PHIL*4160
Philosophy Field Course
2020 Syllabus

Course description

This course will spend approximately ten days on location at the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve on Vancouver Island. This is a site of astounding natural beauty as well as economic and political significance. In 1993 the area staged Canada's largest act of civil disobedience - a protest over logging in one of North America's only remaining old-growth rainforests. Following this episode the region has become something of a microcosm for the competing economic, environmental and political interests that our society must balance on a global scale.

Many of the challenges confronting this region are familiar to philosophy students. However, these issues are usually discussed only in an abstract classroom setting. The aim of this course is to enrich these academic discussions with firsthand experience. We will learn about the ecology and social history of this region to understand why and how various stakeholders value it. We will interact with environmentalists, First Nations representatives, and industry members to determine how they view environmental issues. For example, what does "sustainability" mean to these groups? What are their respective long term goals and can they be reconciled? Students will formulate a general research question prior to arriving in Clayoquot Sound. The experiences that they collect during the visit will be included in a research paper and a presentation that will be prepared over the course of the Fall 2012 semester.

Learning Objectives

By engaging with stakeholders in the field, students will become familiar with the ways that salient environmental concerns are understood from the (often competing) perspectives of those stakeholders.

By keeping a journal of personal reflections and observations, students will develop their own understanding and analyses of a particular environmental issue. In particular, they will identify the relevant conflicts in value or factual disagreements that distinguish different viewpoints, and come up with suggestions for reconciling those disagreements.

By synthesizing their reflections with some body of literature, and writing up their analysis in a research paper, students will make connections between their observations in the field and some body of academic scholarship.

By presenting their analysis to a non-specialist audience, students will develop their skills in the verbal communication of complex ideas.

Readings

Some suggested readings are available for download on the course website:
http://biophilosophy.ca/Teaching/philosophy4160-2019.html#Resources
Students are also responsible for finding materials relating to their individual research projects.

Evaluation
Participation 15%
Journal assignments 25%
Individual research project 35%
Presentation 15%
Blog post 10%

Participation (15%)

During our class meetings and especially while we are in the field, students are expected to engage in discussion about the course themes. In particular, students are expected to develop, through practice, skills in verbal critical engagement. The main criterion for assessment here is that the student show evidence of progress over the duration of the course, especially during the field component.

Journal (20%)

Students will begin keeping a journal of detailed notes from the beginning of the course. Notes from conversations, lectures, and readings should be contained in the journal along with personal reflections about the course. There will also be a few dedicated journal assignments, where students are required to reflect on a particular issue or reading assignment (20%)

Individual research project (30 %)

Students will design and carry out individual research projects of their choosing. This will involve five steps.

1. **Select a topic and write a proposal**

   Students must have selected a topic before arriving in Tofino on May 20th, with the understanding that they are free to choose topics after having spent some time on location.

   Generally speaking, proposals should start by identifying some question that you want to work on. It need not be a question that you will resolve conclusively at the end of your project, but it should be something that you will shed light on. The proposal should also explain how you plan to address the question. For example, whom or what would you like to interact with? How will you collect information in the field? What other sources will you engage with?

   As a source of inspiration for finding a question/topic, I highly recommend reading the course blog. These blog entries contain reflections on the previous year's field course. Many different issues are touched on here. Perhaps some of them will capture your interest. I also suggest reading carefully the course material and visiting some of the links available on the course website. You can also bounce ideas off of me at any time.

   I will provide each student with feedback on their proposals prior to our meeting in Tofino.

2. **Collect observations in the field**

   The way in which you make observations could depend on your research proposal. I am very interested in your ideas on how this can be done effectively. Last season, a few students took

careful notes and these provided a valuable reference later in the year when working on their projects. By "careful" I mean that the students recorded the dates on which notes were taken, and distinguished the items that came up in conversation from their own reflections on those topics

Other students who did not take careful notes ended up having to rely on their memories, and the shortcomings of this became very obvious in their later work. However, I realize that there is a trade off between taking notes and being able to engage in the field. Keep in mind that these meetings will be nothing like lectures. It is entirely up to you to guide the discussion by generating and asking your own questions. Coming up with a way to document those interactions while directing them is, in fact, one of the most difficult skills that you will need to develop.

3. Integrate personal reflections and observations with available literature on the subject.

I recommend to students that, before they do a proper literature search on their topics, that they write down their own ideas and reflections first. The reason for this is that research papers, (my own included) are often heavily influenced by other papers that one reads on the topic. In some ways this is good, especially when you find a clear author who helps you simplify and frame a complex topic. That said, other authors might not do as good a job of framing an issue as you would. Let me offer an example.

Authors who write on traditional ecological knowledge tend to frame the issue in terms of two bodies of information: Western and Traditional. These bodies of information tend to be viewed as static objects or repositories of information. This ignores their social dimensions, or, if you like, the way that these knowledge systems are embodied as living institutions. The static view also sets up the problem of how these two bodies of knowledge can be reconciled. Here, reconciliation is seen as a sort of matching, statement for statement, of particular claims in these two bodies of text. By contrast, a more socially embedded view of these systems would view reconciliation as involving the interaction among social institutions. My point here is that, if you were to approach this topic from the perspective of the existing literature, you would be likely to adopt the predominant way of framing the relevant issues. This can be a good thing, but sometimes it is also limiting. Sometimes the framework for thinking about an issue was not carefully considered in the first place. By writing out your own ideas before delving into the literature, you are more likely to generate and recognize your own contributions to a topic.

Of course, since this is a work of scholarship that you will be producing, you will have to make contact with the relevant literature. This will involve a literature search which you will narrow down to a few key articles. At least part of your paper should be seen as engaging in a conversation with these articles. Basically, you will be bringing your own observations and insights to an existing academic discussion.

The approximate due date for this literature review will be the end of June. By this time you will have narrowed down on approximately 5-10 articles with which your paper will engage.

4. Writing, commenting and revising

The paper will be written over the course of about 4 weeks. During this time you will submit a draft of your paper for peer commentary to another student in the class. You will also be commenting on another student's paper. A portion of your project grade (about 5%) will be based on the quality of the comments you provide. Generally speaking, the value in this process is for students to get assistance on the clarity and direction of their papers. The final papers will be due in Mid November, a couple of weeks before the end of semester.

5. Reporting research

Presentation (15%)

After the final papers are submitted, at the end of the summer semester, students will present their project at a small workshop, to which other students and faculty will be invited. These are short presentations , maximum 15 minutes each plus 5 minutes for questions. \

Blog post (10%)

Each student will write a short, accessible blog post written for a general audience, in which their research project is summarized.