

ENVR 203 - 051: *Knowledge, Ethics, and Environment* (Fall 2022)

Teaching Team

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Course Time & Location

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:05 - 11:35

Centennial Centre 1-150

Course Format

This course will take place live, in person! Students are expected to be in class and attendance and participation will be graded.

Course Overview

The relationship between human societies and the environment is articulated, among other things, by how knowledge about this very same environment is produced and by how this relation is mediated by ethics. This course will introduce mainstream Western approaches to ethics and science, as well as critiques of and alternatives to these approaches inspired by environmental concerns.

This course aims to:

- 1) introduce some key ideas in environmental ethics, sociocultural analysis, and political theory as they relate to the emergent rights of nature; and
- 2) sharpen students' skills in recognizing, critiquing, and formulating arguments about the environment.

Course materials focus on six environmental controversies and draw from across the social and natural sciences in order to provide an interdisciplinary perspective to our relationships with the Other (animals, species, and ecosystems). Topics include understanding the impacts of anthropocentrism and attuning (or listening) to the suffering and rights of animals and plants; investigating the historical roots of contemporary socio-ecological destruction through colonialism and capitalism; and thinking through specific ways that we can change our current trajectory.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Critically read different literature on environmental issues from different ethical perspectives.
- Contribute to a collaborative-style learning environment, that is: actively participating in a respectful manner, and producing robust analyses of course texts.
- Formulate and support an ethical positioning on environmental issues both in oral and written forms.

Learning Objectives for each of the SIX Environmental Controversies

Controversy 1: The Ethical Underpinnings of a circular Economy

Learning objectives: To understand entropy as property of our universe and entropy accumulation as a conclusion to any economic activity. What are the ethical positions regarding the expansion/continuation of our economies on a limited planet?

Controversy 2: The TransMountain Pipeline

Learning objectives: Introducing different sources and forms of rights, through an exploration of how these different forms of rights are being invoked in the TMX controversy. Understanding the *limits and alternatives* to a rights-based framework for ethical decision-making.

Controversy 3: Nuclear Power

Learning objectives: To understand and be able to implement concepts of risk, risk society and risk perception; energy ethics; the power relations, geopolitics and political economy of nuclear science and technology. To introduce the history, moral and ethical stakes of nuclear testing, waste, waste management and uranium mining in the context of contemporary debates on renewable energy and climate change.

Controversy 4: Electric Vehicles and mineral extraction

Learning objectives: Introduction to ecomodernism and challenges to technological expansion. Flows, funds, services and stocks as alternatives to capital substitution under scarcity. This environmental controversy will help students deepen their understanding of the relationships and tensions between individual freedom and collective responsibility.

Controversy 5: The Seal Hunt & the Moose Moratorium

Learning objectives: Introduction of widening spheres of moral standing and ethical consideration, from anthropocentrism to biocentrism to eco-centraism to relationality. Understand different ways of knowing, different ways of relating to, valuing and harvesting non-human animals. Whose voices count when making decisions and policies around the use and protection of animals?

Controversy 6: Genetically Modified Organisms

Learning objectives: To understand and be able to analyze the moral and ethical stakes in contemporary debates on biotechnology; differing narratives about controversies; human-animal and human-plant relations; the history of plant modification; the role of corporations, intellectual property and the ownership of “life” and livelihoods; the political economy of GM crops.

Required Course Materials

This course requires that everyone reads and discusses articles, book chapters, blog entries assigned for each lecture. All reading materials will be made available in advance, no textbook is required for this course.

Additional shorter readings may be assigned.

Evaluation

Assessment breakdown	Due Date	% of final grade
Course attendance	Ongoing	10
Course participation	Ongoing	10
Deliberative Democracy Fora (one-page memo 5% + participation 15%)		20
Assignment 1	Sept 29	10
Assignment 2	Oct 20	10
Assignment 3	Nov 15	15
Final Assignment	Dec 1	25

Course Attendance (10 %)

Attendance will be taken in lecture after the add-drop period. Students are expected to come to class on time, having completed each week's readings beforehand, and prepared to contribute to discussions or activities.

If you cannot attend a class, it is your responsibility to notify the instructors in advance. Students will be excused from attendance only in cases where they can provide written documentation from a credible source outlining the extraordinary circumstances for the absence. Credible sources include medical professionals and appropriate McGill University staff. Note that when a student is requesting a medical accommodation for a course assignment, the request must be submitted directly to the Student Affairs Office (Laird Hall - Room 106), rather than the course instructors.

For more information, see: <https://www.mcgill.ca/macdonald/studentinfo/medical-notes>

10 points: Up to one absence

8 points: 2 missed classes

7 points: 3 missed

6 points: 4 missed

5 points: 5 missed

0 points: more than 5 missed classes

Course participation (10%)

These classes will be what you make them, and as such it is essential that all students arrive well-prepared and intellectually curious. Assessment of course participation is as follows:

9-10 points: Excellent and constructive contributions to discussion

7-8 points: Consistently active, constructive and engaging

4-6 points: Inconsistently or poorly engaged

0-3 points: Very little or no engagement

Note that the quality of a student's contributions is of greater importance than simply their frequency in the assessment of course participation.

Entry and exit questionnaires will be administered to all students with the objective of assessing changes in participants' views and perspectives with regards to human-nature relationships. No marks will be assigned to these questionnaires but participation is required.

Deliberative Democracy Forum (20%)

Deliberative democracy is an approach to political decision-making that emphasizes that decisions should be made through fair and reasonable discussion among a wide diversity of people. In our four forums during the course we will practice our skills in generative, productive discussion across diverse perspectives and interests. Our goal of these forums will not be to win a debate, or even to change each other's minds, but to actually really listen to each other and *come to the best decision we can, together*.

Each student will sign up to participate in 1 of the 6 *Deliberative Democracy Forums* that will take place on the final session of each of the 6 controversies (see course schedule). Through an online sign up form posted to myCourses, students will sign up for one of the forums and be assigned a position to take in relation to the particular controversy. Each student will come to their Forum session prepared (having done

some research and developed a well-thought-out ethical argument) to argue his/her position during the discussion.

Before the day of the Forum session you have signed up to, please **submit a 1 page memo** outlining your position, and its justification (including lines of ethical reasoning, sources of evidence and other sources of knowledge).

Upload your memo through myCourses by 6pm on the day before the deliberative democracy forum. Name your file as follows:

lastname_firstname_ENVR203memoDDF.docx. Please submit your work in either Word, RTF, or Adobe PDF format, no other types of files are permitted and Word documents are preferred whenever possible.

Written Assignment 1 (10%) - Summary/Synthesis

Thursday

Due on ~~Tuesday~~ Sept 29 2022

For the first written assignment, students will practice summarizing and synthesizing one article, learning to identify the main arguments, lines of ethical reasoning and sources of knowledge used to defend the arguments. Students will select one article we've read on the **Circular Economy or TMX controversies** and write a *one page* (1.5 spacing) summary/synthesis of the article. You will need to extract the essential elements of the article by focusing on the main argument(s), the lines of ethical reasoning and sources of knowledge brought in as evidence to back up arguments.

Upload your Assignment through myCourses by 6pm on the same day as the beginning of the next environmental controversy (Due on Tuesday Sept 29 2022).

Name your file as follows: lastname_firstname_ENVR203A1.docx. Please submit your work in either Word, RTF, or Adobe PDF format, no other types of files are permitted and Word documents are preferred whenever possible.

Written Assignment 2 (10%) - Compare/Contrast

Due on Tuesday Oct 20 2022

For this second of the written assignments, students will build on the summary/synthesis skill developed in the first assignment. For this assignment, in addition to providing brief summaries of two articles, students will also identify and reflect on the main similarities and differences in the arguments, ethical reasoning and sources of knowledge in the respective articles. Students will write a *two page* (1.5 spacing) summary of two articles on *either* the **TMX controversy or the Nuclear Power controversy**, *comparing and contrasting* the two.

Upload your Assignment through myCourses by 6pm on Tuesday Oct 20 2022. Name your file as follows: lastname_firstname_ENVR203A2.docx. Please submit your work in either Word, RTF, or Adobe PDF format, no other types of files are permitted, and Word documents are preferred whenever possible.

Written Assignment 3 (15%) - Applying Ethical Frameworks to Environmental Controversies

Due on November 15 2022

In this third written assignment, students will practice applying some of the ethical frameworks that have been presented in the course to the environmental controversies we're exploring. In this assignment students will choose two of the various ethical frameworks presented in the course so far and in this *3 page* (1.5 spacing) written assignment will explain both frameworks, and then apply each of them to the **Mining & EV controversy**.

Upload your Assignment through myCourses by 6pm on the same day as the beginning of the next environmental controversy (Due on November 15 2022). Name your file as follows: lastname_firstname_ENVR203A3.docx. Please submit your work in either Word, RTF, or Adobe PDF format, no other types of files are permitted and Word documents are preferred whenever possible.

Final Assignment (25%) - Taking a stance and developing your own argument

Due on December 1 2022

In this fourth written assignment, students will write a *4 page* (1.5 spacing) essay taking a stance on one of the six environmental controversies that we've explored in the course. Students will develop their own argument about what they think the best course of action might be given the complexities, impacts and trade-offs surrounding the controversy. Students will bring in ethical frameworks and lines of evidence and other sources of knowledge to defend their stance. This is an opportunity to practice the difference between having an opinion and crafting a well reasoned, thoughtful and well defended argument. To strengthen your argument, identify any assumptions you may be making in your argument.

Upload your Assignment through myCourses by 6pm on the final class session (Due on December 1 2022). Name your file as follows: lastname_firstname_ENVR203FA.docx. Please submit your work in either Word, RTF, or Adobe PDF format, no other types of files are permitted and Word documents are preferred whenever possible.

Late Policy

“Stuff happens” clause: you invoke the clause on one (1) assignment and get a 3-day extension. No explanation required. However, *you must let your teaching team (all three instructors and TA) know **via email** that you are invoking the clause before the deadline* (adapted from Dr. Robin Mitchell, California State University, Channel Islands).

Otherwise, we will accept written assignments up to one week late, with a 5% assignment-grade reduction per day late.

If you would like assistance with improving your writing, consider making an appointment with the [McGill Writing Centre](#).

Sickness/illness during the term: Please visit Student Services (CC1-124) at Macdonald Campus if you are suffering from any mental or physical health-related issues during the term. If you need to seek accommodation for in-course assignments, for medical or other emergencies, please bring medical documentation to the Student Affairs Office (106 Laird Hall).

Student well-being is a priority for the University. All of our health and wellness resources have been integrated into a single Student Wellness Hub, your one-stop shop for everything related to your physical and mental health. If you need to access services or get more information, visit the [Virtual Hub](#) or drop by the Brown Student Services Building (downtown) or Centennial Centre (Macdonald campus). Within your faculty, you can also connect with your Local Wellness Advisor (to make an appointment, visit mcgill.ca/lwa).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Content	Assessment
Session 1 - Thursday Sept 1	Go over syllabus, introductions, Community Guidelines	Entry Questionnaire Sign up on MyCourses for DD Forum
Session 2 - Tuesday Sept 6	Controversy 1: <i>Ethics of a Circular Economy</i> (intro)	
Session 3 -	Controversy 1: <i>Ethics of a Circular</i>	

Thursday Sept 8	<i>Economy (perspectives)</i>	
Session 4 - Tuesday Sept 13	Controversy 1: <i>Ethics of a Circular Economy</i> (theoretical frameworks)	(Discuss Assignment #1)
Session 5 - Thursday Sept 15	Controversy 1: <i>Ethics of a Circular Economy</i> Deliberative Democracy Forum	
Session 6- Tuesday Sept 20	Controversy 2: <i>TransMountain Pipeline</i> (Intro)	
Session 7- Thursday Sept 22	Controversy 2: <i>TransMountain Pipeline</i> (Guest Lecture)	
Session 8- Tuesday Sept 27	Controversy 2: <i>TransMountain Pipeline</i> (Theoretical Frameworks)	
Session 9- Thursday Sept 29	Controversy 2: <i>TransMountain Pipeline</i> - Deliberative Democracy Forum	Assignment 1 due
Session 10- Tuesday Oct 4	Controversy 3: <i>Nuclear power</i> (intro)	
Session 11 - Thursday Oct 6	Controversy 3: <i>Nuclear power</i> (perspectives)	(Discuss Assignment #2)
Study BREAK		
OCT 11 & 13 : No CLASSES		
Session 12- Friday Oct 14	Controversy 3: <i>Nuclear power</i> (theoretical frameworks)	
Session 13- Tuesday Oct 18	Controversy 3: <i>Nuclear power</i> Deliberative Democracy Forum	
Session 14- Thursday Oct 20	Controversy 4: <i>Mining and EV</i> (Intro)	Assignment 2 due
Session 15- Tuesday Oct 25	Controversy 4: <i>Mining and EV</i> (perspectives)	
Session 16- Thursday Oct 27	Controversy 4: <i>Mining and EV</i> - (Theoretical Frameworks)	
Session 17- Tuesday Nov 1	Controversy 4: <i>Mining and EV</i> - Deliberative Democracy Forum	

Session 18- Thursday Nov 3	Controversy 5: <i>Seal Hunt & Moose Moratorium</i> (Intro)	(Discuss Assignment #3)
Session 19- Tuesday Nov 8	Controversy 5: <i>Seal Hunt & Moose Moratorium</i> (Guest Lecture)	
Session 20- Thursday Nov 10	Controversy 5: <i>Seal Hunt & Moose Moratorium</i> (Theoretical Framework)	
Session 21- Tuesday Nov 15	Controversy 5: <i>Seal Hunt & Moose Moratorium</i> - Deliberative Democracy Forum	Assignment 3 due
Session 22 Thursday Nov 17	Controversy 6: <i>Genetically Modified Organisms</i> (Intro)	(Discuss Assignment #4)
Session 23- Tuesday Nov 22	Controversy 6: <i>Genetically Modified Organisms</i> (Perspectives)	
Session 24- Thursday Nov 24	Controversy 6: <i>Genetically Modified Organisms</i> (Theoretical Frameworks)	
Session 25- Tuesday Nov 30	Controversy 6: <i>Genetically Modified Organisms</i> - Deliberative Democracy Forum	Exit Questionnaire
Session 26- Thursday Dec 1	Conclusions and final reflections	Final Assignment due

Language

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.”

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue). »

Academic Integrity

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information)

« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/). »