



**Religious Studies 2230F/G (570)
Ecology, Spirituality, and Justice
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026**

Instructor: B. Szoller
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Course Information

Calendar Description:

This course examines the relationship between spiritual practices and the environment through lenses of social justice. Students will explore how spirituality and spiritual practices offer ways to reframe our relationship to our natural world at a time of intensifying climate and economic crises.

Antirequisite(s): [Social Justice and Peace Studies 2230F/G](#), [Religious Studies 2277F/G](#) if taken in 2020-21 or 2021-22, and [Social Justice and Peace Studies 2278A/B](#) if taken in 2020-21 or 2021-22.

Extra Information: 3 hours; cross-listed with [Social Justice and Peace Studies 2230F/G](#).

Course Weight: 0.50
Breadth: Category B
Subject Code: RELSTUD

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), 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.

King's University College
RELSTUD 2230F / SOCLJUST 2230G (Cross-listed)
ECOLOGY, SPIRITUALITY, AND JUSTICE

Course information:

Instructor: Ben Szoller

Contact Information: bszoller@uwo.ca

Office hours: By appointment Mondays 1-3pm via *Zoom* (excluding reading week)

Course description:

This course examines how religion and spirituality help to shape our understanding of social and ecological justice, and vice versa. To do so, the course presents a survey of prescient ecological concerns (e.g., climate change) through the lens of various religious traditions, spiritual practices, and beliefs systems. The goal is for students to develop both their religious and ecological literacies, critically engage with real-world topics, and understand the many ways that religion and spirituality continue to impact discourse around ecological justice. It will also give the students the opportunity to dig deeper into a specific religious tradition or spiritual practice and consider the role of religion and ecology in their own lives.

Course learning outcomes:

Successful students will be able to:

1. Identify how various world religions and spiritual traditions have understood the relationship between the individual, society, and the natural world (*comprehension*)
2. Identify and observe primary topics within ecological justice and how they intersect with other features of social justice, e.g., race, gender, class (*knowledge, comprehension*)
3. Actively discuss how methodologies within the study of religion are able to assess the relationship between religious features (e.g., belief, membership, theology) and environmental discourse and activities (*evaluation*)
4. Reference religious and cultural contexts to identify patterns or novel approaches to environmental concerns, both historical and contemporary (*analysis*)
5. Clearly communicate through group discussion, writing, and other media the relationship between ecology, spirituality, and justice in specific cases (*synthesis*)
6. Critically reflect on how these topics inform their own behaviours and actions and consider how to apply the information to their own goal path(s) (*application*)

Mode of instruction: In-person

Course texts:

The primary text for the course will be the *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker & John Grim (2017). This will be made available digitally by the King's library. All additional readings will be posted in OWL and/or shared via online link, at no extra cost.

Method of evaluation:

1. **Participation: 10%** — Ongoing

The participation mark reflects attendance and general participation, including group discussions and in-class learning activities, e.g., *think pair share*, recap questions, etc. Students should be familiar with all assigned readings prior to class and be ready to engage with both the material and their peers. Each class will include an activity/reflection to help the instructor track participation throughout the term.

2. **Observational Activity: 10%** — Due February 3

The Observational Activity is a very short assignment to help prepare students for the February 3 class, *Listening to the Natural World*. In the week before class, students will complete a brief inspirational reading and conduct a 30-minute observation of a “natural environment” of their choosing, for example, a park, trail, or a view from an unfamiliar place. Students will use this data to compose a short written reflection (2 pages, double spaced) along with a photographic composition (i.e., evidence) to be uploaded to Brightspace no later than 2:30pm February 2. The aim of this Observational Activity is to practice a contemplative method and to think about your environment in a new way; it is designed to be fun but also illuminating and generative, so you should be prepared to discuss their experience with peers in class.

3. **Goal Path Reflection: 15%** — Due February 24

The Goal Path Reflection is an opportunity for students to consider the topics presented in the first section of the course and apply them to their own unique goal path, for example, their academic program, career goal, or life circumstances. The aim of this assignment is to develop religious and ecological literacy. For example, an Accounting student could examine how their profession requires growing sensitivity to Environment, Sustainability, and Governance (ESG) principles, often informed by religious beliefs. The Goal Path Reflection should be 5 pages (double spaced, not including bibliography and sources) and draw primarily from readings and discussions covered in the first three weeks of class as well as two additional sources (articles or chapters) specific to the student’s own goal path.

4. **Weekly Recap Papers: 20%** — Ongoing*

Throughout the term, students will complete four Weekly Recap Papers. These papers will each be 2-3 pages in length and are meant to help improve reading skills and prepare for class discussions. Each recap is worth 5% of the final mark and will i) answer three guiding questions posted on Brightspace (1-2 paragraphs per question), ii) list three questions/challenges for the week’s discussion, and iii) provide 1 paragraph (~250 words) recapping the **previous class**. Recap paragraphs should engage directly with the previous lecture, class discussion, or activity, for example, a student might weigh in on a vibrant class debate or identify a ‘missed opportunity.’ Be specific!

***Please note:** Students can choose which weeks they submit Weekly Recap Papers, but **they must be submitted prior to class** (i.e., before 2:30pm the day of class). This is to ensure that students have completed the readings for class. To help alleviate end-of-term stress, **at least 2 must be submitted by February 10 (before Reading Week), and a Weekly Recap Paper cannot be submitted for the final class (April 7).**

5. **Case Study Presentation: 15%** — Beginning March 10*

Beginning in March, students will be responsible for presenting a unique case study on the intersection of ecology, religion/spirituality, and justice. Students will find a news story or research paper from the last 3 years relating to ecology and spirituality from around the world. The 10-minute presentation (5%) should summarize the main issue, provide historical/cultural context, and describe the major religious and ecological elements. The presentation should also include one interactive component (5%), e.g., a comprehensive poster (digital or physical), slideshow, or learning activity, as well as discussion questions for the group. On the day of presentation, students should submit a 2-page summary of the topic and article (5%) along with a copy of the interactive component and questions.

***Please note:** Students will sign up for a presentation in week 3 so that they can review deadlines for other courses and plan accordingly.

6. **Final Paper/Project: 30%** — Due April 9 (last day of classes)

The final project provides the opportunity for students to dig deeper into one tradition or topic. It must explicitly address the three main components of the course: ecology, spirituality, and justice. For example, a project could examine the intersection of ecology, spirituality, and justice within one specific religious tradition OR explore a specific ecological topic (e.g., biodiversity, colonization) through the lens of multiple religious traditions. Topics can go beyond the traditions and themes discussed in class. Regardless of the format, the student must present a clear thesis or argument and use 1 full page to describe how and why they came to choose the topic. Each project must use 3 peer-reviewed or reputable sources **not** presented in class and should also cite class discussions or lecture material where appropriate. The final project may take one of three forms:

Research Paper

Students will submit a formal research paper 10-12 double-spaced pages in length (excluding bibliography/sources) following appropriate guidelines. Students are encouraged to consult with [The Write Place](#) to help review and improve their work.

Podcast

Students will record a 15-minute podcast covering their topic. The podcast should incorporate an interview or other exploratory component (e.g., walking reflection, soundscape) but must include at least 10 minutes of scripted content. Students will need to submit a copy of the podcast transcript (at least 6 pages) with citations and sources. Be creative—give your podcast and episode a name, icon, musical intro, etc.

Educational Poster/Artwork

Students will submit an educational poster or artwork to convey their research topic in a creative and impactful way. The poster must be Bristol Board size (22"x28") or equivalent; it may use a variety of mediums but **must include text**. The student will also submit an accompanying 5-page paper on the topic (with citations) and a 2-page artist statement describing the artistic process (e.g., rationale for media/colour, challenges, etc.). Digital pieces must include a workflow video, no exceptions.

***Please note:** Students will participate in a **Final Project check-in** activity on March 3. The check-in is necessary for project approval and students unable to participate must arrange to meet the instructor during office hours to confirm their project topic and plan.

Academic considerations:

- Please pay special attention to the assessment deadlines, especially to the Weekly Recap Papers which can be submitted throughout the term. You will also be responsible for selecting a date for your Case Study Presentation. The date you choose will be considered a due date, so be sure to consider the deadlines and responsibilities for your other classes.
- Formal documentation will be required for academic consideration in both the **Case Study Presentation** (throughout November) and the **Final Project** (due April 9).

Academic integrity:

- Your voice is important, and your contributions are vital part of how the course will run. You are encouraged to communicate thoughtfully, critically, and empathetically throughout class discussions and your assignments.
- All words should be your own unless stated otherwise through citations. The following AI Policy (developed by CYS faculty) will be enforced in this course:

"Any usage of artificial intelligence or language generation or translation applications by students to complete assigned work for this course must be approved by the instructor *and* noted by the student in the submitted work itself. Writing text and then feeding it into a computer application to **improve or translate your own words**, changing a few words, and then submitting this text as if it was your own constitutes plagiarism. You must compose text, choose words, construct logic flow, structure sentences and paragraphs to organize, synthesize, interpret information with your own mind. When you borrow language or ideas **from another person or from a machine** this must be acknowledged with quotation marks and/or citations."
- Please familiarize yourself with the Western Scholastic Discipline policy, here: https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Schedule of Classes, Readings, Assessments:

*Please note that some topics may be adjusted to accommodate class discussion, presentation schedules, etc. Any changes will be noted in advance and will not impact evaluation criteria.

Week 1 – Tuesday January 6

Introduction: Why ecology, spirituality, and justice?

Special Topic: Climate change and “Climate Refugees”

Optional Readings:

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 2 “Developments in religion and ecology” by Sigurd Bergmann (pp. 13-21)
2. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 3 “Whose religion? Which ecology?” by Willis Jenkins (pp. 22-32)

Week 2 – Tuesday January 13

Approaches to the Study of Religion and Spirituality

Special Topic: Biodiversity

Religious Focus: Christianity

Reading:

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 25 “Climate change: Varieties of religious engagement” by Mike Hulme (pp. 239-248)

Optional Reading:

2. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 8 “Christianity: An ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction” by Ernst M. Conradie (pp. 70-78)

Week 3 – Tuesday January 20

Frameworks for Social and Ecological Justice

Special Topic: Globalization, Politics, and Indigenous Voices at COP30

Readings (**pick one**):

1. Iyad Abumoghli (2024) “The Role of Religions, Values, Ethics, and Spiritual Responsibility in Environmental Governance and Achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda” in *Religion and Development* 2(3) (Mar 2024), pp. 485-495.
2. Celia Cook-Huffman (2020). “Identity matters: Social identity and social change.” In S. Byrne, J. Senehi, I. M. Scott, & T. Matyók (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Peace and Conflict Studies* (1st ed., pp. 269–279). Routledge.

Week 4 – Tuesday January 27

Animal Ethics & Conservation

Religious Focus: Judaism and Islam

Podcast and Readings:

1. Podcast episode: “Can I microdose veganism?” from *Search Engine* hosted by PJ Vogt, September 6, 2024.
2. **Skim:** Hava Tirosh-Samuelson. 2023. “Jewish Environmentalism in the United States: Achievements, Characteristics, and Challenges.” *Religion & Development* 2(3): 381–417.
3. “Islamic Declaration on Climate Change.” 2015. *United Nations’ Framework Convention on Climate Change*. August 18, 2015.

Week 5 – Tuesday February 3

Listening to the Natural World

Religious Focus: Indigenous Cosmovisions

Readings:

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 24 “Nature Writing and Nature Mysticism” by Douglas E. Christie (pp. 229-236)
2. *Routledge* textbook: Introduction to Part III “Indigenous cosmovisions” by John Grim (pp. 107-108)

Assignment: **Observation Activity** Due

Week 6 – Tuesday February 10 *Potluck TBC

Food, Agriculture, and Rituals

Religious Focus: Hinduism and Sikhism

Readings (**pick one**):

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 18 “India” by Christopher Key Chapple (pp. 171-180)
2. Nicola Mooney “Sikh millennials engaging the earth: Sikhi, environmental activism, and eco-enchantment.” *Sikh Formations*. 2018; 14(3-4): 315-338.

Assignment: Second **Weekly Recap Paper** due no later than today

Guest Speaker: TBC

Week 7 – Tuesday February 24*Population and Eastern Religions*

Religious Focus: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese Traditional Religions

Readings (**pick one**):

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 32 “Population” by Guigui Yao and Robert J. Wyman (pp. 304-315)
2. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 19 “China: Landscapes, cultures, ecologies, religions” by James Miller (pp. 181-189)

Assignment: **Goal Path Reflection** due today

Week 8 – Tuesday March 3*Class, Consumption, and Global Economics*

Religious Focus: African Traditional Religions and Diasporas

Readings (**pick one**):

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 12 “Africa: African heritage and ecological stewardship” by Jesse N. K. Mugambi (pp. 109-119)
2. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 33 “Consumption” by Laura M. Hartman (pp. 316-325)

Assignment: Participate in **Final Project Check-in**

Week 9 – Tuesday March 10*Gender at the Intersection of Ecology, Spirituality, and Social Justice*

Religious Focus: Paganism, Wicca, and New Religious Movements

Readings (**pick one**):

1. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 34 “Gender Injustice” by Heather Eaton (pp. 326-336)
2. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 22 “Paganism and Animism” by Graham Harvey (pp. 211-219)

Assignment: Start of **Case Study Presentations**

Week 10 – Tuesday March 17*Law and our Changing Landscape*

Religious Focus: Indigenous Activism

Reading (**pick one**):

1. Mark S. Cladis “Sacred Sites as a Threat to Environmental Justice?: Environmental Spirituality and Justice Meet among the Diné (Navajo) and Other Indigenous Groups.” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*. 2019; 23(2): 132-153.
2. Routledge textbook: Chapter 41 “Law: Religious influences on environmental law” by John Copeland Nagle (pp. 393-401)

Guest Speaker: TBC

Week 11 – Tuesday March 24

War, Conflict, and the Environment

Religious Focus: Religious Partnerships and NGOs

Readings:

1. Sung Yong Lee (2020). “Local peacebuilders’ ownership development in southeast Asia.” In S. Byrne, J. Senehi, I. M. Scott, & T. Matyók (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Peace and Confl. Studies* (1st ed., pp. 120–130). Routledge.
2. Various United Nations Documents (provided)

Week 12 – Tuesday March 31 *Outdoor Class TBC

Looking Back: Why ecology, spirituality, and justice?

No required readings.

Optional Readings:

1. Paul Bramadat “Introduction: Religion, Spirituality, and Irreligion in The Best Place on Earth” in *Religion at the Edge : Nature, Spirituality, and Secularity in the Pacific Northwest*. UBC Press; 2022.
2. *Routledge* textbook: Chapter 23 “Spiritual ecology and radical environmentalism” by Leslie E. Sponsel (pp. 220-228)

Assignment: Fourth and final **Weekly Recap Paper** due today

Week 13 – Tuesday April 7 *Potluck TBC

Bonus/Buffer Class: Your Questions, Final Presentations, Wrap-up

No required readings.

Assignment: **Final Project** due Thursday April 9, 11:59 PM (last day of classes)

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 https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

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://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

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 (under [Special Examinations](#)).

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://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-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/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King’s University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

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://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing 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.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also 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://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

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

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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 your 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/Originality Reports - 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.