RELS-235* Religion and Environment:  
Or how I learned to stop worrying about my lectures and love my students

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Abstract  
This paper reflects on my experience of teaching a 200-level interdisciplinary course on “Religion and the Environment” which fulfilled requirements for students in religious studies and environmental studies. The course was taught as a “mass seminar” in which 66 students were placed into small groups, and emphasized seminar-style discussions and formal class debates rather than lectures. An appendix of student comments reflects positively on the format and process of the course and the paper concludes by recommending this “mass seminar” approach as a way of giving humanities and interdisciplinary education to large numbers of students. This approach, however, depends on the right type of teaching space that is flexible enough to accommodate a large number of students sitting at tables facing each other.

Context and history  
In Winter 2009 I taught the class RELS-235 Religion and Environment for the third time at Queen's. The class grew out of a third-year seminar class on Religion, Nature and Technology, that was on the books when I came to Queen's in 2000. I taught that class once and then decided to split it into two classes, a 200-level undergraduate class called Religion and the Environment, and a 800-level graduate seminar on Nature, Technology and the Sacred. The aim of the 200-level class was to create a popular course with no prerequisites that would appeal to a wide variety of students outside of religious studies, and one that would also be acceptable to the School of Environmental Studies, which was at the time seeking to bolster its offerings in the humanities and social sciences.

The class was taught in a three-hour block, attracted a total enrolment of 66 students, and was taught in the Integrated Learning Centre in Beamish-Munro hall, an oval room with whiteboards all the way round the room, moveable tables and chairs, and no technological aids. Many of the students were in environmental studies, some in global development studies, two in commerce, several in applied science, and a handful in religious studies. At the end of the class I asked students to hand in one page on the topic “what I learned in this class.” At least half of the students focussed on the question of process rather than content. Their responses prompted me to write this reflection on the learning processes that I developed.
The fundamental pedagogical principle for this course was that education should be about unleashing the creative potential of students rather than attempting to get students to conform to a pre-ordained pattern of knowledge or thinking. This is not to say that getting students to master a body of knowledge is not valuable. Far from it. It is absolutely necessary when it comes to learning languages, how to build a bridge, or conduct open-heart surgery. But I knew from my conversations with students in the past that many of them found university to be a depressing experience that placed too much emphasis on demonstrating knowledge rather than learning how to be creative and innovative.

I remember vividly a conversation with a student who had taken a course in the history of opera. When I asked her what was her exam like, she told me that it consisted of listening to operas that they had studied and identifying their titles and composers. To me this was a travesty of supposedly “higher” education and seemed more suited to elementary forms of education, rather than encouraging creativity, innovation, thinking, problem-solving or indeed fostering wisdom and intellectual maturity among the young.

On another occasion I remember listening to lecture on creativity and mathematics by a professor who had won a teaching award. The lecture was full of examples of how in his own career he had found mathematics to be an incredibly exciting and creative career. I believed him, but when I asked him how he taught students to be creative, he responded that his classes at Queen’s didn’t do that. This to me was absurd!

The topics of creativity and innovation are widely bandied around as the key to economic success. Countries such as China and Japan are actively investigating how to turn their higher education systems into places that emphasize creativity rather than rote-learning. China wants to become a place that its known for innovation rather than production, a place where products can be stamped with the label “Designed in China” rather than “Made in China.”

The topic of the environmental crisis is a topic that demands creativity on the part of a new generation of students. As Gus Speth notes in his most recent book, the environmental movement has been a failure, largely because it has not been radical enough, and has tended to accommodate to the norms of thinking and social processes that have engineered the problem. Solutions are not always to be found by reverse engineering. They can come from new patterns of thought and creative insights from unexpected places. I hoped that teaching a course on “religion and the environment” would go some way towards thinking in creative ways about pressing social issues.

**Objectives**

Based on my experience of teaching the course before, I wanted to achieve several key objectives in this class. I wanted students who knew nothing about religion to gain a positive impression of how the academic study of religion approaches the topic of religion without regard to religious belief or adherence. I wanted students who were religious to see the benefit of thinking about religion from an outside point of view. I wanted students in the sciences to think about the significance of cultural approaches to the question of the environment. I wanted humanities students to learn from science students about environmental issues. But above all, I wanted all students to have the opportunity to learn in a truly multidisciplinary way, gaining knowledge from each other’s varied academic backgrounds, to think about issues from multiple perspectives, and to work together on common problems.
The main obstacles to achieving these objectives were my own fear about what could be considered an acceptable form of education at Queen’s, my own presupposition that a large class meant a lecture class and not a seminar class, and my own faith in technology as the solution to dealing with larger and larger numbers of students. Instead, I overcame these self-imposed mental objections and created what was for me an entirely novel form of education: a low-tech mass seminar with no formal lectures and no final exam or term paper.

In the end the success of the course also depended on two additional factors: the physical space created in the Faculty of Applied Science’s Integrated Learning Centre; and the personality of my TA.

**Course structure**

The course was organized around reading five books in twelve weeks. The books moved from theory to practice. The first book was a functional theory of religion that discussed how religion and the environment are connected at the level of evolutionary psychology. The second provided a set of arguments for which religion should be considered a powerful social force that has the ability to make a positive contribution to solving the environmental crisis. In the second half of the course we focussed on East Asia, my own area of expertise. By way of background we read about the relationship between ideology and environment in Maoist China, then went on to consider the globalization of Western views of nature and environment in China and Taiwan, and then the specific actions of Buddhists in Asia and North America on green issues. Although there was, therefore, a kind of direction to the content, the course was more or less arranged into discrete segments and did not attempt to synthesize the cumulative load of knowledge that the students were acquiring. I agonized for a while about this aspect of the course design, but in the end remained firm in my conviction that what the course achieved by formally disconnecting the various sections more than made up for what could be gained my emphasizing the accumulation of knowledge.

Each week therefore, was an independent learning unit that did not depend very much on previous knowledge. Marks were gained on a weekly basis, and there was no formal summative assessment of knowledge. Rather the emphasis was totally on the weekly process. Each week had to be a success independent of each other week. This required careful attention to the lesson structure.

**Lesson structure**

The focus on this course was on giving students free rein to voice their ideas creatively about the weekly readings. I didn't really care what they knew, only about whether they could think independently and make a contribution to the class as a whole. The gamble was that by giving students an unprecedented degree of freedom, independence and flexibility, they would not abuse this freedom but rather take advantage of the opportunity to develop their own creative intellectual talents. Key to this was that the instructor’s voice should not be heard as the source of knowledge or wisdom, but as one voice among many. This was not because of any democratic ideological conviction on my part but rather because of my own somewhat elitist sensibilities. I genuinely wanted the course to give students the chance to think in a way that they had never thought be-
fore and learn in a way that they had never learned before. In so doing I hoped that genius, rather than conformity, would be rewarded with the highest marks.

Each lesson began by arranging tables and chairs in groups. Students would sit together at a table facing other. At the beginning I did this in groups of eight but quickly changed to groups of four, which proved much better for fostering intensive discussions. Each student would bring to class a one page response paper based on the readings. Students were told to physically exchange their papers with the person next to them, and that person would have the job of reading it and explaining to the others what that person had written. The purpose of this assignment was to ensure that students took the weekly reading and response paper seriously. Knowing that the response paper would be read and discussed by peers would be far more frightening than handing it in to an instructor for grading. As one student wrote:

During RELS235 I have learned to critically examine my own writing before handing it in. Prior to having my papers read in front of me, I would just write what I wanted to say and hand it in. Once I knew my peers would be reading it (in front of me) I made a more concerted effort to improve my writing. … Additionally, this method of sharing your work also allows for you to not only see new thoughts from various points of view (thoughts that you may never have considered) but it also allows you to see where there may be “holes” in your own work. Having someone else summarize your work shows you where you may have been unclear in your thoughts or in your wording of a particular point you were trying to say. I tried to learn from this and improve for each paper.

Once the students had got used to this assignment, the class was able to begin with little instruction on the part of the instructor. At 2:30 I would walk into class and simply invite the students to begin. This was to reinforce the notion that it was the students’ voices rather than the instructors’ that were to take priority in the class. The TA and I would then walk round the class, pulling up a chair, sitting in on discussions, and making sure that students were doing the assignment correctly. (In particular it was necessary to strictly enforce the rule that response papers should be exchanged, as initially many students were unwilling to have others read their writing). One student wrote:

I’ve learned that interactive small group discussions are very efficient and effective at triggering creative ideas from different people. As compared to a force fed lecture based course, I found myself learning more of how different people’s background can have a huge effect on their established opinions even when presented with a point that differs from their beliefs entirely. … I had a lot of fun taking this course and I would love to see this methodology applied to more courses within the university as I am pretty disgusted at the force feeding of lecture based courses at this point.

The second part of the class developed out of the first. This consisted of a group exercise where each table was required to write a sentence that responded in some way to the readings and which could be discussed by everyone in the class. The key to the success of this exercise was to award bonus points to the groups that came up with the most interesting or insightful statements that could stimulate class discussion. I experimented with awarding bonus points myself to those I thought most conducive to class discussion, and also with having the class decide which group they most wanted to hear from. The way this worked was that each table was given a dry erase
marker and wrote its sentence on the whiteboards. Then there would be a ten minute voting period whereby the whole class would get up and walk around reading the various statements, and affix a sticky note to the ones they most wanted to hear about. The groups with the most sticky notes received a bonus mark, and they were then required to lead a brief discussion explaining what their idea was, how it related to the readings, etc. The democratic experiment worked sometimes, but it sometimes caused students to lapse into frivolity, creating sentences that had little intellectual value but which they thought might attract the most support from their fellow students. Democracy in this case, was in some weeks a race to the bottom. This in itself was a valuable lesson for everyone.

After a break, we resumed for the third and fourth parts of the class. The third part was the time for me or the TA to speak about the topic. Sometimes I knew in advance what I wanted to say, and prepared a mini-lecture. Sometimes I wanted to riff off the points raised by the students, perhaps correcting misinterpretations or filling in holes in the class’s knowledge. The impression I was trying to create was that the class should be driven by the students’ responses to the topic and not my own. This was a mixed success. In a mid-term performative evaluation, some students asked for greater direction from me, which prompted me to provide a slightly more formal lecture experience in each class. In the end I think this was as a good idea to slightly increase my own contribution to the content.

The fourth and final part of the class was a debate. The topic of each week’s debates was fixed in advance, and related broadly to the readings. To prepare for the debate, one team would be coached by the instructor, and another by the TA in a mandatory tutorial that took place outside the regular class schedule. In the debate, each person had the opportunity to speak for three minutes, the “pro” team going first, followed by the “anti” team. The debaters then took questions from the floor, moderated by one of the instructors, and followed by a blind vote. The debate proved to be a great success. One student wrote:

I also learned a lot from the public speaking / debating framework which I feel encouraged skills that are not taught in my other classes.

The debate format also continued the theme of discussing topics from different perspectives:

Having to listen to different perspectives on the same topic allowed me / forced me to listen to the side of the topic I wouldn’t otherwise have considered.

Altogether this proved to be attractive but also challenging to students:

This class was a big shock to my university mindset. I was forced to actually think about issues and roll ideas around in my head rather than just memorize or write essays based on research that had been done in the past. This was both difficult and refreshing for me. I found this class very difficult because I was never quite able to feel that I had caught my balance, and that I was slightly off-footed the whole time because I was never sure what was expected from me. At the same time I found the concept that I could state my own ideas refreshing and slightly intimidating (having spent so much time referencing the ideas of others I was more than a little frightened to state my own in such a manner).

Closing the class with a debate on which the students voted proved to be effective because it ended the class with the sense that the students had somehow engineered their own learning, rather than having it provided for them. I think this was an enabling and positive experience for
most people. The debate also enabled the debaters to practice public speaking skills and to collaborate on writing a persuasive argument to be judged by their peers. It also enabled the audience to consider an argument from opposite sides and form their own opinion on a topic. One student wrote:

Unlike many of the courses I have taken thus far in my undergraduate career, I did not learn from this course what to think, but rather what to think about. In place of absorbing facts and memorizing definitions were perplexing questions, complex debates and glimpses into new perspectives. … I learned that there are some subjects that involve more than just being told the answers, and that instead, sometimes the most engaging follow-up to a question is simply another question. Most importantly, I learned to keep asking questions despite not always being handed an easy answer.

The debate format on the whole contributed to the objective of presenting different opinions driven by the students rather than having a single authoritative voice in the class.

Assessment of student performance

Students were assessed each week on their one page response paper. The criteria were explicitly stated in the syllabus (see Appendix 2) and were based on the principle of rewarding effort and creativity. It was emphasized that students should strive to produce unique responses rather than conform to what they imagined the instructors wanted to hear. Responses were not judged on their content so much as how closely they adhered to the guidelines for writing a response. Again this was consistent with the principle that this class was about the learning process rather than knowledge content. Papers that barely conformed to the guidelines received the lowest mark. Papers that conformed to the guidelines received an average mark. Papers that went beyond what the guidelines asked for or seemed to be works of supererogation received the highest mark.

Response papers accounted for 60% of each student's marks. The remaining 40% came from their debate performance. 10 marks were available for attending the pre-debate tutorial in a well-prepared manner. 10 marks were for the quality of their oral debate performance. 20 marks were for a lengthier written debate argument that they handed in on the day of their debate. In total, students produced 15 pages of writing for the class, nine for the responses, and six for the debate.

The principle behind assigning marks in this way was that the distribution of marks conveys to students a sense of where they should put their energy and attention. In this case, the majority of marks were given for coming to class each week armed with a response paper. This indicated to the students that the course heavily emphasized the process of continuous engagement by students, rather than a final summative exam or essay. This meant that the weekly classes were genuine sites of interactive learning to which students were forced to give serious attention and effort. Students had to come to class and contribute to the dialogue in order to gain any marks at all.

A benefit of this system was that marking took place continuously throughout the semester, enabling the instructors to get a steady flow of feedback from students about what they were thinking and give a steady stream of feedback back to them. It also had the added bonus that there was no pile of essays or exams to mark at the end from which students rarely learn anything or have the chance to improve upon.
Conclusions and recommendations

In my estimation, this format proved a huge success with students. Part of this could be attributed to the fact that many of the students were from the sciences and had not generally had this kind of educational opportunity before. For them, the course was perhaps successful simply because it was a humanities course that involved debate and discussion and was therefore something different. But the fact that the course was deliberately constructed around interdisciplinary dialogue, student participation and active discussions probably reinforced this point to a greater degree than many of them had previously experienced. This was reflected in the number of student comments to the effect that this course was nothing like what they had experienced before.

The teaching styles in this course provoked me to use my brain rather than regurgitate information from lecture material or a textbook. Reading the opinions and insights of peers, whom were once strangers and are now good friends, on readings that we both had read yet interpreted differently. … I have also learned to work well with others and to begin to understand how others think and process the same information as me. Randomly sitting at a table of girls in the first week has now allowed me to make four new friends and also to learn how these people work through problems to arrive at their end result. Some draw pictures, some think logically step by step, some sit back and take in others opinions and then create a well-rounded response, and other some fully prepared and eager. … Structuring sentences that were catch yet academic was also a new challenge I faced in this class. Coming together as a group to pick one idea and then develop it took patience and then determination to have the best sentence every week.

One student even remarked that this is how they had imagined university would be like, implying that rarely was their expectation ever met!

This class is how I pictured all university classes being before I actually came to university, a bunch of people in a room discussing different ideas and the effects of them.

Another key finding from the student comments was that engineers and scientists found this style of learning valuable for their own disciplines:

I come from an engineering background, where there is a lot of focus on the more technical side … Unfortunately due to degree requirements and time constraints I found that not much emphasis was placed on the social implications of engineering, and I expect this is a big learning curve once you get to the working field. I particularly noticed the lack of social implications this year once I was fully removed from the engineering program and submerged in an environmental degree. I feel that the environmental program in general has made me more aware and conscious of the cultural and social implications of problem solving. … I think what this course has done is further open my mind into cultural and social reasoning. I think that this course has looked at social concerns in a much different way than even my other environmental studies courses. I feel the other courses focus more on informing you of cultural differences, and that they must be taken into consideration, but do not explore or explain why this is important, what cultural difference even means. And how culture will affect the way someone behaves, re-
acts or thinks. I feel as though the other courses have skimmed along the surface of culture in the social aspect of environmentalism, where this course has made me actually get inside and dissect culture a little bit. … It has developed me to question why people think the way they think, or feel the way they feel, and I think this is important for when I approach an engineering or environmental problem.

To my mind what was important about the course was that it managed to achieve this type of learning in a class of 66 rather than 20. How was this possible? The short answer to this question is the Integrated Learning Centre. To my knowledge there is no other classroom at Queen's where a large number of students can sit as peers facing each other to discuss topics together. The room flat and completely flexible. The whiteboards go almost all the way round the room and are designed to give students the opportunity to control the writing. The only drawback to the room is the acoustics. I and my TA are both good at projecting our voices, though the oval shape created unusual spots where the acoustics were odd. But many students were not good at projecting their voices, and it became a little bit tedious having to ask students to speak up so that the whole class could hear. A solution to this would be a system of multiple wireless microphones that could be placed throughout the room so that students could be remain at their own tables but have their voice heard throughout the class. At the moment the class only has the facility to have one wireless microphone for the instructor, which is a pity as it counteracts the interactive teaching to which the class is otherwise conducive.

The other key to the success of the class was the TA, who was blessed with a forceful, charismatic personality and could thus be a successful counterweight to the instructor. This meant that even when the instructors had the floor there was always the potential for two voices rather than one. This also played an important role in contributing to the dynamic, dialogical nature of the class.

Of these two elements, the classroom space and the TA, of course it is only possible for universities to control the space. I hope that as universities update their classroom facilities they build more flexible, flat spaces like the one in the ILC so as to support this type of teaching style. As we have more students in each class, it is increasingly important to design physical spaces that can accommodate a variety of formats for large classes, and not just lectures. My experience also proved to me that it was possible to design interactive and dynamic learning environment that did not depend upon expensive technology or visual aids. With more TAs and the right space I could even envisage replicating this low-tech, low-cost form of human-to-human learning with perhaps 200 students in a single room.
Appendix 1: “What I learned in this class”

The following statements are excerpted from the one page non-graded assignment at the end of class on the topic “What I learned in this class.” The comments reproduced below are the ones that tend to discuss the process, rather than the content.

This class took me out of my comfort zone of black and white concrete answers that is primarily the world of science. … This class was definitely one of my favourites that I have taken at Queen’s and I am in fourth year, so that says a lot! I found it very exciting to write my own opinion every week because I have never had a chance to do that. Otherwise, it was great to have such a large class interact so well, not only with each other… but also with the professor and TA.

Most classes we are given the material and as students we are told to process it and then spit it back the exact same way, however this class did the exact opposite.

I came into the course having put religion in a separate box. For me, religion stood alone in opposition to the social-historical processes that I had deemed as the important, influencing factors when thinking about global issues. However this class has inspired me to unleash religion from the shackles that I had previously imposed. I now look at religion as creating practices and behaviours that shape the world and intimately interact with issues.

I learnt for the first time that I can comfortably engage in class material when put in an interactive setting with a couple of peers, as opposed to lecture style courses where participation is only for the select few. This class taught me that what you learn in a class has little to do with the material and everything to do with the way the class is taught. I realized in this class that religion should have been my major.

By doing reflections about the course material, the assignments prevented me from simply regurgitating the facts from the assigned readings. Instead, the reflections caused me to dig deeper, formulating my own ideas and thoughts to the reading. I was able to apply material I learned from my other courses. The reflections also forced me to think outside of the box. Rather than accept what I was being told at face value, I learned to think critically and determine whether I agree with the author’s thoughts. The reflections taught me to dispel my previously held idea of “if this concept is published in a book, it must be right.”

I learned a lot from this class and I thought a lot as well. Being in a science program, a lot of my courses include memorization, math, and a lot of information regurgitation. I love my program, I love memorizing mechanisms, and I’m great at regurgitating information, but I really loved taking the time to sit and think for this class. I liked conjuring up ideas and writing down my thoughts.

The readings and discussions really challenged me to think outside of my logical, problem-solving based type of thinking I have learned in engineering. There were a few frustrating moments and a whole cast of topics I didn’t understand at all. I’ll probably never understand those points or arguments, but I’ve experienced them and they have diversified my university experience.
Coming from a scientific background I rarely find myself reading books that have me bring what
I have read into conversation with my housemates for discussion. I think that this way of thinking
and not just accepting the facts that I have been taught or read from a textbook was good for me.

The format of this course was refreshing and lively. It made me think in more constructive and
formal terms. The response papers encouraged me to try and make an original opinion or discov-
er-y; which I personally enjoyed.

I was a little wary of entering the classroom on the first day. here was this three hour time slot on
“religion and the environment”—sure to be a lecture-based, churn-out-an-essay-every-two-weeks
type of course. Imagine my delight when I found out there would only be one essay. And that the
course was a seminar-type class, with weekly debates and discussions. And no final exam? Yes
please. What I’m getting at is that I really liked the way the course was designed. It was such a
change of pace from every other course, where some daft professor drones at you for 50 minutes,
then you go home wondering why someone so boring gets paid six figures.

What I come away with from this class is much greater than anything I’ve experienced thus far in
my university classes. Sure this class has not taught me any new-fangled words or concrete facts—
that as a student I’m so eager to learn and memorize—but instead my mind has been opened up
to these new ideas.

Through my participation in this course I have not so much been given transcendent knowledge
but rather I believe I have developed the ability to ask the right questions. ... Most importantly,
though, through this course I have learned to listen, learn and form my own unique opinions; and
these opinions have sometimes been unconventional. It is my newly learned ability to think, rea-
son and create opinions outside of the box, or my culture, that has so greatly impacted me.

This class is one I debated hard on whether I should drop it or not. I think I was mostly scared of
Dr. Miller and the amount of readings we had to do each week. I was unsure of what to expect
and if I could handle this. But looking back at this uncertainty, I’m really glad I decided to ignore
it and stay in this class. … What I liked about this class was that no firm conclusions were drawn
but rather everyone was entitled to their own opinions. This motivated me, as well as the weekly
assignments, to think for myself and think of the things drawn in readings in relation to other
things in the world.

At the start of the semester, I had no idea what to think of RELS235. I had never taken a course
structured in this way, and quite frankly was a little bit terrified by just about everything. The first
few weeks, I felt like I had little to contribute: none of my ideas seemed very novel, I lacked the
discussion abilities of the upper year arts students, and I knew next to nothing about the topics we
were studying. But I stuck with it, and soon I was getting an “S” on most responses, leading dis-
cussions, and speeding through the readings. In the process, I learned a lot about how to think
critically, expand my ideas, communicate effectively and apply my own experiences to the read-
ings in the form of weekly responses.
Appendix 2: Syllabus

**Time:** Winter 2008, Tuesday 2:30-5:30pm  
**Place:** Active Learning Centre, 313 Beamish Munro Hall  
**Instructors:** James Miller (Professor) and Ian Cuthbertson (TA)  
**Contact:** james.miller@queensu.ca / 7iac@queensu.ca

In this course we will learn how people's religious and cultural habits shape the way they interact with their environment, and vice-versa. We will examine the culture of modernity and how it has transformed the place of religion in our society and at the same time fostered ecologically unsustainable habits of living. This class will also adopt a broad regional focus, East Asia, and a religious focus, Buddhism. In particular we will examine how the ideas and habits of modernity have transformed China into the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and we will investigate the response of the Buddhist tradition to the changing relationship between humans and other living beings on our planet.

This course meets on Tuesdays from 2:30 to 5:30 in the winter term and fulfils the humanities requirements for Environmental Studies students. For more details visit the Environmental Studies website.

Texts available in the Campus Bookstore


**Format**

This is not a lecture course where you are being provided information by an instructor and asked to regurgitate it at the end of the year in a test. Rather, this is a seminar-style course where you are expected to read, think, and discuss ideas with your fellow students. In order for this format to be successful, it is necessary that each student is familiar with the readings before the class starts. To ensure this high level of preparation, all students will be required to create a one-page written response to each week's readings and bring it to the class.

At the beginning of each class students will discuss their written responses with the others at their table. The instructors will rotate through the class looking for tables where there is a variety of interesting ideas and opinions. At the end of the table discussion, the instructors will each call upon two or three tables to explain their ideas to the whole of the class.

After several of the tables have presented, one of the instructors will offer his own view of the readings, highlighting key points of agreement and disagreement. The aim of this exercise is to
generate a thoughtful response to the readings that is guided by the instructors but which draws on the voices of all participants in the course. Students will thus gain practice in critically engaging with ideas, evaluating arguments and working with others.

The final part of each class features a student debate on a key question posed in the schedule below. The question is related to the readings. Each week a team of four students will argue for a particular point of view, and four students will argue against. The students will prepare for the debate by attending a mandatory tutorial with the two instructors. One instructor will coach the "pro" students and the other will coach the "anti" students. Each student will have 3 minutes to make an argument. Each student will also hand in a written argument which will be evaluated by their coach. Following the presentation of arguments, the floor will be open for questions from the rest of the class. Each team will then have a chance to make final arguments, before a class vote is taken.

**Course Requirements**

The course requirements and mark scheme reflect the course’s emphasis on a process of continuous participation and the fact that there is a heavy weekly workload. Consequently, there is no final exam or term paper. Rather you are required to demonstrate a continuous creative engagement with the ideas we will be encountering throughout the term.

**Participation:** 60 marks. Do the assigned readings, attend class, and participate in class discussions. To prepare for the class you must create a one page written response to the reading every week except for the week in which you are a debater. You must bring your response to class, be prepared to discuss it with your group, and hand it in at the end of class. The requirements for the response are as follows:

- It must fit onto one page.
- It must directly respond to a key idea expressed in the readings, and it must make clear what that key idea is.
- It must be uniquely personal, i.e. it must make clear your own response or reaction to the idea, emphasizing the way that your response to the readings is different from everyone else’s response.

Responses will be graded weekly according to the level of effort and creativity that they display. Your response will receive a simple letter grade: B barely sufficient; A adequate; S supererogatory; E elvis. The letter grades will be converted into marks as follows: B 4 marks; A 5 marks; S 6 marks; E 7 marks.

**Debate:** 40 marks. To gain marks you must

- attend the tutorial and demonstrate that you are well prepared (10 marks)
- make an oral presentation in a debate in class (10 marks)
- hand in a 6 page double-spaced written argument (20 marks) on the day of the debate

**Policy on Missed Classes, Deadlines and Extensions**

Students must attend all classes, meet all deadlines and hand in all written material on time in order to be graded. Material handed in after any deadline will not be evaluated and will receive a mark of zero. The only exception to this rule is if you suffer a catastrophic accident that is so severe that you are admitted to the ER and are physically unable to come to class. Students who re-
quire accommodation for religious reasons or because of some chronic medical condition or learning disability must inform the instructors at the end of their first class, and negotiate an appropriate accommodation.

### Class Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Debate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 6</td>
<td>Introduction of course, class, and instructors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 13</td>
<td>Religion is not about God part I</td>
<td>Science must explain religion away.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 20</td>
<td>Religion is not about God parts II and III</td>
<td>Consumerism is a religion that is destroying our planet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 27</td>
<td>A Greener Faith chs. 1-4</td>
<td>The ecological crisis cannot be solved without the participation of the world’s religions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 3</td>
<td>A Greener Faith chs. 5-8</td>
<td>Environmentalism at its best is a spiritual practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 10</td>
<td>3 readings on Web-CT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lynn White. The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis</td>
<td>Christianity must share some of the blame for our ecological crisis.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>George Rupp. Religion, Secular Modernity and Ecology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John Gray, An Illusion with a Future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 24</td>
<td>Mao’s War on Nature chs. 1-2</td>
<td>Democratic states are better equipped to respond to environmental problems than non-democratic states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 3</td>
<td>Instructor away: class cancelled</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 10</td>
<td>Mao’s War on Nature chs. 3-5</td>
<td>China’s one child policy is morally necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 17</td>
<td>Discovering Nature (whole book)</td>
<td>The globalization of Western cultural concepts of nature is a positive force for environmentalism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 24</td>
<td>Buddhism and Ecology (introduction, overview, and chapters by Swearer, Sponsel, Ingram, Parkes, Williams, and Habito)</td>
<td>Buddhism is vital for solving environmental problems in Asia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 31</td>
<td>Buddhism and Ecology (chapters by Odin, Kaza, Barnhill and Yamauchi)</td>
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