

Ecopsychology: Psychology and Environmental Ethics

Global Stewardship Study Program, Spring 2004

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Have you ever wondered why camping and hiking seem to restore our spirits?

Or why preserving wilderness is important to some people and not others?

Why some people recycle and some people don't?

Or if the environmental movement is really working?

How to integrate nature into your schoolwork, occupation, faith, and other areas?

During the 1950s, mass marketing in the United States shifted from convincing consumers to purchase specific items of utilitarian value to purchasing products that addressed the consumer's sense of worth or identity. Concurrently, national development programs saw great expansion of cemented communities—where trees, lakes, prairies, hills, and valleys were supplanted by freeways, shopping malls, suburbs, and parking lots. The psychological and spiritual impacts of modern living are profound in many ways. Human beings have moved more and more into an artificially constructed environment where we are disconnected from the physical cycles of life, where we are divorced from the nurturing role of creation, and where our sense of self is defined through products that cheapen our souls and degrade our environment.

Enter Ecopsychology! Ecopsychology seeks to creatively combine aspects of psychology and environmental studies to increase our understanding of how we as humans relate to our natural surroundings. Psychology and ecology both have much to teach one another. This course will focus on psychological elements found in the ecology movement (i.e., what motivations and attitudes influence environmental behavior?) as well as on ecological concepts often overlooked in traditional psychology (i.e., should a definition of mental health include our environmental actions?). The content will explore the most basic spiritual and human instincts/inclinations and raise the question of identity in the context of community and environment.

This course will focus on integrating ideas, focusing on success stories, and exploring how psychology, ecology, and faith can strengthen each other. We will use the tools of class discussion, research, lecture, field work, and personal experiences to help us gain a rich understanding of ecopsychology. Jaguar Creek will serve as an opportunity to experience the principles and challenges of ecopsychology firsthand. We will use the course material in combination with our experiences of living in Belize to challenge many of our psychological paradigms in an attempt to more fully understand our place as humans in the natural world.

Course Structure

Sixteen lectures focused on Ecopsychology

Four field trips to pertinent locations within Belize

Requirements

There are two main expectations for this course. First is that you keep pace with the flow of the course by doing the readings, keeping up with assignments, and attending class consistently. Second is that you develop and share your personal reactions and opinions about the course topics. There are five requirements which make up your grade and help you reach these expectations:

1) Class Attendance and Participation (20%)—The second half of each class in the lecture section will be turned over to discussion. Students are expected to contribute to the class discussions regularly. The class discussions will provide a chance to voice our opinions, hear other people's views, make sense of our experience in Belize, and better understand the class topics.

2) Personal Journal (20%)—You will be asked to write in a journal on various topics relating to the readings each week during the semester. You will be expected to write at minimum of 5 handwritten pages each week before you come to class. Journals will be collected twice during the semester (see syllabus) to help you keep up with the readings and course topics. This journal is your chance to write your personal reactions, thoughts, ideas, opinions, and criticisms of ecopsychology topics. This will give you a way of formulating your views on ecopsychology as well as keep you on top of the readings for the semester. Please keep in mind that this journal is informal and personal—do not write summaries of the readings! The journal is for your own reactions.

3) Midterm Exam (20%)—The midterm will be an exam covering course material, field work, and class discussions to that point. It will be an essay exam.

4) Final Reflection Paper (20%)—This paper will be your final wrap-up of your thoughts on Ecopsychology. You will no doubt be changed in some ways by spending a semester abroad at Jaguar Creek. This paper is designed to give you a chance to express what you have learned in class, what you have experienced in Belize, and how the semester has impacted you. It will also serve as an opportunity for you to discuss how you might transfer your experiences here back to your life at home. We will discuss the details about this paper as it approaches.

5) Art Reflection (20%)—This project will be presented to the class during the final two days of the intensive. Group discussion of your project will follow your presentation.

Required readings

The required texts are Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind, a collection of essays edited by Theodore Roszak and Mary E. Gomes, and Earth Community, Earth Ethics by Larry Rasmussen. There will also be supplemental readings taken from relevant journal articles, book chapters, psychological research, and religious texts. These readings are indicated in the syllabus and will be provided to students prior to class.

Grading

Grading will be based on a total 100-point scale for the semester. Class participation, personal journals, the midterm, the final paper, and the art project will each be worth 20 points. There will be no final exam. Your final point total will determine your grade as follows:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
90 - 100	A
80 - 89	B
70 - 79	C
60 - 69	D
59 or below	F

Grades will not be curved. For example, if your total points equal 79 at the end of the semester, you will receive a "C" for the course. Also, there will be no extra credit work.

Course Outline

THE ALL

Class 1: Introduction to ecopsychology

We will introduce the topic of ecopsychology—how we as humans approach our relationship with nature and spirituality. Concepts and definitions will be explored and formulated. (Brown chapter, Krause article)

Class 2: History and schools of psychology

We will explore historical perspectives of psychology as they relate to spiritual development, Christianity, and the natural environment. We will also learn about the major schools of psychological theory, and we will discuss how the above concepts might be integrated into each school. (Azar, White articles)

Class 3: Schools of ecopsychology

We will explore the primary schools of thought that make up the field of ecopsychology. Philosophies such as deep ecology, feminist psychology, environmental justice, creation spirituality, and stewardship will be discussed. (Aizenstat chapter)

Class 4: Benefits of creation

We will discuss the benefits to humans of sustainable environmental practices. Possible topics include physical health, mental health, aesthetics, ecological diversity, honoring God's creation, and others. (Windle chapter, Tiesl & O'Brien article)

Class 5: Perception and sensation

We will discuss the foundations of perception and sensation, and then will explore the importance of using our five senses to attend to and interact with the natural world. (Readings from Sewall, Dillard)

Class 6: Field trip to Xuntanunich

The class will travel to the ancient Mayan site of Xunantunich. Students will learn about the history of the local Mayan cultures and will receive particular attention to Mayan spirituality and the Mayan relationship with nature. Students will be asked to compare and contrast Mayan life and beliefs with their own.

Class 7: Connectedness

The idea of interdependence and connectedness will be explored so that we gain a greater understanding of our relationships (and impact) on other people as well as the environment. (Shapiro chapter, Wright article)

Class 8: Jaguar Creek applications

This will be the first dedicated time period to focus on how life in Jaguar Creek relates firsthand to ecopsychology. We will be dealing on a daily basis with the limited availability of electricity and water, the sources of electricity and water, options for food, disposing of waste in a sustainable manner, and living as a part of nature rather than apart from nature. Although all of these topics will be covered, the discussion will be largely directed by students' needs and issues. This will be a primary opportunity for us to explore how Jaguar Creek, our experiences in Belize, and ecopsychology course topics intersect. (Harper chapter)

THE FALL

Class 9: Consumerism

We will discuss the Western world's emphasis on materialism and consumerism and explore the various effects of that worldview. Alternatives will be explored. (Durning chapter, Kanner and Gomes chapter)

Class 10: Science...

Class will focus on the pros and cons of the scientific method as a way of categorizing and understanding the world (especially the natural world). Other methods will also be explored, such as experiential knowledge, qualitative analysis, intuition, spirituality, and the Gaia hypothesis. (Roszak excerpt)

Class 11: ...and Spirit

We will focus in-depth on Western religious viewpoints related to creation care. A wide variety of viewpoints will be discussed and students will be asked to consider where they fall in the continuum of Christian environmental thought. (Brandt article, Lerner article, readings from The Bible)

Class 12: **Midterm Exam**

Class 13: Environmental Impact Assessment

Students will participate in an exercise created by S. Lerner in which they consider the impact of their daily lives on the environment. Specific aspects will include diet, clothing, electrical usage, transportation, water, refuse, leisure activities, and their roles as students, employees, and church members.

Class 14: Field trip to Spanish Lookout

We will visit several sites in the Mennonite village of Spanish Lookout to examine the origin and preparation of much of the food available at Jaguar Creek (and Belize as a whole). A poultry farm, a beef farm, a produce farm, Quality Poultry Products, and Western Dairies will all be visited. Environmental impacts of each site will be addressed. (Kaufman & Braun excerpt)

Class 15: Jaguar Creek applications

We will revisit the above topics pertaining to Jaguar Creek. This will allow for the changing experiences and attitudes of students to be explored and better understood.

THE CALL

Class 16: Motivation & attitudes

We will review psychological research and theory pertaining to learning, cognition, motivation, and attitudes. We will challenge the approach of the environmental movement as a whole (who typically use guilt and shame as a method of enacting change) and discuss more effective methods in light of research. (Bardwell, De Young, Martinez & McMullin articles)

Class 17: Field trip to Ix Chen

This field trip will give us a firsthand look at holistic medicine and traditional Mayan natural remedies. Hiking trails will help us understand how Mayans used plants, trees, fruits, and herbs to develop medicines and other natural products.

Class 18: Field trip to Friends for Conservation and Development

The class will visit a community-born agency devoted to environmental awareness and refuse management. We will discuss the concept of success stories, assess the impact of the organization, and discuss the challenges associated with environmental action as a whole. (Pockets of Paradise article, Berger & Bowman article, Cappiello article)

Class 19: What can we do?

We will discuss how ecopsychology can be implemented in real life. We will develop strategies for implementing ecopsychological principles in our lives back home. We will emphasize the importance of the “power of one” and of “small wins”—essentially a way of encouraging environmentally-sustainable behaviors no matter how small. (Macy chapter, Monroe & Kaplan article)

Class 20: Wrap up / Applications

We will have a small celebration for the end of class, again discussing how the principles of ecopsychology and our experiences in Jaguar Creek can be assimilated into our lives after we leave Belize. (Walsh article, Jickling article)

Required readings

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