**GEOG 4390: Seminar in Rural Geography**  
*(Seminar in Rural Human-Environment Relationships)*  
**Instructor:** Dr. Hannah Harrison  
**Meets:** Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:30pm – 2:20pm  
**Room:** Online (Teams)  
**Email:** hharr@uoguelph.ca

### Course Description

This course surveys themes and issues in human ecology with a focus on human-environment relationships and interactions. Specific attention is given to the contemporary social and ecological challenges facing rural systems in Canada and other developed and developing economies. Themes include human-environmental relationships and interactions, resilience and adaptation, social and environmental justice, and rural-urban / local-global linkages, livelihoods, climate and the Anthropocene, and more. At the core of this course is the student’s personal development in understanding their own role and place within social-ecological systems, and developing their ability to critically evaluate the myriad of ways in which human-environmental interactions take place. Our weekly meetings will also attend to the core ecological and social science concepts, frameworks, and theories that comprise the discipline of human ecology. The goal is not to memorize these definitions and frameworks, but to get a critical handle on what it means to talk about human relationships with their environments, as well as to develop a working knowledge of the root causes of contemporary problems related to sustainable social-ecological systems. That is, the student will learn how to ground their thinking about environmental problems in the best available science for decision-making and planning. Appropriate to the subject matter at hand, the course draws on material from the natural and social sciences as well as the liberal and fine arts.

### Anticipated Learning Outcomes

1. Become familiar with different ontological and epistemological ways of understanding and exploring human-environment interactions, including Indigenous perspectives  
2. Identify and clarify one’s own positionality and values in relation to the environment, including the student’s own notion of a land ethic  
3. Follow societal debates about the values, interests and controversies involved in human-environmental relationships/interactions, particularly within rural contexts  
4. Be able to identify major challenges of rural living and livelihoods  
5. Be familiar with major concepts and topics in human ecology, including: human populations and living spaces; social-ecological systems; the Anthropocene; perceptions of nature; sustainability resilience and vulnerability; social and ecological justice; food security, sovereignty, and production;

### Course Materials

Books (required): NONE
Course Topics and Schedule (subject to change):

Wk1: Getting started: personal introductions; class aims and objectives; preparing to think from multiple perspectives

Wk2: Introduction to human ecology, and human-environmental relationships

Wk3: Social ecological systems and systems thinking

Wk4: Rural contexts, and rural-urban dynamics

Wk5: Resilience and Adaptation

Wk6: Food

Wk7: Water

Wk8: Biodiversity & Restoration

Wk9: Climate and the Anthropocene

WK10: Natural Resource Conflict

Wk11: Policy, Regulation, and Relationships

Wk12: Catching up

Wk13: Finals Week

Course Assignments

Land ethic short essay [5%]: You are to write a short essay that reflects on the land ethics readings. What is compelling (or not) about this perspective on nature, from your perspective? Critically evaluate it in terms of rights, well-being, equity, and considering the position of the author. There’s no right or wrong answers here, just evidence that you’re thinking carefully and critically about this. Expected length: 300-500 words

Personal Land Ethic/Environmental Relationship statement [10%]: You are to consider and write a personal statement that outlines and describes your own interpretation and connection to the environment – a land ethic of your own. This can include aspects of your habits around where and how you live, including eating, energy consumption, transportation, recreation, material consumption, interactions with the environment (including other people), etc. There are no right or wrong answers, but I expect evidence that you have familiarize yourself with the basic concepts of human-environmental relationships presented thus far in the course. Expected length: 600-800 words.

Mini-lecture [10%]: You and a partner will select one concept from the course textbook and prepare a mini-lecture (15-20 minutes max) on an case study related to that concept. You may use PowerPoint or other visual aids, but will be assessed based on appropriateness of the case study selected, presentation quality, equitable division of labor between both presentation partners, and preparedness. You are encouraged to be creative in your
presentation, but are reminded to prioritize effectiveness in communicating your main points.

**Midterm [20%]: Systems Diagram**
You will select a system or case study that includes the following actors: humans, non-human life (inclusive of plants and animals), and the physical environment. Research that system or case study and design a systems diagram that involves 7-10 of those “actors” and shows the relationships between them. Consider relationships around food and water consumption, energy usage and production, services provided, relationships related to well-being. Write a 500-1000 word synopsis describing the case study and the relationships that you’ve created in your diagram. Include in your discussion your thoughts about the ethics in action, the sustainability of the system, and any suggested changes you would make to improve sustainability within it.

**Annotated Bibliography [15%]:** You are to select a topic related to the human ecology and human-environment interaction concepts discussed in this class and in the textbook, then select and read between 12-15 peer-reviewed articles on that topic and compose an annotated bibliography from your selected readings.

**Final [25%]: Case Study “Unessay”**
For this “UnEssay” assignment, you must produce some information material, be it a factsheet, short video, podcast episode, artistic endeavor, Buzzfeed-style listicle, or some other creative product, building on the topic that you explore in your annotated bibliography and drawing from your personal land ethic statement. The goal is to fully explore some case study or issue related to human-environmental relationships.

**Participation [15%]:** You are expected to participate in conversations in class and/or on the discussion board. Participation can take multiple forms—in the classroom, via the periodic surveys I send out, and in the online discussions. When posting online, you will pose at least one question or comment regarding the material and respond to at least one posted by your fellow classmates. These can be new threads or in response to existing threads. This will give you the opportunity to think critically about the class discussions and material and provide your perspective in a low-pressure environment.

**General Policy on Late Assignments / Make-up Tests**

**Note: Due to the conditions we are all coping with during the COVID19 pandemic, there will be no firm due dates for assignments during the course. Due dates listed on the syllabus should be considered goal dates for submission. The only firm due date is the end of the course. By then, all assignments must be uploaded to the Courselink dropbox no later than 4pm on the final day of class.**

That said, I strongly recommend you attempt to follow the timeline of the course in order to not bog yourself down with work at the end of the semester. Begin your writing assignments early so that you have plenty of time to organize your submissions to the
Courselink dropbox. That said, when you find yourself unable to meet the expectations of the course because of illness or compassionate reasons, please inform the course instructor and the teaching assistant by way of email or in person with as much notice as possible prior to the end of the course. I am only able to make accommodations if I am aware of your situation, so please keep the lines of communication open as early and often as possible.

**Academic Integrity Statement**

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

For the purposes of this class, plagiarism is defined as the theft of the intellectual creation of another person without proper attribution. It is the use of someone else's words or ideas or data without proper documentation or acknowledgment. Quotations must be clearly marked, and sources of information, ideas, or opinions of others must be clearly indicated in all written work. This applies to paraphrased ideas as well as to direct quotations. A student must acknowledge and fairly recognize any contributions made to their personal research and scholarly work by others, including other students.

- Any direct copy of text, beyond 4-6 consecutive words, is considered plagiarism
- Uncited use of photos or drawings or other visual materials is considered plagiarism
- Presenting an idea, concept, or theory as your own, even if in your own words, when it clearly was pulled from someone else's work, is also plagiarism.

To combat plagiarism it is best to practice “generous scholarship”, which seeks to err on the side of caution in giving people credit for their work. Your work is stronger, not weaker, if it is heavily cited.

There are many resources on campus to assist you with proper citation and paraphrasing. Please see the instructor for help with these. These include the software TurnItIn, which we will not use for final assignments, but you are free to use in order to check your work.

When in doubt about a citation requirement or your approach to paraphrasing, ask your librarian or your course instructor or your academic supervisor for assistance.

Before you submit any written work, review it against the following checklist:
☒ I have acknowledged the use of all ideas with accurate citations.
☒ I have used the words of another author, instructor, information source, etc., and I have properly acknowledged this and used proper citation.
☒ In paraphrasing the work of others, I have put the idea into my own words and did not just change some words or rearrange the sentence structure.
☒ I have checked my work against my notes to be sure that I have correctly referenced all quotes or ideas.
☒ When using direct quotations I have used quotation marks (or other means to clearly identify the quoted text) and provided full citations.
☒ Apart from material that is a direct quotation, everything else in the work is presented in my own words.
☒ When paraphrasing the work of others I have acknowledged the source or the central idea.
☒ I have checked all citations for accuracy (e.g. page numbers, journal volume, dates, web page addresses).
☒ I have used a recognized reference style (i.e. APA, MLA, Chicago etc.) consistently throughout my work.
☒ My list of references/ bibliography includes all of the sources used to complete the work.
☒ I have accurately and completely described any data or evidence I have collected or used.
☒ I fully understand all of the content (e.g., terms, concepts, theories, data, equations, ideas) of the work that I am submitting.
☒ The content of the work has not been shared with another student, unless permitted by the instructor.
☒ The content of the work reflects wholly my own intellectual contribution or analysis and not that of another student(s), unless the instructor approved the submission of group or collaborative work.
☒ If another person proofread my work it was for the sole purpose of indicating areas of concern, which I then corrected myself.
☒ This work has not been submitted, whole or in part, for credit in another course or at another institution, without the permission of the current course instructor(s).

**Student Accessibility Services**

The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible. For more information, contact SAS at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or emailcsd@uoguelph.ca or see the [website](#).