

# ENST 344: Environmental Ethics

## Section 33031D, 4.0 units

**Professor:** Sean Fraga, Ph.D. **Email:** [sfraga@usc.edu](mailto:sfraga@usc.edu). **Name:** FROG-uh. **Pronouns:** he/him.

**Seminar meetings:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:00am – 10:20am in WPH B28.

**Office hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2pm – 3pm, in CAS 112.

*I invite you to meet with me during office hours. Bring questions! I'm happy to discuss course topics, recommend readings, or help with your research.*

How can we reconcile humanity's relationship with the environment in the face of unprecedented ecological challenges? When we talk about saving the planet, are we addressing an environmental crisis—or an ethical one? To answer these questions and more, we engage with a selection of foundational and cutting-edge philosophical works that inform contemporary environmental debates.

Everything we read or watch or listen to in this class is an argument, a set of ideas aimed at persuading us to the author's point of view. I do not expect you to agree with everything we read—and indeed, I don't agree with everything I've assigned! Instead, I ask that you approach these materials with curiosity, open-mindedness, and a willingness to explore the author's point of view, regardless of whether you ultimately agree or disagree with their perspective.

By the end of this class, you will not only possess a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of environmental issues, but will have honed your analytical and critical thinking skills. Our class will prepare you to thoughtfully and meaningfully contribute to discussions of environmental issues.

There are five major assignments. You'll **critique this class** by identifying a missing topic and arguing for its inclusion in future versions of this course: A research proposal is due in week 3, an essay draft in week 7, and the revised essay in week 9. Then, you'll use our course to prepare a **credo, or statement of beliefs**, due in week 14, and you'll present your credo in class during week 14, 15, or 16. Finally, you'll **reflect on your work** in our course.

This syllabus contains course policies, all major assignments and deadlines, and our reading schedule. Please read it all and check here first when you have questions. **You are responsible for meeting the obligations and deadlines detailed below.**

### ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

Submit all course work via this Google Form: [forms.gle/x4du8zpi6pT5JYvP6](https://forms.gle/x4du8zpi6pT5JYvP6)

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- gain familiarity with multiple different ethical frameworks relevant to environmental studies
- learn to ask meaningful questions about the relationship between humans and nature
- critically analyze authors' assumptions, questions, theories, and approaches
- participate in shaping future versions of this course by conducting independent research
- articulate how ethical concepts inform their personal beliefs and actions
- gain practice at communicating their ideas verbally and in writing

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- **Engagement:** We have a lot to cover! Every class matters. I expect you to attend all class meetings, and to complete the reading and written assignments on schedule. If something prevents you from attending a class, please let me know as soon as you can, **and we'll figure out a plan together.**
- **Participation:** I expect you to meaningfully contribute to our discussions. Each of us has something to offer: Come prepared to talk in class by asking a question, offering an informed opinion, or forging a connection between course topics. At the same time, each of us has something to learn: Come ready to listen, to invite your colleagues into conversation, and to respectfully disagree.
- **Originality:** I'm excited to know what *you* think about what you read and research. To that end, I expect you to produce your own work and to appropriately cite work by other writers, consistent with the rules outlined in [The USC Student Handbook](#) and [Trojan Integrity](#) [PDF]. **Note:** Text generated partly or entirely by AI (such as ChatGPT, Bard, or Bing) **doesn't meet my standards for originality.**
- **Timeliness:** I expect you to meet your deadlines. That said, in most cases, quality is more important to us than punctuality. If you think you won't be able to meet a deadline, **email me with a new proposed deadline and your plans for staying on track.**
- **Presence:** We'll use computers selectively. Sometimes we'll work together in Google Docs, and sometimes we'll focus on live discussion. When you're in class, please minimize computer distractions by muting, hiding, or logging out of email, messaging, and social media.
- **Self-advocacy:** What do I need to know to help you succeed in this course?

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

### Participation assignments

- **Share your questions.** For **each** reading or video, submit one quotation that stood out to you and one question **by 11:59pm on the day before our class meets.** Do you disagree with the author? What about the reading surprised you, or helped you see something in a new way? What connections do you see with previous readings? Share these via this Google Form: [forms.gle/W6PjiA3DC21oMLSD6](https://forms.gle/W6PjiA3DC21oMLSD6).
- **Cultivate our discussions.** Each of us has something to offer: Come prepared to talk in class by asking a question, dissecting an author's argument, or forging a connection between course readings. And each of us has something to learn: Come ready to listen, to invite your colleagues into conversation, and to respectfully disagree.

### Writing assignments

There are five primary writing assignments.

#### **Critique this Class, Assignment #1: Research proposal** (2–3 pages, double-spaced)

What is this class missing? What topic broadly related to environmental ethics would you add to our class, and why? In your proposal, point out what's missing and why it matters. Then describe the topic you would add to our syllabus and explain how it would enhance the larger course.

Your research proposal is due by **11:59pm on Friday, January 26.**

**Critique this Class, Assignments #2 and #3: Research essay draft and revision** (8–10 pages, double-spaced)

Build on your research proposal to make an argument about what this class is missing.

Identify three key thinkers for your proposed topic. For each thinker, you'll briefly summarize their ideas and explain why these ideas would enhance the course. You'll also identify one representative reading (or interview, lecture, etc.) for each thinker and briefly summarize it. How would each reading enhance the class? What new ideas or questions would it contribute? Why would your fellow students benefit from engaging with it?

I'll use these essays to plan our classes in weeks 13 and 14, and to inform future versions of this course.

The draft of your research project, plus cover letter, are due by **12 noon on Tuesday, February 20.**

Your revised research essay and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Friday, March 8.**

**Assignment #4: Credo, A Statement of Beliefs** (Notes for a six minute presentation)

What do you believe? Prepare a statement of your personal environmental beliefs and values, drawing inspiration and insights from the concepts, theories, and perspectives discussed throughout the course.

Reflect on your personal values, beliefs, and experiences. What moments in your life have influenced how your relationship with the environment?

Review our course material. What readings did you most identify with? (Or most strongly disagree with?)

Connect work and life. How has the course changed or challenged your perspective on environmental ethics? How will ideas from this course guide your future work?

Your credo and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Tuesday, April 9.** You'll present your credo in class sometime during week 14, 15, or 16.

**Assignment #5: Course reflection** (2–3 pages, double-spaced)

Use this space to reflect on your work in our course. To prepare, read back over your research notes, draft, and revised essay; your cover letters; and your credo.

First, where have you done the strongest work for this course? What skills have you learned? How did your performance improve over the course of the term? Describe what you think you have done most successfully in our course and explain why.

Second, what did you find most challenging about this course? How did you approach these challenges? What could you have done differently to get more out of the course? What will you continue to work on in future classes or beyond USC?

Finally, what grade has your work in our course earned, and why?

Your course reflection is due by **11:59pm on Tuesday, April 30.**

**Cover letters**

You'll include a one-page, single-spaced cover letter when you submit your research essay draft (assignment 2), research essay revision (assignment 3), and credo (assignment 4). These cover letters offer you an opportunity to reflect on what you've accomplished, provide your readers with a snapshot of your argument and your writing process, and ask your readers for feedback on specific parts of your writing. Format these documents like a letter, starting with the salutation "Dear Reader."

For your **research essay draft** and your **credo**, your cover letter should address the following:

- **Explain your question.** Why have you undertaken this project? What intrigued you? What puzzle are you trying to figure out?
- **Restate your thesis.** Use different language than in your draft—that is, do not simply copy and paste from your draft. The thesis may be something that you discovered as you wrote. Tell your reader where in the paper they should look for your thesis.
- **Wave your flag.** What you have done most successfully in this draft? Why?
- **Point out challenges.** Describe what you are struggling with most at this stage in the writing process. What are your concerns or uncertainties at this point?
- **Ask for help.** Based on these concerns, pose two questions for your reader about the areas in which you would like specific feedback.

For your **revised research essay**, your cover letter should address the following:

- Restate your thesis (using different language than in your project). Narrate how and why it has changed during the revision process.
- Discuss what you did most successfully in your project or presentation. Has this changed from earlier versions?
- What did you find most challenging about the drafting and revision process? How did you approach these challenges?
- Select one specific example of a revision you made. Describe this revision and narrate how and why you made it.
- Looking ahead, set yourself some personal goals for future research and writing. What would you like to focus on and improve?

### **Submission checklist**

- Set all written assignments in 12-point Times New Roman font (or close equivalent).
- Double-space your text.
- Set all page margins to one inch.
- Include page numbers in the bottom-right corner.
- Cite your sources using Chicago, MLA, or APA.
- Proofread your writing before submitting.
- Submit your work as a PDF.
- Start every file name with your last name** (e.g., "Fraga research proposal.pdf").
- Submit your course work via this Google Form: [forms.gle/x4du8zpi6pT5JYvP6](https://forms.gle/x4du8zpi6pT5JYvP6)

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

- **Week 3:** Your research proposal is due by **11:59pm on Friday, January 26.**
- **Week 7:** Your critique-this-class research essay draft and cover letter are due by **12 noon on Tuesday, February 20.**
- **Week 9:** Your revised research essay and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Friday, March 8.**
- **Week 14:** Your credo and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Tuesday, April 9.**
- **Study period:** Your course reflection is due by **11:59pm on Tuesday, April 30.**

**All deadlines are firm deadlines.** That said, in most cases, quality is more important to me than

punctuality. If you think you won't be able to meet a deadline, email me (as far in advance of the deadline as you can) to **propose a new deadline** and tell me your plans for staying on track.

## COURSE GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

### Qualitative Assessment

In assessing your work for our course, I'm following Jesse Stommel's approach. As Stommel writes, "**this course will focus on qualitative not quantitative assessment** [...] While you will get a final grade at the end of the term, I will not be grading individual assignments, but rather asking questions and making comments that engage your work rather than simply evaluate it. You will also be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you're expected to. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about your progress in the course to date. **If you are worried about your grade, your best strategy should be to join the discussions, do the reading, and complete the assignments.** You should consider this course a 'busy-work-free zone.' If an assignment does not feel productive, we can find ways to modify, remix, or repurpose the instructions."<sup>1</sup> These policies will apply to our course as well.

### Grading Rubric from "[Academic Standards,](#)" *USC Course Catalog*

- A — excellent
- B — good
- C — fair (and minimum passing grade for ENST program credit)
- D — minimum passing grade
- F — failed

### Grading Scale

	A	100–93	A-	92–90		
B+	89–87	B	86–83	B-	82–80	
C+	79–77	C	76–73	C-	72–70	
D+	69–67	D	66–63	D-	62–60	F 59 and below

## TEXTS AND MATERIALS

All course texts and materials are available electronically through our Blackboard course site.

## ACADEMIC RESOURCES

**I want you to succeed—and so does U.S.C.** These offices and programs are here to support your personal and academic development, at no cost to you or your family.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesse Stommel, "Why I Don't Grade," *Jesse Stommel* (blog), October 26, 2017, [jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/](https://jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/)

- **U.S.C. Libraries** offers research guides ([libguides.usc.edu](http://libguides.usc.edu)) that explain how to access and use the library's resources. Librarian **Robert Labaree** is available for further research assistance, including free one-on-one consultations ([labaree@usc.edu](mailto:labaree@usc.edu)).
- **The Kortschak Center For Learning And Creativity** offers free workshops on academic strategies and free one-on-one consultation sessions so that you can get the most out of your courses and your time here. [kortschakcenter.usc.edu/programs-services](http://kortschakcenter.usc.edu/programs-services)
- **The Writing Center** offers free workshops and free one-on-one writing feedback sessions with experienced fellow writers who can support you at any stage of the writing process: generating ideas, crafting an argument, or revising drafts. [dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter](http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter)
- **U.S.C. Student Health** is here to support your physical and mental well-being. [studenthealth.usc.edu](http://studenthealth.usc.edu) and [studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)
- As **your professor**, I am always happy to talk at office hours, by appointment, or over email. [sfraga@usc.edu](mailto:sfraga@usc.edu)

### **Statement For Students With Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability (including Online / Remote Class Accommodation Requests) is required to register with the Office of Student and Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS (<https://osas.usc.edu>) and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX), [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Statement On Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

### **Emergency Preparedness / Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness: <http://safety.usc.edu/>

### **What Questions Do You Have?**

Please email me ([sfraga@usc.edu](mailto:sfraga@usc.edu)) with any questions about our course or its policies.

## ADVICE FROM PREVIOUS STUDENTS

At the end of each course, I ask: What advice would you offer to future students in this course? Students anonymously offer tips, hints, and suggestions. A selection of this advice from previous students appears below.

"Make sure to stay caught up with the readings!"

"Please read every week. Start early in the week and break up the longer readings between multiple days. It is unfair to your classmates when you don't come prepared to discuss."

"Make a document where you write down ~5 bullet points about each reading, as this is very useful both for making connections, as well as planning writing assignments. It's not that much work to do, but it really adds up over time."

"Start early. Make sure you have some ideas or plans for your assignments when coming to class. This will make it possible for you to get feedback throughout the writing process."

"Come to class with the readings done and understood to really give you the most beneficial class experience."

"My advice would be to always make time in advance to stay up to date or ahead on readings since a lot of them are very long and one sitting the night before may be exhausting."

"Pace yourself throughout the term! Writing a bit here and there will let you make good progress on an assignment."

"do not procrastinate the essays!"

"If you're a serial procrastinator (like me) refusing to take the 'start the research project early' advice, at least start it the weekend before the deadline. I promise you can't get it done in one night."

"Were I to take this class again, I would be sure to begin structuring the load of research and coursework much earlier in the semester and to be more strict with myself in accomplishing self-imposed due dates."

"I wish I had spent more time on the content of our class and approached each assignment with a greater sense of curiosity and discovery rather than with the pressure to simply come up with an answer."

## SEMESTER CALENDAR

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Readings</i>
<b>Week 1: Introductions</b>		
Mon, Jan 8	What is your environmental ethic?	Read this syllabus and bring questions to our first class.
Wed, Jan 10	Ways of being and ways of knowing	Kimmerer, "Planting Sweetgrass" in <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> (2013)
<b>Week 2: Seeking Wilderness</b>		
Mon, Jan 15	No class: Martin Luther King, Jr., Day	None.
Wed, Jan 17	Starting points	- Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (1949) - The Wilderness Act of 1964
<b>Week 3: Humans and Nature</b>		
Mon, Jan 22	Where is nature?	Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1996)
Wed, Jan 24	Belonging and nature	Savoy, "Alien Land Ethic: the distance between" in <i>Trace</i> (2015)
Fri, Jan 26	<b><u>Due:</u> Your research proposal is due by 11:59pm on Friday, January 26.</b>	
<b>Week 4: Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice</b>		
Mon, Jan 29	Space	United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, <i>Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States</i> (1987): ix–xvi, 1–30.
Wed, Jan 31	Time	Nixon, selection from introduction, <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i> (2011): 1–22.
<b>Week 5: Ecofeminism</b>		
Mon, Feb 5	Colonialism and development in the Global South	Shiva, <i>Staying Alive</i> , introduction, ch. 1, and ch. 2 (1988)
Wed, Feb 7	Reason/nature dualism	Plumwood, <i>Feminism and the Mastery of Nature</i> , ch. 1 and ch. 7 (1993)
<b>Week 6: Animal Rights</b>		
Mon, Feb 12	Animal equality	Singer, "All Animals Are Equal..." in <i>Animal Liberation</i> (2009 [1975]), pp. 28–57.

Wed, Feb 14	Living with animals	Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto" (2003), pp.93–124, 132–145.
<b>Week 7: Critiquing this Class</b>		
Mon, Feb 19	No class: Presidents' Day	None.
Tues, Feb 20	<b>Due:</b> A polished draft of your research essay, plus a cover letter, are due by <b>12 noon on Tuesday, February 20</b> . You'll read a colleague's draft, then discuss and offer feedback in Wednesday's class.	
Wed, Feb 21	Discuss essay drafts	Your colleague's essay draft
<b>Week 8: Data and the Environment</b>		
Mon, Feb 26	Environmental impacts of data analysis	Lucivero, "Big Data, Big Waste? A Reflection on the Environmental Sustainability of Big Data Initiatives" (2019)
Wed, Feb 28	Practices for visualizing data	D'Ignazio and Klein, "On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints," in <i>Data Feminism</i> (2020)
<b>Week 9: Religion, Belief, and the Environment</b>		
Mon, Mar 4	Preservation and care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Preservation of the Natural Environment," <a href="https://youtu.be/ITHGZpu1rP4">youtu.be/ITHGZpu1rP4</a> (2013)</li> <li>- Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home</i>, introduction and ch. 6 (2015)</li> </ul>
Wed, Mar 6	Living and dominion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nhật Hạnh, "The World We Have" (2017)</li> <li>- Bernstein, "The Bible Does Not Validate Endless Exploitation and Domination of the Environment" (2021)</li> </ul>
Fri, Mar 8	<b>Due:</b> Your revised research essay and cover letter are due by <b>11:59pm on Friday, March 8</b> .	
<b>Week 10: Spring recess — No class</b>		

<b>Week 11: The Anthropocene</b>		
Mon, Mar 18	Defining the Anthropocene	- Crutzen, "Geology of mankind" (2002) - Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" (2009)
Wed, Mar 20	Indigenous Responses to the Anthropocene	Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene" (2017)
<b>Week 12: The Anthropocene (continued)</b>		
Mon, Mar 25	Welcoming the Anthropocene?	Holly Jean Buck, "On the Possibilities of a Charming Anthropocene" (2015)
Wed, Mar 27	More-than-human responses to the Anthropocene	Tsing, "Patchy Anthropocene: The Feral Impacts of Infrastructure," <a href="https://youtu.be/Efmf77F2oNM">youtu.be/Efmf77F2oNM</a> (2023)
<b>Week 13: Your Environmental Issues</b>		
Mon, Apr 1	Student-initiated topic — TBA	TBD
Wed, Apr 3	Student-initiated topic — TBA	TBD
<b>Week 14: Your Environmental Issues (continued) / Your Environmental Ethics</b>		
Mon, Apr 8	Student-initiated topic — TBA	TBD
<b>Due:</b>	Your credo and cover letter are due by <b>11:59pm on Tuesday, April 9.</b>	
Wed, Apr 10	Student credo presentations	None.
<b>Week 15: Your Environmental Ethics (continued)</b>		
Mon, Apr 15	Student credo presentations	None.
Wed, Apr 17	Student credo presentations	None.
<b>Week 16: Your Environmental Ethics (continued) / Critique this Class</b>		
Mon, Apr 22	Student credo presentations	None.
Wed, Apr 24	Critique this class — again!	None.

**Due:** Your course reflection is due by **11:59pm on Tuesday, April 30.**