Oops” passes may not be used for the final (Photo Story final presentation).

Communication Policy

Communication from the instructors outside of class will primarily take place via email and class announcements in TLearn; thus, *checking email regularly (daily) is an expectation of the course*, and students will be responsible for all information and changes communicated. In addition, frequent field work will require communication via text or cell phones with instructors and peers and/or a secure app (e.g., What's App). Office hours are available weekly for all students (see TLearn). If an emergency or urgent situation exists, please call/text Dr. Allen's cell (210-326-4123) or Dr. Crim's cell (210-862-2797).

Field Trips and Outdoor/Off-Campus Work

By design, the course includes multiple opportunities to spend time in green spaces. As a result, inherent risks exist around personal safety, travel, weather, non-human animal contact, and outdoor hazards. At all times, the first priority is your safety and the safety of others. You are expected to use wise judgment (not venturing into tall grass or risky areas), follow instructor directives (remain in sight of your partner), travel only with authorized drivers if not driving yourself, protect the land using the ethics of "wild tending" and "leave no trace," and support the learning of one another. In addition, let someone know where you are when completing your Sit Spot and choose a location where you feel safe during daylight hours (or go with a peer and sit where you can see one another). If at any time during the course you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, please talk with an instructor.

General Guidelines (see TLearn for specific)

- Check weather conditions and wear appropriate clothing, including closed toed shoes such as hiking shoes/boots/sneakers with tread for walking and climbing.
- Water - bring a *minimum* of 16 ounces of water per one hour trip; trips during class will typically span 2 to 2.5 hours; the full-day trip will span 6 hours.
- Bring sunscreen, bug spray, and something to sit on (towel, mat, picnic blanket, etc.)

Assignments

Participation (10%)

For this course, participation is defined as actively and thoughtfully engaging in each class meeting/trip with peers and instructors, actively and responsibly working with group members on informal and formal assignments, keeping an open mind and positive attitude, and following directions and rules during field trips that include looking out for other classmates and promoting the well-being and safety of yourself and others. Attendance (more than one absence will affect this grade, noting university exceptions), leadership (including authorized driving; Sit Spot pairs; etc.), being on time, and engagement all count toward this category.

Class Assignments (15%)

Regular assignments will be assigned weekly on TLearn, including readings, reflections, handouts, exit slips, OVC peer evaluations, and the like. Most assignments will be homework for the upcoming class; however, some assignments will be completed in class. Note that assignments completed within the class period on Wednesdays may not be made up by those absent (university absence or COVID exception).

Sit Spot Journals (20%)

This assignment is inspired by David George Haskell's *The Forest Unseen* in which the author selects a small circle of land to observe and return to over the course of a year. It is also part of the practice of forest therapy. You will select a site of your own on the Trinity campus or another safe outdoor setting that you can visit repeatedly throughout the course of the semester. The site must be outdoors in *nature* with limited elements of the built environment.

Your assignment is to visit your sit spot every week for 30 minutes and observe and record what you are noticing, thinking, and feeling. Two Sit Spots will be dropped, so a minimum of 12 is required. You will document these responses in a Google form journal to be turned in throughout the semester. More specific information will be shared via TLearn.

Projects

Unit 1: Nature Connection/Disconnection Timeline (5%)

Populations move and change over time for many reasons. In this assignment, you will analyze your biological or chosen family's migration from a more natural existence to an urban space by creating a timeline. Your timeline must go back at least three generations (e.g., grandparents).. You will share and discuss your timeline in class with peers. Timelines should be created using <https://timeline.knightlab.com> or a similar digital timeline platform (PowerPoint or Prezi is acceptable if organized and presented as a timeline). More specific information will be shared via TLearn.

Unit 2: Data Collection, Analysis, and Reflective Paper (10%)

As a class, we will collect data on our own well-being as we visit natural spaces to determine if findings match those found in the literature. All data will be coded for confidentiality; however, you will be able to examine both your individual data and collective class data for comparisons. Individuals will then write a reflective paper comparing the research literature to class and individual findings. More specific information will be shared via TLearn.

Units 3 & 4: Greenspace Design Project (20%)

In groups, you will incorporate your knowledge about the benefits of natural environments, the development of young children, and the key elements of outdoor education spaces by partnering with a Northside ISD elementary school who has received an ACORN grant to develop an outdoor learning space. More specific information will be shared via TLearn.

Photo Story - Ongoing and Final (20%)

In this assignment, you will tell your story of growth and connection over time as it develops between you and the more than human world. This will be accomplished by creating a series of four annotated photos that weave together a visual aesthetic component (picture) with traditional linguistic support (text, symbols, etc.). This auto-photographic methodology allows you to assume the roles of participant, artist, researcher, and storyteller - all while pushing you to express complex thinking about your learning. Photo Stories will be due at four points throughout the semester and include a final presentation and paper. More specific information will be shared via TLearn.

Tentative Schedule (see TLearn for specifics)

Week	Date	Location	Topic
Unit 1 - History, Culture, & Tradition: How Did We Venture So Far from Nature?			
1	August 24	Classroom	Field experience paperwork Course overview Initial reading
		TU Meadow	Introduction of Sit Spot & Journal
2	August 31	Classroom	Data Collection #1 OVC Discussion Separation of Humans from Nature Introduction of Timeline Assignment
3	Sept 7	Brackenridge Park	Abbreviated Forest Therapy Walk (bring something to sit on and water bottle) Introduction of Photo Story Project
4	Sept 14	Classroom	Guest Speaker (virtual): Ben Page Timeline Presentations
Unit 2 - Research, Theory, & Mechanisms: Why Is Nature Important for Well-Being?			
5	Sept 21	Hardberger Park	Park Exploration (Research, Theories and Mechanisms - e.g., ART) Photo Story #1 Sharing
6	Sept 28	Classroom	Data Collection #2 Research, Theories and Mechanisms
October 3, Monday Full-Day Field Trip Class Data Collection (pre-post)			
7	Oct. 5	Classroom	Child Development and the Outdoors OLE Design Standards
		Zoo School	Introduction of Greenspace Design Project
Unit 3 - Education: How can schools connect children with nature and support healthy development?			
8	Oct. 12	ACORN Campus Visits	Visit ACORN campuses and meet with OLE contacts to evaluate school needs
9	Oct 19	Botanical Garden	Evaluate Family Adventure Garden using OLE Standards Photo Story #2
10	Oct. 26	Classroom	Data Collection #3 Greenspace Design Presentations
Unit 4 - Equity, Inclusion & Reciprocity: How can connecting with nature help people and their broader communities?			

11	Nov. 2	Classroom	Guest Speaker: Demi Brown The Outdoors & Marginalized Populations
12	Nov. 9	TU Meadow	The Outdoors & Marginalized Populations Photo Story #3
<i>Nov - 21-25 Thanksgiving Holiday</i>			
13	Nov. 16	Student local park of choice (class decision)	Park Exploration Data Discussion (class and individual)
14	Nov. 30	Classroom	Data Collection #4 Data Analysis Reflective Paper and Sit Spot Analysis Photo Story #4
<i>Reading Days (Dec 7-8)</i>			
Final Presentations: Wednesday, December 14, 7 PM Photo Story Synthesis			