



## REL 3492: Earth Ethics; Section RVC 1218

Instructor Information Table



Dr. James Huchingson

### INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

- Email: [huchings@fu.edu](mailto:huchings@fu.edu)

Course Time Zone | Eastern Standard Time (EST).  
Course due dates are according to this time zone.

### Course Description and Purpose

This course will focus on ways of making moral judgments about important environmental issues. Also included is an exploration of various approaches by environmentalists, philosophers, and religious traditions to the question of what duties humans have to natural systems, including planet Earth, and their inhabitants.

This is a discipline-specific global learning course that counts toward your global learning graduation requirement.

### Course Objectives and Global Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and employ important ways of making moral judgments;
- Discuss the ideas of relationships between humankind and nature found in select environmentalists, philosophers, and religious traditions;
- Apply these ways of making moral decisions and ideas of humankind and nature to specific environmental issues.
- students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, and systems.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the relationship between religious ideas and the ways we interact with other animals and the rest of the natural world.

- Students will be able to construct a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems.
- Students will be able to address specific environmental challenges from multiple perspectives.
- Students will demonstrate willingness to engage in local, global, international and intercultural problem solving.

## Important Information

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- [Policies](#)
- [Netiquette \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- [Technical Requirements and Skills](#)
- [Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Statement](#)
- [Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)

## Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

## Textbook and Course Materials

### Textbook Information

#### **Boundaries: A Casebook in Environmental Ethics**

Christine Gudorf and James Huchingson  
Washington DC: Georgetown University Press,  
Second Edition, 2010.

**ISBN-10:** 158901636X

**ISBN 13:** 978-1-58901-636-1

You may purchase your textbook online at the [FIU Bookstore \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

## Expectations of this Course

This is an online course, which means most (if not all) of the coursework will be conducted online. Expectations for performance in an online course are the same for a traditional course. In fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-

discipline, and technology skills which can make these courses more demanding for some students.

### Students are expected to:

- **review the getting started page** located in the course modules
- **take the practice quiz** to ensure that your computer is compatible with the learning management system, Canvas;
- **interact** online with instructor and peers;
- **review** and follow the course calendar and weekly outlines.

## Course Detail

### Course Policies

- If you have a serious reason for missing the open dates for the first or second exams (e.g., serious accident, hospitalization, death in the immediate family) contact Dr. Huchingson to arrange a make-up. Quizzes are up for a week. Plan to take them early so that if you have technological problems they can be resolved before the quiz period is over. **Important: No make-up quizzes will be given for any reason. The lowest grade will be dropped.**
- Computers are available on campus if your computer breaks down. Many home computers using modems cannot receive all the video or audio presentations—leave time enough to get them on campus if your set-up at home does not work.
- University policy allows incompletes only in cases where the student has completed a majority of work in the class and has a passing grade on all the completed work. Please note; university administration discourages incompletes except in the most serious circumstances. You must ask for an incomplete; they are not given automatically. Indeed, they are sometimes refused by the administration.
- No extra credit is given in this course.

## Assignments

### Quizzes

In order to mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is very important that you take the [Practice Quiz](#) from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams. For quiz duration, grading criteria and feedback response time, please review the [important information about quizzes](#) page.

**Quizzes and Exams:** There will be online quizzes for each unit (seven in all) on all course material and reading assignments.

Each student will have one attempt at quizzes with questions randomly drawn from a large database. **First and Second exams** will be multiple choice and will come from the

text assignments, assigned articles, and online presentations. One hour and fifteen minutes are allowed for each exam. Unlike quizzes, each exam is open only for the day it is scheduled. **Exams are not open book.** The first exam is on **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12**. The second exam is on **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10**.

## Assignments

**Original Case study with Commentary:** Use your considerable untapped creativity to imagine a situation about an environmental issue that involves an ethical conflict or dilemma. The case will consist of a narrative (a minimum of 1000 words) with characters and dialogue, and a commentary explaining the nature of the issue and its possible resolutions (a minimum of 1000 words). **See the Guidelines below.**

A **proposal**, consisting of a description of your issue naming the two opposing sides to the dilemma (two paragraphs) and the sources you consulted in choosing it (three will do), must be submitted by **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27**. The paper itself is due no later than **WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8**.

## Important Notes

- Do not choose a topic that is covered by a case study in the course text (Gudorf and Huchingson).
- If you submit the proposal, the interview with a religious figure and/or the case study as attachments on the submission page, they must be in the Microsoft Word format. Otherwise, they will be returned without credit. You may find it easier to copy and paste your submissions on the submission page.
- **The case study and commentary will be submitted through the Turnitin assignment box.**

**Interview with Religious figure:** Conduct an interview with a full-time or professional representative of a religion (priest, pastor, rabbi, imam, monk, nun, guru, etc.) who is knowledgeable about these matters on the position and views of her/his religion on the following questions:

- How does your faith and philosophy view the relation between humans and the natural world? Where do we fit and why?
- What duties, or obligations, if any, do humans have toward the natural world? How are these justified or explained?
- How is your faith responding through action and practical programs to the environmental crisis, from local issues to global warming?

Write a report summarizing the responses to these questions and assessing their adequacy. Where do you agree and disagree? Why? Use concepts from the course in your responses to these questions. Your reflections on the interview will count more toward your grade than the interview itself. Since this report requires knowledge of the religion whose expert representative you interview, you should prepare yourself through background research and reading. Your report should be no less than 750 words, although it may be longer. **Report due no later than MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1.**

## **Guidelines for Case Study**

The Case (1,000-1,500 words)

- Identify a moral dilemma in environmental ethics.

The dilemma should have two opposing sides, each with its own arguments. The two sides will have competing goods; that is, benefits that will come if their actions are taken or principles they do not want to compromise. Of course, each side will likely also have harms that will result if their preferred actions are taken, a fact that their opponent will use against them. The sharper the conflict between the two sides the easier it will be to write the case. See the list of “Sample Topics” in reading assignments for Unit One. Remember, this assignment is primarily an ethical and/or social and cultural issue having to do with justice, rights, and values and not a technical or scientific problem about the environment. Of course, facts about the issue are very important, but the issue itself is an ethical one. See the course text for good examples.

- Create a fictional situation.

The situation may be a crisis to which the major character (the hero/heroine or person caught in the middle) is forced to decide between the two positions in order to resolve the situation. Or it may be a dialogue between characters. Introduce the situation and the central characters and describe the problem in the first two paragraphs of the case.

- Create a dialogue between the characters.

This characters will then debate the issues with additional characters introduced if necessary. Perhaps each new character could represent one of the two opposing positions. Most of the case should consist of this debate as dialogue. The characters should debate what ought to be done in this particular situation in concrete terms and give reasons why. The best cases are about specific situations. The characters disagree about what should be done in that local situation and why. Generalities are best left for the commentary.

- Conclude the case.

The best case studies do not resolve the dilemma but to end with the central character(s) forced by circumstances to make a tough decision, one way or the other. You do not say what the character(s) decide. This leaves the reader with the task of figuring out for him/herself what the decision ought to be. Or, if you feel strongly that one side of the dilemma is preferred over the other, your central character(s) may resolve the dilemma and take action. The reader is then left to judge if the decision was correct.

## **Guidelines for the Commentary (1,000-1,500 words)**

The commentary is your evaluation of the case based on your reading and research. You should explain why your characters take their positions on the issue and why they argue the way they do. You can bring in facts or examples from real-life cases and refer to the experts who represent each side. And you can refer to important concepts taken from course lectures and readings. Cite your sources with footnotes or end notes and include a bibliography.

## **Research**

Your case will be no better than the research on which it is based. You should be as fully informed as possible about the issue. The University library carries a number of excellent journals and magazines on the environment, not to mention the fine book collection. Also, the Internet is a great source for special interest groups or organizations and governmental agencies that advocate one position or another or who provide facts. Take full advantage of it.

## **Examples of case studies with commentaries**

The course text (Gudorf and Huchingson) consists almost entirely of case studies written with these guidelines in mind. Use them as your models.

Review the [How to submit a Turnitin Assignment](#) page for submission information on this assignment.

## Grading

Percentage grades for course determined by the points earned divided by 520.

Course Grades Distribution Table

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Points Available
Quizzes (lowest quiz grade will be dropped)	7	20	120
Midterm Exam	1	100	100
Final Exam	1	100	100
Case Study with Commentary	1	150	100
Interview with Religious Figure	1	100	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>520</b>

Letter Grade Distribution Table

Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%
A	93 - 100	B	83 - 85	C	70 - 75
A-	90 - 92	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	86 - 89	C+	76 - 79	F	59 or less