

**School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University**

STMM 506: Earth Community, Earth Ethics
Fall 2012
Hunthausen 110
Mondays 1:30 – 4:20

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*Rushes and reeds must be woven
to be useful as a mat. If they weren't interlaced,
the wind would blow them away."*
from "Of Being Woven"

*"Rats and roaches live buy competition under the law of supply and demand;
it is the privilege of human beings to live under the laws of justice and mercy."*
Wendell Berry

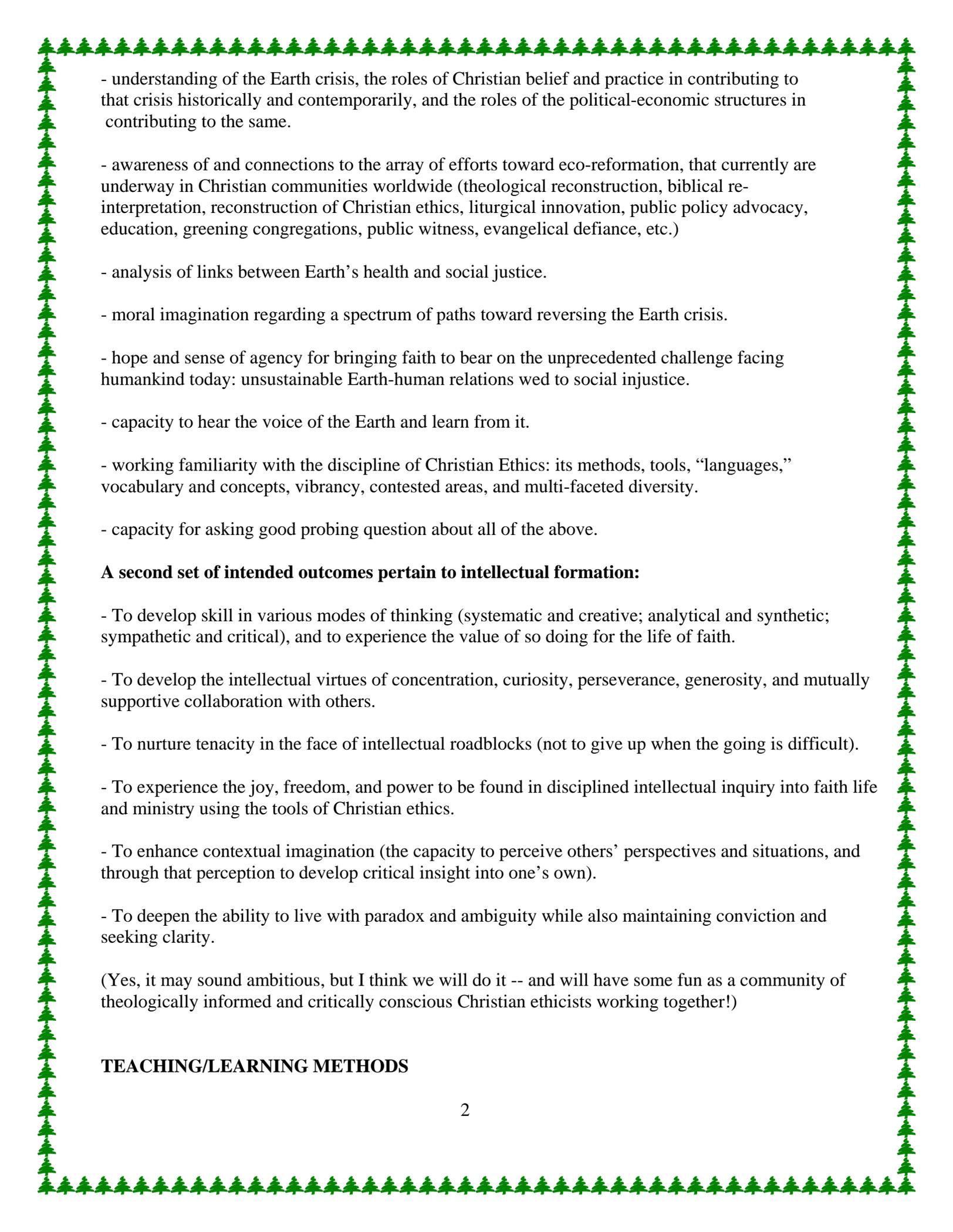
*"Knowledge is produced in response to questions. And new knowledge results from asking new questions....Once
you have learned how to ask questions—relevant and appropriate and substantial questions—you have learned how
to learn and no none can keep yo from learning whatever you want or need to know."*
Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students and professor in this course will explore collaboratively the challenge of forming shaping Earth-honoring Christianities in the context of the ecological crisis facing humankind today. The complex intertwining of ecological degradation and social injustice in its many forms will be a central focus. The methodological lens will be Christian ethics. The course will approach Christian traditions with a hermeneutic of critique, retrieval, and reconstruction. Attention will given to reading Scripture from “perspectives of the Earth. Participants will probe the connections between ideas about nature, understandings of "human," faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, science, and the human species’ relationship to our planetary home. Students will be encouraged to formulate or refine their working understanding of normative Earth-human relations, and their understanding of human vocation in relationship to the rest of creation. The informing undercurrent of this course will be hope and moral-spiritual power in the face of the profound moral challenge posed by unsustainable Earth-human relations.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

The overall goal is that participants will experience themselves as critical, constructive, collaborative, and hope-bearing theological ethicists capable of helping the church forge and follow paths toward Earth-honoring Christianities (eco-reformation), and will be better equipped to grow in that capacity. To those ends, the course aims at enabling all participants (students and professor) to develop their:

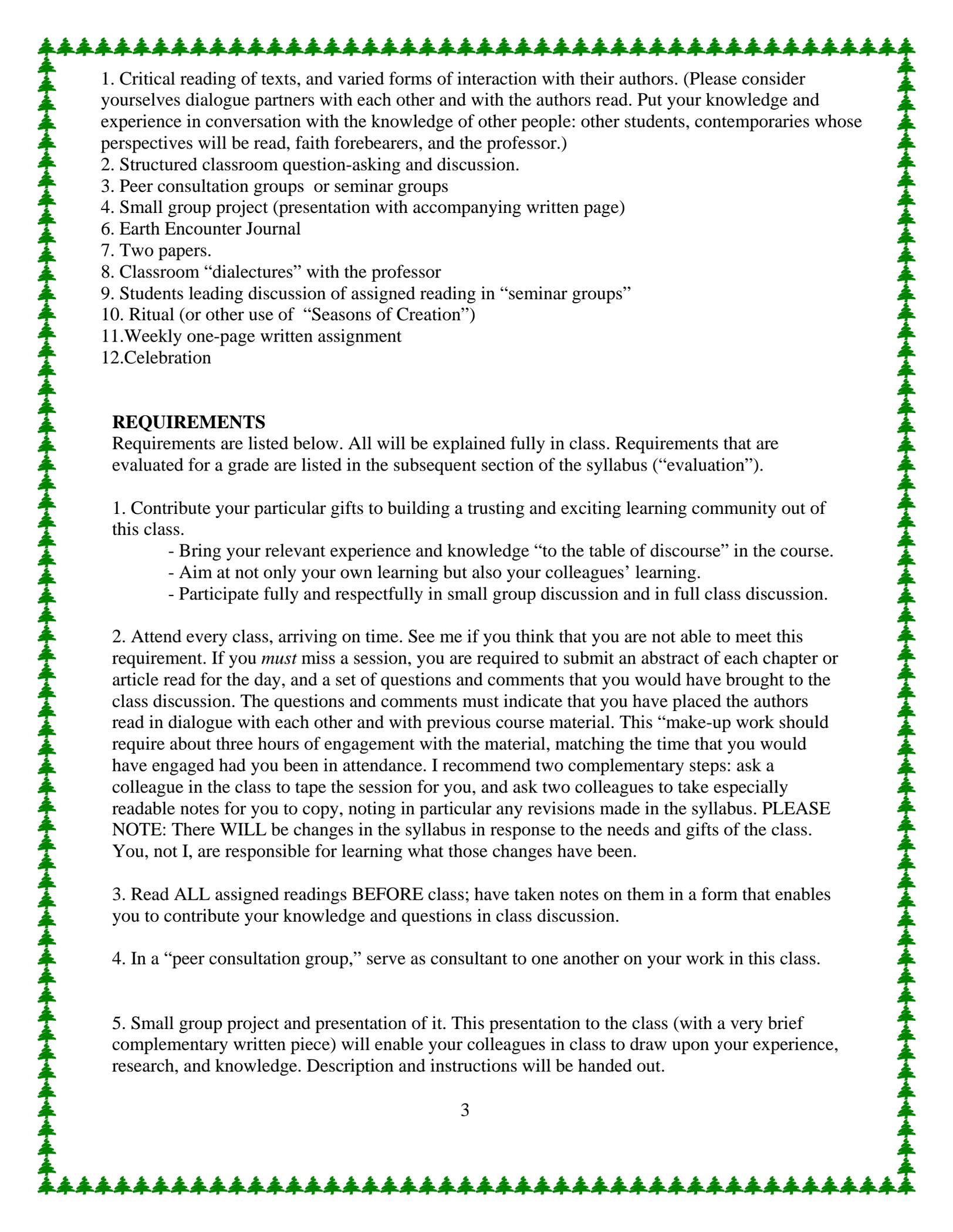
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- understanding of the Earth crisis, the roles of Christian belief and practice in contributing to that crisis historically and contemporarily, and the roles of the political-economic structures in contributing to the same.
 - awareness of and connections to the array of efforts toward eco-reformation, that currently are underway in Christian communities worldwide (theological reconstruction, biblical re-interpretation, reconstruction of Christian ethics, liturgical innovation, public policy advocacy, education, greening congregations, public witness, evangelical defiance, etc.)
 - analysis of links between Earth's health and social justice.
 - moral imagination regarding a spectrum of paths toward reversing the Earth crisis.
 - hope and sense of agency for bringing faith to bear on the unprecedented challenge facing humankind today: unsustainable Earth-human relations wed to social injustice.
 - capacity to hear the voice of the Earth and learn from it.
 - working familiarity with the discipline of Christian Ethics: its methods, tools, "languages," vocabulary and concepts, vibrancy, contested areas, and multi-faceted diversity.
 - capacity for asking good probing question about all of the above.

A second set of intended outcomes pertain to intellectual formation:

- To develop skill in various modes of thinking (systematic and creative; analytical and synthetic; sympathetic and critical), and to experience the value of so doing for the life of faith.
- To develop the intellectual virtues of concentration, curiosity, perseverance, generosity, and mutually supportive collaboration with others.
- To nurture tenacity in the face of intellectual roadblocks (not to give up when the going is difficult).
- To experience the joy, freedom, and power to be found in disciplined intellectual inquiry into faith life and ministry using the tools of Christian ethics.
- To enhance contextual imagination (the capacity to perceive others' perspectives and situations, and through that perception to develop critical insight into one's own).
- To deepen the ability to live with paradox and ambiguity while also maintaining conviction and seeking clarity.

(Yes, it may sound ambitious, but I think we will do it -- and will have some fun as a community of theologically informed and critically conscious Christian ethicists working together!)

TEACHING/LEARNING METHODS

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1. Critical reading of texts, and varied forms of interaction with their authors. (Please consider yourselves dialogue partners with each other and with the authors read. Put your knowledge and experience in conversation with the knowledge of other people: other students, contemporaries whose perspectives will be read, faith forebearers, and the professor.)
 2. Structured classroom question-asking and discussion.
 3. Peer consultation groups or seminar groups
 4. Small group project (presentation with accompanying written page)
 6. Earth Encounter Journal
 7. Two papers.
 8. Classroom “dialectures” with the professor
 9. Students leading discussion of assigned reading in “seminar groups”
 10. Ritual (or other use of “Seasons of Creation”)
 11. Weekly one-page written assignment
 12. Celebration

REQUIREMENTS

Requirements are listed below. All will be explained fully in class. Requirements that are evaluated for a grade are listed in the subsequent section of the syllabus (“evaluation”).

1. Contribute your particular gifts to building a trusting and exciting learning community out of this class.
 - Bring your relevant experience and knowledge “to the table of discourse” in the course.
 - Aim at not only your own learning but also your colleagues’ learning.
 - Participate fully and respectfully in small group discussion and in full class discussion.
2. Attend every class, arriving on time. See me if you think that you are not able to meet this requirement. If you *must* miss a session, you are required to submit an abstract of each chapter or article read for the day, and a set of questions and comments that you would have brought to the class discussion. The questions and comments must indicate that you have placed the authors read in dialogue with each other and with previous course material. This “make-up work should require about three hours of engagement with the material, matching the time that you would have engaged had you been in attendance. I recommend two complementary steps: ask a colleague in the class to tape the session for you, and ask two colleagues to take especially readable notes for you to copy, noting in particular any revisions made in the syllabus. PLEASE NOTE: There WILL be changes in the syllabus in response to the needs and gifts of the class. You, not I, are responsible for learning what those changes have been.
3. Read ALL assigned readings BEFORE class; have taken notes on them in a form that enables you to contribute your knowledge and questions in class discussion.
4. In a “peer consultation group,” serve as consultant to one another on your work in this class.
5. Small group project and presentation of it. This presentation to the class (with a very brief complementary written piece) will enable your colleagues in class to draw upon your experience, research, and knowledge. Description and instructions will be handed out.

8. Complete the two assigned papers.
9. Complete weekly written assignments on-line. (To be explained in class.)
9. Record entries in your Earth Journal on a weekly basis. (To be explained in class.)

EVALUATION

Preparation (20)

Weekly written assignments on-line; Earth journal; leading discussion of assigned reading in seminar groups; contributions in class discussion that demonstrate close reading of the texts.

Participation (20)

Attendance; verbal and non-verbal contribution to a trusting learning community in class sessions (offering knowledge/ experience/ perspectives, listening attentively, respecting others’ opinions, being aware and supportive of others’ learning goals); behavior that is non-disruptive and respectful of self and others.

Small group project presentations with accompanying brief written piece (10%).

First paper (20%)

Second paper (30%)

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty is assumed. Failure to adhere to the academic honesty policies of Seattle University may result in failing the course or the assignment involved. Few things are more painful for me as a teacher than encountering academic dishonesty. PLEASE see me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Where plagiarism is unintentional, a little knowledge will prevent a great deal of pain on your part and mine!

REQUIRED READINGS (and optional supplementary reading)

Goodenough, Ursula	<i>The Sacred Depths of Nature</i>	Oxford University Press, 1998
Hart, John	<i>Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics</i>	Roman and Littlefield, 2006
McKibben, Bill	<i>Eaarth</i>	St. Martin’s Griffin, 2010, 2011

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia	<i>Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation</i> (selections from)	Fortress, 2013
Multiple on-line readings		

Optional Supplementary Reading

Habel, Norman, ed. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth: The Earth Bible*, vol. 1. Sheffield: Academic Press and Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000.

COURSE SCHEDULE, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS

PLEASE NOTE: I advise reading the readings for each day in the order assigned. They are arranged intentionally to facilitate comprehension.

Part I: Who Are We and Where Are We in the Cosmos?

SEPT. 24 (Week 1): Beginnings

OCT. 1 (Week 2): Cosmos Story, Earth Story, Bio-genesis

Readings:

Hart: xiii-xviii and Chap 1 to bottom of p.18

Goodenough: pp. lx – xxi and Chaps 1 – 5

Sign up for leading Week 3 and 4 seminar groups

OCT. 8 (Week 3): Human Creatures in Earth Community

Readings:

Goodenough: Chaps. 6 – 12 and “Emergent Religious Principles”

“God’s Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States
(written by National Council of Churches) (on-line)

Presentations in seminar groups

Part II: What Are We doing? How Big Are We?

A question: What price do others pay for our energy?

Oct. 15 (Week 4): How Big Are We?

Readings:

McKibben : Beginning – 127 top of page

James Hansen: on-line
Presentations in seminar groups
FIRST PAPER DUE

Oct. 22 (Week 5): Ecological Debt, Climate Justice

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: Selected parts of Chap. 8
On-Line Readings TBA
Hart: chap 5

Oct. 29 (Week 6): Environmental Racism and Structural Violence

Readings:

Environmental Racism readings on-line
Moe-Lobeda: Chap. 3 (and optional Chap 4)
“Proceedings of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit”

Part III: How Then Shall We Live?

Nov. 5 (Week 7): Christian Ethics (Reconstructed) in Service of Life and the Commons

Readings:

Hart: chap 4 and Part III

Nov. 12 No Class (Veteran’s Day Observed)

Nov. 19 (Week 8): Christian Ethics (Reconstructed) in Service of Life and the Commons

Readings:

Hart: Part IV and Afterword
McKibben: 127-150

Nov. 26 (Week 9): Christian Ethics (Reconstructed) in Service of Life and the Commons (Day 3)

Readings:

Rasmussen (on-line reading)
Moe-Lobeda: Chap 9

EARTH ENCOUNTER JOURNAL DUE

Dec. 3 (Week 10): Faith, Hope, and Moral-Spiritual Agency AND Celebration

Readings:

McKibben: Chap 4 and Afterword
Re-visiting Readings: TBA
SECOND PAPER DUE

**APPENDIX:
A “Working” Philosophy of Learning for this Course.**

1. One never sees clearly until one sees the world outside of one’s inherited perspectives. This implies a commitment to enabling the perspectives of historically under-represented people and peoples to be heard. The course is designed to honor that commitment.
2. Knowledge is not what is produced and transmitted by experts, but has to do with how we know, learn, and engage our world. Learning happens more deeply when it is, at least in part: collaborative/relational, participatory/active, integrative, experiential, and embodied. Therefore, in this class we will strive to: 1) be collaborative in our inquiry; 2) actively interpret material; 3) make interdisciplinary connections even within the discipline of Christian ethics; 4) draw upon and honor the rich life experience brought by each student, and 5) attend to what is learned through the senses and the heart, as well as through the intellect.
3. Different students learn differently . We will engage in diverse modes of learning.
4. The ecological crises of our day and the imperative of forging sustainable Earth-human relations call for a shift from anthropocentric philosophical, theological, and scientific frameworks to eco-centric ones. This shift entails fascinating and difficult moves in language, conceptual frameworks, theory, and method. We will struggle toward those shifts, recalling, as we interact with the course material, that human being is part of a larger web of life.
5. Follow your intellectual passions. If you do you’ll find yourself surrounded by a lovely community of friends--living and passed. If you become highly interested in particular moral situation, historical community, concept, figure, or dilemma, and wish to do further reading and work on it, see me.
6. Aim at questions and at provisional answers not at answers cast in concrete._