

**WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE**  
**LIBERAL ARTS DIVISION**  
**GENERAL COURSE OUTLINE**

PHI	170	Environmental Ethics	3-0	3
Course Prefix	Course Number	Course Title	(Lec-Lab)	Semester Hours

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Introduces philosophical ethical theory and its application to environmental issues. Explores the roots of Western ideas about nature (Greek, Biblical, early Modern), the American environmental discussion, and current positions including development, conservation, preservation and restoration. Considers issues including human-centered vs. life-centered views, whether species or habitats have value, appreciation vs. cost/benefit approaches, and bioregionalism.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE**

- I. Ethical Theory
  - A. The Nature of Ethics
  - B. Deontological and Utilitarian Approaches
  - C. Rights: Moral and Legal
- II. The Roots of Western Ideas about Nature
  - A. Greek
  - B. Biblical
  - C. Early Modern
- III. The American Background of Environmental Discussion
  - A. Henry David Thoreau
  - B. John Muir
  - C. Gifford Pinchot
  - D. Aldo Leopold
- IV. Current Positions:
  - A. Conservation
  - B. Development
  - C. Preservation
  - D. The Land Ethic
  - E. Restoration
  - F. Deep Ecology
  - G. Ecofeminism
- V. Issues
  - A. Anthropocentric and Biocentric Views
  - B. Aesthetic and Cost/Benefit Approaches
  - C. The Organism, the Species, and the Habitat
  - D. Bioregionalism
  - E. Mitigation

**METHODS OF PRESENTATION**

1. Lecture and discussion
2. Occasional films
3. Case material
4. Student panels
5. Small group work
6. Student debates
7. Field trips

## STUDENT OUTCOMES (*The student should . . .*)

1. Attitudes
  - a. demonstrate respect for differing views.
  - b. learn to be appropriately skeptical.
  - c. take personal responsibility for learning.
  - d. take personal responsibility for moral decision making.
  - e. appreciate biological diversity.
  - f. take personal responsibility for her/his lifestyles and social involvement.
2. Skills
  - a. read, write and speak critically and effectively about environmental issues.
  - b. identify and explain moral environmental issues in the news,
  - c. identify premises and conclusions in moral arguments as well as evaluate the quality of evidence.
  - d. identify and evaluate values assumed in moral arguments.
  - e. identify the major types of species and ecological processes affected by corporate, government, market and individual decisions.
  - f. learn how to perceive ecological interaction, change, health and decay.
3. Knowledge/Content
  - a. use criteria to distinguish between moral and nonmoral situations.
  - b. explore the relation of morals to religion, law, courtesy, custom, opinion and feelings.
  - c. explore and discuss the difficulties in justifying moral theories and judgments (e.g., cultural relativism vs. absolutism, natural law, subjectivism, justice vs. consequences).
  - d. explain major approaches to environmental ethics, including anthropocentrism, animal rights, and ecocentrism.
  - e. explain the perspectives of the monotheistic religions, ecofeminists, and at least one non-Western culture.
  - f. discuss the charge of "environmental racism," population pressure.
  - g. explain conservation, preservation, restoration, mitigation, and cost-benefit analysis.
  - h. discuss the relationship between environmental ethics and the science of ecology
  - i. write at least 10 pages, approximately 300 words each, of college-level writing in the process of demonstrating the accomplishment of the other outcomes .

## METHODS OF EVALUATION

1. Quizzes
2. Exams (may be oral)
3. Written reading responses
4. Debates
5. Homework
6. Class activities
7. Participation

## TEXTBOOKS/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*.

Traer, Robert. *Doing Environmental Ethics*, Westview Press, 2009.

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Semester Fall Year 2015