

University of Guelph
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Web Outline for SOC 3380.01 Society & Nature

- a) **Course code and title:** SOC 3380.01 Society & Nature
- b) **Date of offering:** Fall 2019, Tuesday/Thursday 11:30-12:50, ANNU 204
- c) **Department:** Department of Sociology and Anthropology
- d) **Course Instructor:** John R. Ferguson

e) **Course Description:**

Since the beginning of human society, “nature” has been characterized in many different ways through narratives from folklore to religion to empirical science. Philosophy and economics have especially struggled with clarifying our relationship with the natural world and the natural resources on which human societies are built. In recent decades it has become increasingly evident that humanity is pushing on the edges of the earth’s ecological ability to sustain our species. How did we get here? Could our understanding of nature be implicated in our (in)ability to live within its means? In this course we examine the ethical and epistemological ways in which humans have tried to understand their place on earth and their relationship with the *biota* and *abiota* around them. From nature as ‘hostile’ to ‘indifferent’ to ‘nurturing’; from utilitarian to deontological to wise-use conservation to intrinsic value preservation; from deep ecology to social ecology; course participants examine ways of understanding the ways in which conceptions of nature have emerged in different social, economic, political, environmental and temporal conditions and been socially and ecologically functional as well as dysfunctional. We will consider the behavioural, societal, environmental effects and implications of different perspectives on nature from folklore, to natural science to philosophy and ethics.

“The challenge of modernity is to live without illusions
and without becoming disillusioned.”
Antonio Gramsci

f) **Course Format:** Seminar style with some lecturing, student presentations, close use of required texts and use of on-line resources, discussions, media, music and films will be used.

g) **Course Description:**

- To understand the evolving ways in which humans characterize and perpetuate society’s relationship with nature
- To develop a sociological vocabulary pertaining to the biota and abiota of “nature”

- To develop an advanced knowledge sociological of concepts pertaining to society and nature
- To apply sociological concepts to different worldviews about nature and the relationship of humans and society to “it”
- To understand how conceptions of nature serve certain social interests, institutions, hierarchies and power structures
- To answer the question: “Whose interests are advanced by this way of understanding nature?”
- To apply sociological theory to “world views” and “nature views.”
- The interpolate characterizations of nature with environmental impacts and implications for sustainability.
- To apply sociological theory to understanding the relationship between society and nature
- To consider and debate ideas, concepts and theories vis-à-vis “nature” orally and in writing.
- To advance logic and reasoning skills in writing, on-line discussions and speaking
- To increase confidence and skill in public speaking and presenting ideas to an audience

h) Assessment/Evaluation (subject to revision):

Assessment Summary:

Assessment Type	%
Participation	~10%
Quizzes	~20%
On-Line Discussions	~20%
Presentation + Peer Evaluations	~25%
Proposal & Research Paper	~25%
Total	100%

Note: Changes to the outline are possible prior to the first class.

h) Readings/resources:

Readings on ARES

Required and supplementary material are posted on ARES.

<http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/find/find-type-resource/course-reserves-ares>