

*Section of the 2008 Human Ecology Core Course – Gray Cox
Office on second floor of Davis Center
Office Hours MTh 1:30- 4:00
and by appointment and happenstance
ext. #326, gray@coa.edu*

Syllabus

Human Ecology Core Course - Fall 2008 – Gray's Section

Faculty: John Anderson, Elmer Beal, Richard Borden, Colin Capers, Dru Colbert, Gray Cox, Jamie McKown

Times and Places:

Faculty Presentations - Wednesday 2:35 - 4:00 (Gates Auditorium)

Discussion Groups – Monday/Thursday 11:10 - 12:35 – Gray's Section meets Turrets I

Purpose and Structure:

The purpose of this course is to explore ideas that currently frame how we conceive and value our social, economic, and natural environments. Our approach will be to examine: (1) the strengths and weaknesses of traditional disciplines and (2) the possibilities for new ideas and visions to be found at the interfaces between disciplines.

Weekly presentations by a cross-section of the faculty will introduce the content and modes of inquiry of different disciplines ranging across the arts, sciences and humanities. The two small-group discussions per week will serve as forums in which to further explore how the assumptions and presuppositions of different perspectives shape larger questions within human ecology. In addition to faculty presentations and discussion groups, a number of exercises and field trips will be included. Discussions will focus on themes from the lectures and readings, all lectures will be held in Gates Auditorium on Wednesdays.

Expectations:

Final evaluations will be based on multiple criteria. These include: 30% completion of short papers and homework assignments; 45% an early “mid-term” and a final paper assignment; 25% active involvement in discussion sessions and participation in field trips and other class projects. Attendance at faculty presentations on Wednesdays is required. All requirements are to be completed on time. Formal course extensions will be granted only with approval of the instructors or a medical excuse.

Reading Materials: (All books are available at Sherman’s Bookstore)

John Berger - *Sense of Sight*

John Berger - *Pig Earth*

Annie Dillard - *The Annie Dillard Reader*

Loren Eiseley - *The Star Thrower*

Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash - *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*

John Gray - *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*

Aldo Leopold - *A Sand County Almanac*

Note: Additional short articles and handouts maybe added by individual lecturers at the time of their presentations.

Some of the questions and themes looked at in different ways by these texts include, for instance: What kinds of changes are needed to make our society sustainable? How radical are they and how could they actually be brought about? How is the current system rooted in history and social, cultural, religious and economic patterns? What are alternatives to it? How are the ways we relate to each other and to nature determined by our ideas? our habits of perception and styles of seeing the world? our spiritual practices and experiences? the structures of our personalities? How are the claims of science related to the insights of art, the readings of history and the visions of religion? Are we entering a post-modern – or post-“post-modern” – age?

Schedule

NOTE: This will be revised during the term:

Week	Dates	Lecturer
Week 0	9/11	Syllabus review and introductions
Week 1	9/15	Readings from HANDOUT --- BRIDGE AT THE END OF THE WORLD
	9/15	Sidebar mini-lecture and discussion: What is Human Ecology? SPECIAL SESSION NOTE: Gus Speth - Dean, Yale School of Forestry and Environment Studies, Gates Auditorium, Sept. 15, 7:00pm
	9/18	Readings from HANDOUT --- BRIDGE AT THE END OF THE WORLD
	9/20	Field Trip: The Common Ground Fair
Week 2	9/22	Readings from A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC:

- On a Monument to the Pigeon pp116-119
 Deadening p124
 Thinking Like A Mountain pp137-141
 The green lagoons pp 150-158
 Song of the Gavilan pp158-163
 Country pp177-180
 Natural History pp202-210
 The land ethic pp237-264
 Homework Assignment: “Analysis of a Fair Vision”
 9/24 John Anderson, “The Land”
 Reading: HOLY THE FIRM
 9/25 Discussion
- Week 3 9/29 Reading: PIG EARTH
 Sidebar discussion: What is the nature of narrative truth in fiction?
 10/1 Elmer Beal, “Earth and Culture” (Finish PIG EARTH)
 10/2 First Paper Due
- Week 4 10/6 Reading: THE STARTHROWER
 “How Flowers Change the World”, “The Hidden Teacher”, “The Star Thrower”, “Science and
 the Sense of the Holy”, “How Natural is Natural?”, “The Inner Galaxy”
- 10/8 Rich Borden, “Ecology of Mind”
 10/9 Discussion
 Read about the “Singularity”, starting with the overview at the Singularity
 Summit 2007 <http://singinst.org/overview/whatisthesingularity>
 and some of the speeches there <http://singinst.org/media/singularitysummit200>
 and the Wikipedia article which summarizes Ray Kurzweil’s argument that the “Singularity is
 Near” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Singularity_is_Near
- Week 5 10/13 Reading: THE SENSE OF SIGHT
 “The White Bird”, pp. 5 - 9
 “The Storyteller”, pp. 13 - 18
 “The Eaters and the Eaten”, pp. 27 - 32
 “Hiroshima”, pp. 287-295
 “Theatre of Indifference” and an additional reading TBA
 Sidebar discussion: What is interdisciplinary study?
 10/15 Dru Colbert, “Visual Ecology”
 10/16 Discussion
 NOTE: Possible Extra Evening Session – Movie Night
- Week 6 10/20 Reading: STRAW DOGS
 10/22 Colin Capers, “Reading Between the Lines” (finish STRAW DOGS)
 10/23 Discussion

Note: Possible activity of interest: Climate Change Conference CC21, at

UMO

- Week 7 10/27 Reading TBA
 10/29 Jamie McKown, “Rethinking Environing”
 10/30 Discussion
- Week 8 11/3 TBD
 11/5 TBD – collaborative project activity (dinner, performance, or other option)
 1/6 Discussion
- Week 9 11/10 Reading: GRASSROOTS POSTMODERNISM
 11/12 Gray Cox, “Grassroots Post-modernism”
 11/13 Discussion
- Week 10 11.17 Presentations of final collaborative projects
 11/19 alumni speaker on film – Jen Prediger
 11/20 Final Paper Due

What is Human Ecology?

The study of the relations between humans and their natural and social environment – but studying them how?

Traditional Liberal Arts & Professional Approach

-- Theory-centered learning by a neutral or “objective” spectator

-- Discipline centered and organized by departments

-- Elitist or meritocratic approach to knowing and decision-making

Human Ecological Approach

* Problem-centered [practical, action-oriented, values driven] study by an involved participant

* Inter-disciplinary, non-departmental approach [sometimes integrating theories, sometimes bridging between, sometimes juxtaposing]

* Seeks to include all the stakeholders in study and decision-making