

Dr. Chris Crews (he/him) | Comp. Religion & Humanities
Office hours: Mon/Thu (10:30-12:30 PST) [Schedule Now](#)
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Religion & Nature

(RELS 323-01)

I wish to acknowledge the land on which CSU, Chico operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the [Mechoopda people](#). Today, this place is still the home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

“To be native to a place we must learn to speak its language.” -Robin Wall Kimmerer

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will explore some of the complex relationships between religion and nature. How do religions and spiritual beliefs shape our views about the natural world? What is the relevance of religion to the perception and resolution of environmental problems? How do religions view the ideal and appropriate relationship between humans and the natural world? This course will explore understandings of religion and environment/ecology/nature relations. We will trace the creation of the field of “religion and ecology” and related environmental movement, assess various religious communities’ responses to today's environmental issues, and consider historical, cultural, ecological, and scriptural/theological bases for beliefs and practices related to nature across various traditions.

CLASS BLACKBOARD

This course will take place through the CSU Chico Blackboard Learn platform. Since this is an entirely online class, make sure **in advance** that you can access Blackboard, watch video on your computer, and have either a built-in or external webcam, or a phone with audio & video recording capabilities. If you have trouble with any of these requirements, call ITSS/student computing. Do not wait for the last minute and then ask for technical assistance.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All required readings will be available as digital files or links on our Blackboard Learn site.

*(*Note: This syllabus is subject to change with fair notice.)*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Your final grade will be based on a total of **1100 points** earned from the following activities.

Quizzes (50 points each x4 = 200 pts): Each quiz will cover information since the last quiz. If you have done all the readings and taken notes, you should do fine. The quizzes will be taken through the Blackboard Learn site with a fixed quiz time. Quizzes are open book/open notes, but since there is a short time allotted for each question, you will not do very well on the quiz if you don't know the materials already.

Tests (100 pts each x3 = 300 pts): There will be three tests over the course of the term, as noted on the schedule. You must take these tests during the allotted time. Tests will cover all materials for each section: readings, online videos, class lectures, etc.

Research Blog Posts (50 pts each x5 = 250 pts): The four research blog posts will give students a chance to explore the class themes of religion and nature by looking at current examples of these topics in the media. Posts should be 450-500 words in length and can focus on any current example relating to religion and ecology.

Weekly Discussion Posts and Response Posts (25 pts each x14 = 350 pts): Discussion post should be 250-300 words in length (3-5 min video) and will respond to questions posted on the Discussion page. These discussion posts will allow students to engage themes from the weekly readings. Weekly response posts should be 100-150 words in length (2-3 min video), and respond to a post from another student. Please respond in a thoughtful, substantial, and collegial way to your peers, not just "I agree with what you said."

Discussion/Response Post Grading Rubric:

(20-25 pts): Outstanding engagement with materials for the week. Post is thoughtful, creative, critical or original. Well-written with only minor grammar/spelling errors.

(15-19 pts): Solid understanding and engagement with materials. Relatively free of errors.

(10-14 pts): Some engagement with materials and attempt to understand issues. Arguments not fully developed or poorly articulated. Some grammar/spelling errors.

(1-9 pts): Minimal engagement with readings. Many grammar/spelling errors. Did not meet minimum required length for assignment.

(0 pts): Did not complete assignment. Did not follow instructions.

Research Blog Post Grading Rubric:

(45-50 pts): Outstanding engagement with research topic. Paper is thoughtful, creative, critical, and original. Well-written with only minor grammar/spelling/citation errors.

- (40-45 pts):** Solid understanding of research materials. Relatively free of errors.
- (35-40 pts):** Some engagement with materials and attempt to understand issues. Arguments not fully developed or poorly articulated. Some grammar/spelling/citation errors.
- (25-30 pts):** Minimal engagement with readings. Many grammar/spelling/citation errors. Did not meet minimum required length for assignment.
- (0-30 pts):** Did not complete assignment or follow instructions.

Overall Assignment Assessment Rubric:

- 25% of grade = Engaging with content (comprehension, analysis)
- 25% of grade = Creative thinking (originality, comparison, synthesis)
- 25% of grade = Technical skills (spelling and grammar, formatting, punctuation)
- 25% of grade = Minimum Guidelines (proper length, timely submission)

GRADING SCALE

Your final grade will be based on the following grading scale.

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
99-94	93-90	89-87	86-84	83-80	79-77	76-74	73-70	69-67	66-64	63-60	>59

Sample Weekly Class Schedule

Students should have completed weekly readings, including any online audio or videos, by Monday of each week so they can respond to discussion questions. For weeks with a recommended full movie(s), these can be viewed anytime during that week or earlier.

Monday: Weekly lecture posted on BB. Weekly discussion question posted on BB.

Wednesday: Student response to weekly BB discussion question due.

Friday: Student response to Wed posts due. Quiz opens for submission on BB (in am).

Sunday: Quiz submission closes on BB (in pm).

Class Schedule

The following schedule is a general guide for our class. Please **always check** our Blackboard Learn class site **before** the start of each week for the latest official schedule and assignment due dates, as this schedule may be updated from time to time throughout the semester. All changes will be posted on the class Blackboard, so make sure you are checking your email.

~ UNIT 1: INTRO TO RELIGION & NATURE ~

By the start of the 1970s, a growing global awareness of what we now call environmental issues was beginning to take shape. Alongside an increased interest in the relationship between nature and culture was a growing appreciation that our religious views and values played an important part in how we relate to the natural world, and that this role could be both helpful and harmful, prompting more attention to how religion and nature issues intersect. In this first unit we will explore the emergence of this area of study and some key texts.

WEEK 1 (Jan 21-24)

Topic: An Emerging Idea

Readings:

- **“The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”**, Lynn White Jr. [BB 6 pgs]
- **“Emergence of the Field of Religion and Ecology”**, John Grimm and Mary Evelyn Tucker [BB 11 pgs]
- **“Religion and the Rise of Environmental Politics in the 21st Century”**, Bron Taylor and Lucas Johnson [BB 19 pgs]

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #1 (Introduction video due Wed)

Videos to Watch:

- **“The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology”**, [Online video](#)

WEEK 2 (Jan 27-31)

Topic: Faith Finds Ecology

Readings:

- **“Religion: what is it, who gets to decide, and why does it matter?”**, Whitney Bauman, Richard Bohannon, Kevin O'Brien [BB 15 pgs]

- “Ecology: what is it, who gets to decide, why does it matter?”, Whitney Bauman, Richard Bohannon, Kevin O'Brien [BB 16 pgs]
- “Religion in an Age of Environmental Crisis”, Roger Gottlieb [BB 20 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- “Can Religion Save the Environment?” [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #2 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

Quiz #1:

- Covers Week 1-2 readings.

~ UNIT 2: THE GREENING OF RELIGION ~

Emerging out of the cultural and ecological dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa, the three major Abrahamic traditions have played an important role in shaping the religious values associated with the natural world. In this unit we will explore how these major faith traditions have begun to wrestle with environmental questions in theory and in practice.

WEEK 3 (Feb 3-7)

Topic: The Abrahamic Traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

Readings:

- “Grounding Theory—Earth in Religion and Philosophy”, Catherine Keller and Laurel Kearns [BB 18 pgs]
- “Religion and Environmental Concern in Europe”, Antonio Muñoz-García [BB 21 pgs]
- “Ecotheology and Environmental Praxis in Guatemala”, Anne Hallum [BB 15 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- “Eternal Reefs, The Greening of Religion” [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #3 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday). Choose one of the columns in the [Guardian’s ‘Climate Changed’ series](#) and discuss how that article connects with our readings for this week.

WEEK 4 (Feb 10-14)

Topic: Ecology & World Religions

Readings:

- **“Ecotheology and World Religions”**, Jay McDaniel [BB 26 pgs]
- **“The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology”**, Mary Evelyn Tucker [BB 22 pgs]
- **“Overview of the Encyclical Laudato Si”**, Global Catholic Climate Movement [BB 8 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Laudato Si’ Encyclical Highlights”**, [Online video](#)
- **“Laudato Si’ - Pope Video”**, [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #4 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

Quiz #2:

- Covers Weeks 3-4.

WEEK 5 (Feb 17-21)

Topic: Judaism and Ecology

Readings:

- **“Adamah (Earth): Searching for and Constructing a Jewish Relationship to Nature”**, Matthew Immergut [BB 24 pgs]
- **“Earthcare: An Ethical Culture Designed to Save Our Planet & Ourselves”**, Reformed Judaism [BB 8 pgs]
- **“Eco-Kabbalah Holism and Mysticism in Earth-Centered Judaism”**, David Mevorach Seidenberg [BB 17 pgs]
- **“Hearing the Outcry of Mute Things - Towards a Jewish Creation Theology”**, Lawrence Troster [BB 16 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Kibutz Lotan”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #5 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

WEEK 6 (Feb 24-28)

Topic: Islam and Ecology

Readings:

- **“The Earth is a Mosque - Ibrahim Abdul Matin & Imam Khalid Latif”**, Abby Margulies [BB 10 pgs]

- **“The Contemporary Islamic World and the Environmental Crisis”**, Seyyed Hossein Nasr [BB 12 pgs]
- **“Tradition and Sentiment in Indonesian Environmental Islam”**, Anne Gade [BB 23 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Faith in Action DC: Sarah Jawaid of Green Muslims”** [Online video](#)
- **“Taking Care of the Environment According to Islam”** [Online video](#)
- **“Muslim Environmentalists Push for Green Hajj”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #6 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

Test #1:

- Covers all materials from Weeks 1-6.

~~ UNIT 3: WORLD RELIGIONS & ECOLOGY ~~

In this unit we move from the three major Abrahamic traditions to considering the relationship between the environment and other major world religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism. We will explore similarities and differences between and across these diverse religious traditions and practices, and look at how this growing focus on environmental questions is playing out across some of the most densely populated areas of the world.

WEEK 7 (March 2-6)

Topic: Merging Religion and Ecology

Readings:

- **“Sacred Rivers: Their Spiritual Significance in Hindu Religion”**, Govindasamy Agoramoorthy [BB 10 pgs]
- **“River Dialogues: Hindu Faith and the Political Ecology of Dams on the Sacred Ganga - Intro”**, Georgina Drew [BB 33 pgs]
- **“The Yamuna River: A Confluence of Waters, A Crisis of Need”**, David Haberman [BB 7 pgs]
- **“The Yamuna River: India’s Dying Goddess”**, Richard Conniff [BB 10 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“The Yamuna River, India’s Most Polluted River”**, [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #7 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

WEEK 8 (Mar 9-13)

Topic: Buddhist Ecologies

Readings:

- **“Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism, and the Environmental Crisis”**, Stephanie Kaza [BB 28 pgs]
- **“Buddhist Interdependence and the Elemental Life”**, Christopher Chapple [BB 14 pgs]
- **“Confessions of a Buddhist Environmental Activist”**, Mandala [BB 3 pgs]
- **“A Buddhist Concept of Nature”**, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama [BB 5 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Caring for Our Global Environment - Dalai Lama”** [Online video](#)
- **“China: Religion and Environment”** [Online video](#)
- **“Pad Yatra: A Green Odyssey”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #8 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

Quiz #3:

- Covers Weeks 7-8, opens ([availability info/time](#)).

WEEK 9 (Mar 16-20)

**** Spring Break - No Classes ****

WEEK 10 (Mar 30 - April 3)

Topic: The Yin and Yang of Nature

Readings:

- **“Daoism and Nature”**, James Miller [BB 22 pgs]
- **“Beyond Naturalism - A Reconstruction of Daoist Environmental Ethics”** R.P. Peerenboom [BB 24 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Daoism and the Environment”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #9 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

WEEK 11 (April 6-10)

Topic: Confucianism, Zen & Ecology

Readings:

- **“Confucian environmental virtue ethics”**, Yong Huang [BB 8 pgs]
- **“Landscapes, cultures, ecologies, religions”**, James Miller [BB 9 pgs]
- **“Zen and the Art of Environmental Education”**, Arran Stibbe [BB 21 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“My Neighbour Totoro”** [Full Movie](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #10

Test #2:

- Covers Weeks 7-11.

~~ UNIT 4: INDIGENOUS & YOUTH ECOLOGIES ~~

WEEK 12 (April 13-17)

Topic: Indigenous Environmental Knowledge & Climate Action

Indigenous peoples have lived for generations in every imaginable environment on Earth, and in many cases they have shown greater respect for their local environment than others.

Without romanticizing or homogenizing Indigenous peoples, what can we learn from their varied relations with the land and possible alternative ways of being and living? At the same time, youth are increasingly leading the global push for climate action. What does this look on the ground and how are ideas about the sacred informing these new youth climate activists?

Readings:

- **“Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human-Nature Relationship”**, Enrique Salmón [BB 7 pgs]
- **“Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau, Wairua: A Māori Philosophy of Vitalism and Cosmos”**, Manuka Henare [BB 21 pg]
- **“Interface between Traditional Religion and Ecology among the Igorots”**, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz [BB 22 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Waahi Tapu”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #11 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

WEEK 13 (April 20-24)

Topic: African Ecologies

Readings:

- **“The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves, Ecological, Social & Symbolic Processes”** Michael Sheridan [BB 32 pgs]
- **“Loggers v. Spirits in the Beng Forest, Côte d’Ivoire, Competing Models”** Alma Gottlieb [BB 14 pgs]
- **“The Socio-Politics of Ethiopian Sacred Groves”** Tsehai Berhane-Selassie [BB 14 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Faces of Africa - The Defender of the Sacred Sites”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #12 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

Quiz #4:

- Covers Weeks 12-13.

WEEK 14 (April 27 - May 1)

Topic: In Defense of the Sacred

Readings:

- **“Sustaining Our Land and Lifeways - Protecting Sacred Lands”** Cultural Survival [BB 9 pgs]
- **“In Defense of our Relatives”** Karyn Mo Wells [BB 20 pgs]
- **“Marshallese poet and activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner talks climate change, nuclear trauma, and cultural resiliency”** Chetanya Robinson, [International Examiner online](#)
- **“Bulldozed Reefs and Blasted Sands - Rituals for Artificial Islands”** Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner [BB 9 pgs]
- **“We Are Sacred as the Earth: Environmentalism, Spirituality, Community & Commitment - Starhawk Interview”** Marilyn Berta [BB 4 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Dear Matafele Peinem”** [Online video](#)
- **“Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner 2014 Speech at UN Climate Summit”** [Online video](#)
- **“Rise”** [Online video](#)
- **“Xiuhtezcatl Martinez 2015 Speech at UN General Assembly High Level Event on Climate Change”**, [Online video](#)

- **“Awake, a Dream from Standing Rock”** [Online documentary](#)

Discussion Post:

- Post #13 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

WEEK 15 (May 4-8)

Topic: Youth Climate Activism

Readings:

- **“Exploring Youth Activism on Climate Change: Dutiful, Disruptive, and Dangerous Dissent”** Karen O'Brien , Elin Selboe, Bronwyn Hayward [BB 13 pgs]
- **“Indigenous Youth Leading the Way”** Cultural Survival [BB 6 pgs]
- **“Indigenous Women Rising”** Cultural Survival [BB 8 pgs]
- **“9 Teen Climate Activists Fighting for the Future of the Planet”** Marilyn La Jeunesse [BB 5 pgs]
- **“The new face of climate activism is young, angry — and effective”**, Ella Nilsen [BB 17 pgs]
- **“The Missing Message in Gen Z's Climate Activism”**, Rachel Hatzipanagos [BB 3 pgs]

Videos to Watch:

- **“Stand Up / Stand N Rock #NoDAPL”** [Online video](#)
- **“Prolific The Rapper x A Tribe Called Red - Black Snakes”** [Online video](#)
- **“Greta Thunberg 2019 Speech at UN Climate Action Summit”** [Online video](#)
- **“The Youth Climate Movement”** [Online video](#)

Discussion Board Post:

- Post #14 (Post due Wed, Response due Friday)

WEEK 16 (May 11-15)

****FINALS WEEK****

Topic: Reflection on the semester and key themes and religious traditions...

- No readings

Test #3:

- Covers Weeks 12-15.

END OF CLASS

University Policies and Campus Resources

Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

Please notify me of any special need relating to your disability within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. Please note that you may be required to show documentation for your disability. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, please email me. Please also contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) as this is the designated department responsible for approving and coordinating reasonable accommodations and services for students with disabilities. ARC will help you understand your rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and provide you further assistance with requesting and arranging accommodations. The Accessibility Resource Center is in Student Services Center 170, 530-898-5959 or www.csuchico.edu/arc.

Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting

State law makes university professors mandated reporters. This means I am required to report to the Title IX Coordinator whenever I learn about incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking that affect any member of the campus community. This includes disclosures that occur during our class discussions or in private. Students may make a **confidential** report to the Counseling and Wellness Center (898-6345) or Safe Place (898-3030). Information on campus reporting obligations and other Title IX related resources are available here: www.csuchico.edu/title-ix.

Academic Dishonesty:

If there is evidence that you have been involved in any form of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism or cheating on exams), you will receive an “F” grade for the course, and a report will be provided to Student Judicial Affairs for further action. Be careful in all of work (classroom presentations as well as written assignments) to properly cite your sources (including online materials). If you borrow the ideas of others in composing your written work, they must be cited; if you borrow the words of others, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and cited. If you have any doubts as to whether or not something needs to be cited, play it safe and cite it—or ask me about it. Any standard citation format (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) is fine. Review the Academic Integrity policy: csuchico.edu/sjd/integrity.shtml, and the “**Religious Studies Academic Integrity Policy**” under “Programs” on the CORH Department home page (csuchico.edu/corh/crel/programs/academic-integrity.shtml). Ignorance of proper citation methods is not a legitimate excuse for violation of these policies.

Other campus resources:

There are many resources available to students such as tutoring through the Student Learning Center, assistance with personal crises through the Counseling Center, help with research

through the library, help for students with food insecurity at the Wildcat Food Pantry, etc. Check out the “Student resources” tab on our Blackboard page for more information.

Library Liaison:

For help with library research please contact George Thompson, ghthompson@csuchico.edu, 898-6603, MLIB 305

This course counts towards:

- Major in Religious Studies (34 units) - [More info](#)
- Minor in Comparative Religion (18 units) - [More info](#)
- Minor in Modern Jewish and Israel Studies (18 units) - [More info](#)
- Major in Humanities (41 units) - [More info](#)
- Minor in Humanities (21 units) - [More info](#)

Students graduating with majors in these and other disciplines in the liberal arts are known for their overall educational preparation, their job flexibility, and their ultimate earning potential when compared to graduates receiving a more narrow, technical, or vocational undergraduate education. Graduating with a double major or even a minor in these fields provides extra evidence of open-mindedness, perseverance, inquisitiveness, and the ability to relate to people of other cultures and to those who are highly educated.

Please consider the environment before printing this syllabus and print double-sided.