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EDUC 3410/ENVI 3410: The Natural Environment and Well-Being

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**EDUC 3410/ENVI 3410:
The Natural Environment and Well-Being**
Fall 2024
SML 110, 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.

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. Assignments will be due on Mondays at 2 PM and on Wednesdays at 2 PM. Detailed course specific can be found on <https://canvas.trinity.edu/>.

Required Texts

- *Last Child in the Woods* (Louv, 2008)
- *Healing Trees: A Pocket Guide to Forest Bathing* (Page, 2021)

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

- Research, Theory, and 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:

- 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.
- Reflect on personal relationships with nature and evaluate changes over time
- Utilize a research-based conceptual model of nature well-being and relate it to the self
- 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 nature 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
- *TAAE (Texas Association of Environmental Education)*
Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Plan – Goals 1, 2, and 3

Course Requirements

Main Course Requirements	Grade Percentage
Participation (attendance, engagement, in-class activities, leadership)	20
Sit Spots and Reflection (due Mondays, 2 PM)	20
Concept Check Quizzes (due Wednesdays, 2 PM)	20
Photo Essay #1 (due Mondays, 2 PM)	5
Photo Essay #2 (due Mondays, 2 PM)	5
Photo Essay #3 (due Mondays, 2 PM)	5
Greenspace Design Project	15
Final - Photo Essay Presentation	10

Canvas

Canvas, Trinity's LMS, will be used for course scheduling, assignments, and most assessments.

Communication Policy

Communication from the instructors (this includes TAs) outside of class will take place via email, Canvas announcements, the GroupMe app, and text messages; thus, *checking these communication outlets regularly (daily) is an expectation of the course – especially email*. Students will be responsible for all information and changes communicated. These are necessary due to the frequent fieldwork in the course. Office hours are also available weekly for all students (see Canvas). If an emergency or urgent situation exists, please call/text Dr. Allen (210-326-4123) or Dr. Crim (210-862-2797).

Technology Policy

Students are expected to use technology (phones; laptops; tablets) when directed to do so for an assignment, for viewing PowerPoint slides being used during class, or for communication during field trips. *Use of technology for other purposes during class is not allowed and will result in the removal of points for attendance and engagement (see Participation grade)*. Excessive violation of this policy may be grounds for removal from the course at an instructor's discretion.

Grading and Attendance

Attendance is essential to the successful completion of the course since the course meets once a week, and 50% of the course takes place "in the field" and cannot be made up. For these reasons, attendance is a key aspect of the Participation grade. That said, students should notify the instructors of all anticipated absences *in advance*. Missing three or more classes will result in the student being dropped from the course. Exceptions are made for official university travel, extended illness (e.g., COVID), and emergency situations (e.g., family). Exceptions require documentation. The university grading scale will be used.

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 or allowing yourself to overheat/dehydrate), 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). Do not complete Sit Spots at night. If at any time during the course you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, please talk with an instructor (this includes TAs).

General Guidelines

- 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, and the full-day trip will span 6 hours.
- Bring sunscreen and bug spray, and always bring something to sit on (towel, mat, picnic blanket, etc.)

Assignments

“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 Greenspace Design Project or the final.

Participation (20%)

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 (you will not agree with everything we read or necessarily like all trips equally and that’s okay), and following directions and rules during field trips – these include looking out for other classmates and promoting the well-being and safety of yourself and others. Attendance, in-class assignments, leadership (including authorized driving, and Sit Spot pairs), being on time, and engagement (being present and not on technology unless needed for class) all count toward this category.

Online Concept Check Quizzes (20%)

An online, open-book 10-item Concept Check quiz follows each content assignment and *must be completed prior to the scheduled class meetings on Wednesdays at 2 PM CST* (exceptions will be announced in advance). This helps ensure you are ready to dive into the material for the week. Each quiz normally requires 15-minutes for completion; however, a 30-minute time limit will be used, which provides the time allotted for those with accommodations to everyone in the course (those with accommodations will not be given additional time). Quizzes may be taken *twice.* The lowest (one) quiz score will be dropped. This policy is intentional and allows for unforeseen circumstances, such as illness, during which a student is not able to take a Concept Check quiz. Concept Check quizzes may only be made up if using an “Oops” pass. Students may not assist one another on quizzes; however, quizzes are open-book (no monitoring will take place). *Questions regarding quizzes or quiz items should be emailed to the instructor or asked after class or during office hours. Quizzes will not be reviewed during class time.*

Sit Spots (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. To do so, students will select a safe outdoor setting to visit for 30 minutes each week throughout the semester during daylight hours. Additional details on Canvas.

Greenspace Design Project (15%)

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 that has received an ACORN grant to develop an outdoor learning space. More specific information will be shared via Canvas.

Photo Essay - (15% - 5% each)

In this assignment, you will share how your own identity is reflected in nature. This will be accomplished by creating a series of photos, each accompanied by an artist's statement. Each selected photo will be altered by incorporating visual materials that allow embedded symbolism to become more evident. Then, you will conclude by writing a statement explaining the process used and meaning behind the symbolism. Photo Essays will be due at three points throughout the semester when you will share the work in small groups. More specific information will be shared via Canvas and examples will be provided.

Final - Photo Essay Presentation (10%)

As the course final, the three final Photo Essay pieces will be printed, displayed, and presented to the full class in a gallery walk format. More specific information will be shared via Canvas.

Tentative Schedule (see Canvas for specifics)

Week	Date	Location	Topic
1	August 28	Classroom	Intro to Course Sit Spots @ Bishop Jones
		Bishop Jones Center, Episcopal Diocese of TX (urban park)	
2	Sept 2	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM (may use first one completed at Bishop Jones)
	Sept 4	Classroom	Concept Check Quiz 1 due 2 PM Research Study - Data Collections #1 Photo Essay Introduced
3	Sept 9	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Sept 11	Brackenridge Park (urban park)	Concept Check Quiz 2 due 2 PM Forest Therapy Walk - abbreviated (bring something to sit on and water bottle)
4	Sept 16	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM Photo Essay #1 due 2 PM
	Sept 18	Classroom	Concept Check Quiz 3 due 2 PM Research, Theories and Mechanisms Photo Essay Sharing
5	Sept 23	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Sept 25	Hardberger Park (natural area)	Concept Check Quiz 4A or 4B due by 2 PM Park Exploration/Speaker Merlin app iNaturalist app
6	Sept 30	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Oct 2	Classroom	Concept Check Quiz 5A or 5B due by 2 PM Greenspace Design Project (intro & teacher videos)
7	Oct. 7	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM Photo Essay #2 due
	Oct. 9	Zoo School	Concept Check Quiz (Week 7) due 2 PM Zoo School Visit Photo Essay Sharing

8	Oct. 14	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Oct. 16	Classroom	Concept Check Quiz (Week 8) due 2 PM
		ACORN School Visits	School Visits
9	Oct. 21	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Oct 23	Guadalupe River State Park (full day field trip)	Forest Therapy Walk Exploration
10	Oct. 28	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Oct. 30	Classroom	Concept Check Quiz (Week 10) due 2 PM Guest Speaker Conceptual Framework (Guadalupe River)
11	Nov 4	<i>Robin Wall Kimmerer Lecture</i>	7 PM, Laurie Auditorium (DeCoursey Lecture) or 10:30 - 11:20 (Fiesta Room) Photo Essay #3 due
	Nov. 6	Botanical Gardens	Concept Check Quiz (Week 11) due 2 PM Exploration Photo Essay Sharing
12	Nov 11	Student Choice	Sit Spot Due by 2 PM
	Nov. 13	Classroom	Greenspace Presentations due by 2 PM Field Trip Data Sharing Greenspace Presentations
13	Nov 18	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Nov. 20	Woodlawn Lake (kayaks/canoes)	Concept Check Quiz (Week 13) due 2 PM On-Water Park Exploration
<i>Nov 25-29 Thanksgiving Holiday</i>			
14	Dec. 2	Student Choice	Sit Spot due by 2 PM
	Dec. 4	Classroom	Photo Essay Final due 2 PM Data Collection #2 Final - Photo Essay Presentations Course Evals
<i>Reading Days (Dec 11-12)</i>			
<i>There is no final during final exam period.</i>			

