

ENST 344: Environmental Ethics

Section 33031R, 4.0 units

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

Seminar meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00pm – 3:20pm in THH 118.

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30pm – 4:30pm, 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 11, and you'll present your credo in class during week 12, 13, or 14. 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

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. 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
- **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](#). **Note: Text generated partly or entirely by AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, 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.**
- **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.
- **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, September 13.**

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 Monday, October 7.**

Your revised research essay and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Friday, October 25.**

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, November 15.** You'll present your credo in class sometime during week 12, 13, or 14.

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, December 10.**

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

- Start every file name with your last name** (e.g., "Fraga research proposal.pdf").
- 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.
- Submit your course work via this Google Form: forms.gle/x4du8zpi6pT5JYvP6

IMPORTANT DATES

- **Week 3:** Your research proposal is due by **11:59pm on Friday, September 13.**
- **Week 7:** Your critique-this-class research essay draft and cover letter are due by **12 noon on Monday, October 7.**
- **Week 9:** Your revised research essay and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Friday, October 25.**
- **Week 11:** Your credo and cover letter are due by **11:59pm on Friday, November 15.**
- **Study period:** Your course reflection is due by **11:59pm on Tuesday, December 10.**

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."¹ 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 Brightspace 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.

- **U.S.C. Libraries** offers research guides (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).
- **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

¹ Jesse Stommel, "Why I Don't Grade," *Jesse Stommel* (blog), October 26, 2017, jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/

- **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
- **U.S.C. Student Health** is here to support your physical and mental well-being. studenthealth.usc.edu and studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling
- As **your professor**, I am always happy to talk at office hours, by appointment, or over email. sfraga@usc.edu

What Questions Do You Have?

Please email me (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.

"Do. The. Readings. It makes the class so much more enjoyable when you do the readings before each class and participate in the discussions, and you will get so much more out of the class!"

"My biggest piece of advice is try try your best and deeply engage with every reading, even if it does not initially resonate with you. I gained the most critical perspectives when I thought deeply about a reading that I otherwise would not have considered. "

"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."

"Take notes on all of the readings! It will help you a lot during discussions. Especially at the end, the class gets very summative, so having notes on everything will help a lot."

"Come to class not just with an understanding of what the author said, but how you feel about what they said. That makes for the best discussions."

"Engage in discussion, if you sit in the back of the class playing on your computer you miss out on valuable information. These readings that I interpreted individually deepened my environmental ethic, but what truly took my learning to the next step was listening to the perspectives of my peers."

"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."

"You're only going to get out as much as you put into it. Participating in class discussion can really lead to a much more meaningful experience."

SEMESTER CALENDAR

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>Motivating question</i>	<i>Read for this class</i>
Week 1: Introductions		
Tue, Aug 27	What is your environmental ethic?	Read this syllabus and bring questions to our first class.
Thu, Aug 29	Where do our environmental ethics come from?	Kimmerer, "Planting Sweetgrass" in <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> (2013)
Week 2: Defining Nature and Wilderness		
Tue, Sep 3	How has our definition of nature changed over time?	- Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (1949) - The Wilderness Act of 1964
Thu, Sep 5	How do we define wilderness, and why does that matter?	Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1996)
Week 3: Incorporating Race and Gender		
Tue, Sep 10	What is environmental racism?	- United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, <i>Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States</i> (1987): ix–xvi, 1–30. - Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, "The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)" (1991)
Thu, Sep 12	What is ecofeminism?	Plumwood, <i>Feminism and the Mastery of Nature</i> , ch. 1 and ch. 2 (1993)
Week 4: Intersectional Environmentalism		
Tue, Sep 17	What is intersectionality, and how can it help us develop an environmental ethic?	- Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality" (2016, 18 minutes, transcript available) ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality - Thomas, "Intersectional Environmentalism Is the Urgent Way Forward" (2021)
Thu, Sep 19	What does it mean to belong to a place?	- Liou, "Am I an invasive species?" (2020) - Liou, "I'm an ecologist and second-generation Chinese immigrant. I had to define my own environmentalism" (2023)
Fri, Sep 13	Due: Your research proposal is due by 11:59pm on Friday, September 13.	

Week 5: Time / Humans and Animals		
Tue, Sep 24	Why does time matter for environmentalism?	Nixon, selection from introduction, <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i> (2011): 1–22.
Thu, Sep 26	What separates animals from humans?	Singer, "All Animals Are Equal..." in <i>Animal Liberation</i> (2009 [1975]), pp. 28–57.
Week 6: Humans and Animals (continued)		
Tue, Oct 1	What connects humans and animals?	Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto" (2003), pp.93–124, 132–145.
Thu, Oct 3	What are our obligations to animals?	Nussbaum, <i>Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility</i> , ch. 10 (2022)
Week 7: Critiquing this Class		
Mon, Oct 7	Due: A polished draft of your research essay, plus a cover letter, are due by 12 noon on Monday, October 7 . You'll read a colleague's draft, then discuss and offer feedback in tomorrow's class.	
Tue, Oct 8	How can you help your colleague improve their essay?	Your colleague's essay draft
Thu, Oct 10	No class: Fall Recess	None.
Week 8: Religion, Belief, and the Environment		
Tue, Oct 15	What environmental responsibilities accompany our religious beliefs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home</i>, introduction and ch. 6 (2015) - Adha Shaleh and Muhammad Saidul Islam, "Averting the Existential Threat of the Planet: Islamic Environmental Ethics to Address the Contemporary Environmental Crisis" (2024)
Thu, Oct 17	How should we apply religious teachings to live in the world?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nhật Hạnh, "The World We Have" (2017) - Bernstein, "The Bible Does Not Validate Endless Exploitation and Domination of the Environment" (2021)
Week 9: Science, Belief, and the Environment		
Tue, Oct 22	How should we practice science?	Resnick and Elliott, "The Ethical Challenges of Socially Responsible Science" (2016)
Thu, Oct 24	No class.	No reading. Instead, work on revising your research essay.
Fri, Oct 25	Due: Your revised research essay and cover letter are due by 11:59pm on Friday, October 25 .	

Week 10: Eco-Anxiety and Eco-Activism		
Tue, Nov 5	How should we respond to eco-anxiety?	- Hertzog-Young, <i>Spinning Out</i> (2023), chapter 3, "Climate despair, climate trauma" and chapter 10, "REMEDY: how to change the things we cannot accept"
Thu, Nov 7	What should be the limits of eco-activism?	- Malm, <i>How to Blow up a Pipeline</i> (2021), chapter 2, "Breaking the Spell."
Week 11: Your Environmental Issues		
Tue, Nov 12	Student-initiated topic TBD	Readings TBD
Thu, Nov 14	Student-initiated topic TBD	Readings TBD
Fri, Nov 15	<u>Due:</u> Your credo and cover letter are due by 11:59pm on Friday, November 15.	
Week 12: Your Environmental Ethics		
Tue, Nov 19	Student credo presentations	None.
Thu, Nov 21	Student credo presentations	None.
Week 13: Your Environmental Ethics (continued)		
Tue, Nov 26	Student credo presentations	None.
Thu, Nov 28	No class: Thanksgiving Day	None.
Week 14: Your Environmental Ethics (continued) / Critique this Class		
Tue, Dec 3	Student credo presentations	None.
Thu, Dec 5	Critique this class — again!	None.

Due: Your course reflection is due by 11:59pm on Tuesday, December 10.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

STATEMENT ON UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.