



**2293A (570)**  
**DISABILITY IN NATURE**  
**Summer 2025-2026**

Instructor: Stephanie LeBlanc-Omstead,  
Email: [slebla8@uwo.ca](mailto:slebla8@uwo.ca)

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### **Course Information**

**Calendar Description:**

This course offers a focused exploration of the intersection between Disability Studies and the environmental humanities, with an emphasis on disability and neurodivergence in the context of “natural” environments.

**Prerequisite(s):** Disability Studies 1010A/B.

**Antirequisite(s):**

**Extra Information:** 3 hours

**Course Weight:** 0.50

**Breadth:** Category A

**Subject Code:** DISABST

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course, or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

# Disability in Nature

King's University College @ Western University

Version Date – April 1st, 2026

## Instructor Information

Stephanie LeBlanc-Omstead, PhD, OT Reg. (Ont.) [slebla8@uwo.ca](mailto:slebla8@uwo.ca)

Office Hours: Fridays, 10:00 am – 11:00 am

## Lecture Information

Time: Wednesdays, 6:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Location: Online

## Course Information

Prerequisite:

Antirequisite:

## Course Description

This course offers a focused exploration of the intersection between Disability Studies and the environmental humanities, with an emphasis on disability and neurodivergence in the context of “natural” environments. While Disability Studies has often focused on the built environment, this course considers parks, trails, and other outdoor spaces as environments also shaped by social norms, design decisions, and power relations. Students will examine how ableism structures access to these spaces and shapes inclusion, representation, and belonging. Students will be introduced key concepts such as environmental justice and eco-ableism and consider how climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately impact disabled people and communities. Applied engagement with course concepts is supported through an accessibility audit of a local outdoor space, and a series of weekly nature journal entries, where students will develop a reflective practice focused on access, embodiment, and environment. Throughout the course, students are invited to consider how outdoor spaces might be reimaged as more accessible, equitable, and inclusive.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Use Disability Studies frameworks to analyze and describe how “nature” is defined, experienced, and shaped by social and cultural forces.

2. Analyze disability, neurodivergence, and embodiment in relation to outdoor environments, including dominant narratives of health, healing, and “cure.”
3. Identify and analyze barriers to access, inclusion, and belonging in outdoor spaces.
4. Identify instances of eco-ableism in contemporary climate justice and environmental activist movements.
5. Complete an accessibility audit of a local outdoor space, drawing on field observations and course concepts.
6. Develop recommendations to improve access, equity, and inclusion for disabled and neurodivergent people and communities in outdoor spaces.

## Mode of Instruction

This is an online course with both synchronous and asynchronous components. Beyond taking responsibility for your own learning, you are asked to contribute to a respectful, collaborative, and engaged online classroom. Please come to each class prepared to participate thoughtfully and with a willingness to learn with and from one another. Each of you brings valuable knowledge, experience, and perspective to our learning community. Together, we will use course materials (readings, videos, discussions, mini modules, and more) to support collective learning and critical reflection.

**Technical requirements:** Course reminders/updates, links to course readings, weekly module slides, and additional resources are shared through our course OWL Brightspace site. Assignment submissions are also completed and/or submitted online. You will need a computer as well as stable high-speed internet connection to access course materials.

## Course Outline

05-06	Week 1: Rethinking Nature: Landscapes, Power, and the Myth of Wilderness
05-13	Week 2: Access, belonging, and representation in Outdoor Spaces
05-20	Week 3: Bodies, Landscapes, and Human (Bio)Diversity
05-27	Week 4: Eco-Ableism and Disability-Inclusive Climate Justice
06-03	Week 5: Nature, Healing and the Politics of “Cure”
06-10	Week 6: Re-Imagining Disability in Nature

## Required Texts

Links to all readings and other required materials are posted on OWL Brightspace.

## Course Requirements & Evaluation Scheme

Weekly Nature Field Journals	40 %
Participation	10 %
Nature-Based Accessibility Audit Project	25 %
Field Journal Synthesis Reflection	25 %
Total	100 %

## Assignment Details

### 1. Weekly Nature Field Journals (5 x 8% = 40%)

Students will complete weekly field journal entries documenting observations of nature-based environments through a Disability Studies lens. The journal is a practice of noticing, with emphasis on curiosity, reflection, and connection to course ideas. Each entry includes brief observations and a short reflection, and may incorporate text, images, sketches, or other formats.

**Built-in flexibility:** Students are required to submit 5 entries across the 6-week course, with one week that may be skipped without penalty. Entries are expected to be completed on a weekly basis in alignment with the course schedule.

Complete assignment details are available through our OWL Brightspace course.

**Due:** Weekly (Fridays by 11:59pm)

### 2. Participation (10%)

Participation in this course reflects ongoing engagement with course ideas across multiple formats. Because this is a primarily asynchronous course with one hour of synchronous online class each week, participation is not based on attendance alone. Engagement may include attending or engaging with the weekly online class, participating in optional outdoor field office hours, contributing to in-class discussion or activities when present, asking or responding to questions both in class and through OWL Brightspace, and engaging thoughtfully with course materials and field journal work.

Participation will be assessed holistically across the term, with emphasis on consistent and meaningful engagement in ways that are accessible and appropriate to each student's circumstances.

### **3. Nature-Based Accessibility Audit Project (25%)**

Students will complete an accessibility audit of a local outdoor, or nature-based, space (e.g., park, trail, campus green space). Using a provided audit tool, students will observe and analyze how environmental design, sensory conditions, and social expectations shape access and participation in natural spaces. The assignment also includes a written component, where students will propose concrete recommendations for improving accessibility or inclusion in their chosen space.

Complete assignment details are available through our OWL Brightspace course.

**Due:** Friday, May 29 (Week 4)

### **4. Field Journal Synthesis Reflection (25%)**

Students will draw on their weekly field journal entries to reflect on how their ways of noticing, experiencing, and engaging with nature have evolved over the course of the term. This assignment invites students to integrate course concepts with experiential learning, with particular attention to their emerging understandings of disability, access, and nature.

Flexible formats are accepted, including written, audio, video, or other creative submissions.

Complete assignment details are available through our OWL Brightspace course.

**Due:** Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup> (end of Week 6)

# Course Policies & University Procedures

## Device Policy

Students are welcomed and encouraged to make appropriate use of technology during class time. Please be aware that inappropriate use of technology during class time may be distracting to you, to other students and to the professor, and will not be tolerated. Examples of appropriate use of technology during class include using a device to take notes or to reference readings or other materials relevant to class. Using the internet to find information related to class discussion is also encouraged, provided it does not hinder your engagement in the class. Examples of inappropriate use of technology during class include using social media and accessing content that is not directly related to class discussions. Please excuse yourself from the room if you need to check email, message, text, make or take phone calls.

## Safer Space Policy

Effective learning can only happen when everyone feels safe in our shared space. Each member of the classroom community is asked to be mindful of language and actions that may be perceived or experienced as disrespectful or discriminatory. Students are encouraged to communicate their own, and to be cognisant of others', needs and preferences. Please alert the professor at any time if you are feeling unsafe in the classroom.

## Communication Policy

Students are encouraged to make use of the professor's office hours to clarify concepts or to engage in discussion about course material beyond what is covered during class time. You may also communicate with peers about course materials and evaluations. Before you contact the professor with questions about assignments, please ensure you have carefully read all provided instructions, including relevant sections of the course outline and course website.

If you contact the professor by email, you can usually expect a response within 1-2 business days (Monday-Friday). Please do not expect a response over the weekend. At busy times of the semester, it may take longer to get a response.

## Support & Accommodations

I am happy to support any formal accommodations recommended by Accessibility, Counselling & Student Development (ACSD, <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/acsd-student-supports/>) or the Academic Dean's Office (ADO, <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/courses-enrolment/exams-and-tests/academic-consideration-requests/>). Please communicate with Dr. LeBlanc-Omstead early and often so that we can collaborate to ensure your full and equitable participation in this course.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Academic Integrity

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Website:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>). Please note that Turnitin analysis now includes AI detection.

Within this course AI tools such as Chat GPT are permitted exclusively for information- gathering and preliminary research purposes (i.e., development of an essay outline). If AI tools are used, students must acknowledge use and state how the tool was used. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

# King's University College

## General Course Policies

### 2025-2026

## **1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences**

### **Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)**

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence**

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at [here](#).

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course. Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course. For further information, please see:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

### **Absences from Final Examinations**

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details [https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education/exams/index.html](https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/exams/index.html).

## **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

## **2. Support Services**

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/personal-counselling>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King’s University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>

## **GBSV Support:**

King’s is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/campus-safety-and-reporting/gender-and-sexual-violence>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing [Care@kings.uwo.ca](mailto:Care@kings.uwo.ca) or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western’s Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

See also [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html)

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

### **3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices**

**Use of Electronic Devices:** Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

**Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom:** King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/campus-safety-and-reporting/student-code-of-conduct>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

### **4. Statement on Academic Offences**

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at [here](#).

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/OriginalityReports-TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

## **5. Copyright of Course Material**

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member.

Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

## **6. Use of Recordings**

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

## **7. Policy on Attendance**

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.