



Religious Studies 2230f/g (570)
Ecology, Spirituality, and Justice
Fall/ Winter 2026-2027

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 2230G / SOCLJUST 2230G (Cross-listed)
ECOLOGY, SPIRITUALITY, AND JUSTICE

Course information:

Instructor: Ben Szoller

Contact information: bszoller@uwo.ca

Office hours: By appointment Fridays 9am-12pm via *Zoom*

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 how various religious traditions, spiritual practices, and beliefs systems understand prescient ecological concerns (e.g., climate change). 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, report 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. Weekly Reading Reports: 15% — Ongoing*

Throughout the term, students will complete three Weekly Reading Reports as a way to engage with the week's readings and prepare for class discussions. The reports will be submitted using an online form and include 2-3 short answer reflections as well as three questions for the week's discussion. Each report is worth 5% of the final grade.

***Please note:** Students can choose which weeks they submit Weekly Reading Reports, but to help alleviate end-of-term stress, the first must be submitted by Week 5 (October 8), the second by Week 7 (October 29), and the third no later than Week 11 (November 26). Reports **must be submitted prior to class** (i.e., before 11:00am) so that students are prepared for class discussions.

3. Goal Path Reflection: 20% — 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 4 pages (double spaced, not including bibliography and sources) and draw primarily from readings and discussions covered in the first five weeks of class as well as **two additional sources** (articles or chapters) specific to the student's own goal path.

4. Observational Activity: 15% — Due November 5 (but can be completed any time)

The Observational Activity is a short assignment designed to help prepare for the November 5th class, *Listening to the Natural World* (students are encouraged to complete the assignment as early as they like!). Students will first complete a brief inspirational reading (Dillard's essay, *Living Like Weasels*) 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 (3 pages, double spaced) which includes **at least three** references to the readings. Students must also **include a photographic composition** (i.e., evidence) in their reflection. The aim of the Observational Activity is to practice a contemplative method and to think about our environment in a new way; it is designed to be fun but also illuminating, so students be prepared to discuss their experience with peers in class.

5. Final Project Check-in: 5% — In-class November 19 (plus short 1-page outline)

Students will participate in a **Final Project check-in** activity on November 19. Prior to class, students will submit a 1-page summary of their paper (including topic outline and three potential sources). This is an opportunity to get a head start on your final project and collaborate with your peers. The check-in is **required for project approval**, so students unable to participate must arrange to meet the instructor during office hours to confirm their project topic and plan.

6. Final Project: 35% — Due December 9, 11:59pm (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. It 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.

Academic considerations:

Attendance and absences

- 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.
- Students are required to attend and participate in classes in person. Missing more than **two classes** throughout the term will impact their participation mark.
- Students are encouraged to communicate with their instructor regarding ongoing issues/absences as soon as possible and make arrangements for missed lecture material and any class assignments.

Deadlines and exemptions

- Please pay special attention to the assessment deadlines, especially to the **Weekly Reading Reports** which can be submitted throughout the term.
- Formal documentation will be required for academic consideration in both the **Final Project Check-in** (in-class November 19) and the **Final Project** (due December 9).

Academic integrity:

- All words should be your own unless noted otherwise (using citations, statement, etc.).
- Within this course, use of generative **artificial intelligence (AI)** tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, co-pilot, translation tools, and grammar-checking tools) is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.
- 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. 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 familiarize yourself with King's **Scholarly Ethics and Academic Honesty** outline, here: https://registry.kingsu.ca/Calendar/2026-27/Academic_Calendar/Academic_Information/Scholarly_Ethics_and_Academic_Honesty.htm

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 – Thursday September 10

Introduction: Why Ecology, Spirituality, and Justice?

Religious Focus: Belief

Optional Readings:

1. Routledge textbook: Chapter 2 “Developments in religion and ecology” by Sigurd Bergmann (pp. 13-21)
2. Routledge textbook: Chapter 25 “Climate change: Varieties of religious engagement” by Mike Hulme (pp. 239-248)

Week 2 – Thursday September 17

Approaches to the Study of Religion and Spirituality

Religious Focus: Genealogies, histories, and looking back

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)

Optional Readings: TBD

Week 3 – Thursday September 24

Christianity

Religious Focus: Cosmologies & the places we inhabit

Readings:

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

Week 4 – Thursday October 1

Judaism

Religious Focus: Ritual and food

Readings:

1. Routledge textbook: Chapter 7 “Judaism” by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (pp. 60-69)
2. TBD

Week 5 – Thursday October 8

Islam

Religious Focus: Sacred Texts

Readings:

1. Excerpts from *Al Mizan*. Othman Llewellyn, Fazlun Khalid and others. 2024. *Al-Mizan: Covenant for the Earth*. The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham, UK.
2. Routledge textbook: Chapter 9 “Islam: Norms and Practices” by Zainal Abidin Bagir, Najiyah Martiam.

Optional readings:

3. 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.

Assignment: First **Weekly Report Paper** due no later than today 11:00 AM

Reading Week – October 10-October 18

Week 6 – Thursday October 22

Buddhism, Daoism, & Confucianism

Religious Focus: Ethics & how to live in society

Video: “Daoism and Ecology” with James Miller www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uQzayobwfk

Readings (Pick one):

1. Routledge textbook: Chapter 19 “China: Landscapes, cultures, ecologies, religions” by James Miller (pp. 181-189)
2. Routledge textbook: Chapter 6 “Confucianism: Confucian environmental virtue ethics” by Yong Huang (pp. 52-59)

Assignment: **Goal Path Reflection** due today 11:00 AM

Week 7 – Thursday October 29

Hinduism (& Sikhism)

Religious Focus: Devotionalism

Readings:

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 Report Paper** due no later than today 11:00 AM

Week 8 – Thursday November 5

Indigenous Cosmovisions & Folk Religions

Religious Focus: Observing the natural world (incl. animals)

Readings:

1. Routledge textbook: Introduction to Part III “Indigenous Cosmovisions” by John Grim (pp. 107-108) .
2. Routledge textbook: Chapter 24 “Nature Writing and Nature Mysticism” by Douglas E. Christie (pp. 229-236).
3. Dillard, Annie. 2008. “Living Like Weasels.” In *Teaching a Stone to Talk : Expeditions and Encounters*. Harper Perennial.

Optional readings:

4. Routledge textbook: Chapter 12 “Africa: African heritage and ecological stewardship” by Jesse N. K. Mugambi (pp. 109-119)

Assignment: **Observational Activity** due today 11:00 AM

Week 9 – Thursday November 12

Paganism, Psychedelics, & New Religious Movements

Religious Focus: Spirituality

Readings:

1. Routledge textbook: Chapter 22 “Paganism and Animism” by Graham Harvey (pp. 211-219)
2. Pollan, Michael. “This is Your Priest on Drugs.” In *The New Yorker*, May 31, 2025. Available here at Pollan’s website. <https://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/this-is-your-priest-on-drugs/>

Week 10 – Thursday November 19

Intersections: Gender, Land Rights & Legal Frameworks

Religious Focus: Sacred vs. Profane

Reading:

1. Routledge textbook: Chapter 34 “Gender Injustice” by Heather Eaton (pp. 326-336)
2. 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.

Optional reading:

3. Routledge textbook: Chapter 41 “Law: Religious influences on environmental law” by John Copeland Nagle (pp. 393-401)

Assignment: **Final Project Check-in** (1-page outline due 11AM and attendance mandatory)

Week 11 – Thursday November 26

Intersections: War, Conflict, & Migration

Religious Focus: Membership

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. TBD

Assignment: Third **Weekly Report Paper** due no later than today 11:00 AM

Week 12 – Thursday December 3 *Potluck TBC

Intersections: Looking Ahead to Personhood, Technology, and Religious Ecology

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: **Final Project** due Wednesday December 9, 11:59 PM (last day of classes)

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (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 at [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible, and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>.

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this which assessment has been designated as requiring documentation for consideration (that is, exempt from undocumented absences).
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

If an instructor has built flexibility into their assessments (e.g., “complete 8 of 10 quizzes”), this flexibility will already address consideration needs and thus academic consideration may be denied.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see

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

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** 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 (i.e., you are scheduled to write 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](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their 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.

3. Support Services

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

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

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

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

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's 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 (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. 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://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

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.

6. 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 https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.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 you instructor to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.