

School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability
Faculty of Environment
University of Waterloo

ERS 215: Introduction to Environmental Assessment Winter 2021

Instructor:

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Teaching Assistants:

See the online course site for TA contact details.

Office Hours: Due to COVID-19, office hours will be by appointment rather than scheduled. Please contact me or the TA by email with concerns. Weekly drop-in hours will be scheduled based on a student survey.

Description

This course is an introduction to processes and techniques for incorporating environmental considerations in planning and evaluating proposals for future undertakings that may have significant social and ecological effects. The course provides an overview of methodologies for, and controversies surrounding, the design and conduct of environmental impact studies, and the testing of reported findings. The main focus is on the purposes and design of impact assessment processes, with particular reference to the Canadian federal and Ontario provincial environmental assessment systems, and the evolution of environmental assessments toward a sustainability-oriented framework. Further, students will get the opportunity to develop their skills on how to write a briefing note to a government decision maker. This assignment will develop the skills to concisely and effectively convey key issues surrounding impact assessment in Canada. You will develop an in-depth understanding of key principles and priorities of a well-done impact assessment. This knowledge will be transferable to any impact assessment act. In this course we will focus on IAA 2019, but may also refer to the CEAA 2012 as many of the challenges and shortcomings of CEAA 2012 are still relevant with the new IA Act.

Approach

The course will make use of asynchronous content modules, assigned readings, quizzes, and assignments. Content Modules will provide an overview of key topics and also to highlight important themes. Key topics and themes will be elaborated on through videos and attention to case studies. Assigned readings are critical for providing additional depth and breadth. Quizzes and assignments provide an opportunity for integrating key topics and themes, as well as linking them with the broader scholarly literature on environmental assessment. From this course you will develop a key understanding of what an EA should be and, therefore, you can apply this knowledge and understanding to any assessment act in general.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

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

- **define** the aims and objectives of environmental/impact assessments, as well as key terms and concepts in EA/IA.
- **identify** the roles and relevance of EA/IA as a potential venue that can contribute to sustainability.
- **describe** the different steps and components of an EA/IA process in Canada.
- **apply** EA/IA principles for best practices to case studies and critically analyze the strengths and weaknesses of environmental assessment.
- **identify** the important relationship between EA/IAs and other environmental planning and management instruments (i.e., SEA, CEA, SA); and
- **develop** the skills to write a briefing note to a government minister, an essential component of the course. Students will develop the skills to quickly (concisely) and effectively convey the key issues surrounding the federal IAA to a government discussion maker. Therefore, all students must complete the briefing note assignment.

Course Technologies

We will use LEARN and Contensis Course Management System (CMS) in this course. The link to CMS will be provided on the LEARN platform. On LEARN you will also have access to quizzes and Dropbox for assignment submissions. On CMS, you will have access to the course contact information, course outline, assignment instructions and course content in module format.

Course Schedule

Week Of	Module Topic (on CMS)	Assessment
Jan 11, 2021	Module 1: Introduction to Environmental Impact Assessment	
Jan 18, 2021	Module 2: History of Environmental Impact Assessment	Review Quiz 1
Jan 25, 2021	Module 3: Introduction to Systems Thinking and Environmental Impact Assessment	
Feb 1, 2021	Module 4: Screening Procedures	Review Quiz 2
Feb 8, 2021	Module 5: Scoping Procedures	
Feb 15, 2021	READING WEEK	
Feb 22, 2021	Module 6: Impact Prediction and Evaluation	Review Quiz 3
Mar 1, 2021	Module 7: Determining Impact Significance	
Mar 8, 2021	Module 8: Public Participation and Indigenous Issues	Review Quiz 4
Mar 15, 2021	Module 9: EA Follow-up and Monitoring	Briefing Note
Mar 22, 2021	Module 10: Cumulative Effects Assessment	Review Quiz 5
Mar 29, 2021	Module 11: Real World EA Application	
Apr 5, 2021	Modules 12 & 13: Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Assessment and What is Next for Canadian Environmental Assessment	Review Quiz 6

Required Readings

Noble, Bram F. (2020). **Introduction to Environmental Impact Assessment: A Guide to Principles and Practice**, 4th Edition. Oxford University Press Canada, 2021, 9780199028894 (PB)

Students are required to purchase a hard copy of the course textbook (available through WStore). Additional required readings will be posted to the course website and will be available through Library Course Reserves, which is available through LEARN.

Course Grading

The instructor determines the content and establishes the grading rules for all assignments and quizzes. The teaching assistants will assist the instructor with grading course work.

The following table represents the grade breakdown of this course.

Activities/Assignments/Tests	Due Date	Weight
Review Quizzes (6 total, only 5 count toward final grade @10% each)	Friday of every other week starting Jan 22, and ending Apr 9, 2021 through LEARN Quiz	50%
Briefing Note	Mar 19, 2021 at 11:55pm through LEARN Dropbox	25%
Final Exam	TBD	25%

Review Quizzes – 50% of final grade

Review quizzes are will be available on LEARN on a bi-weekly basis (6 in total – but only the best 5 will be count toward the final grade). The review quizzes will cover the module content for two weeks (e.g., Review Quiz 1 will cover material from Modules 1 and 2). Questions in the review quizzes will include a variety of multiple choice, short answer, and long (paragraph) answer, and contain select review questions that are presented at the end of each weekly module. Students will have a two-week window to attempt the module review quiz, only one attempt will be allowed per quiz, and time limit (2 hour) will not be enforced. **These quizzes are to be done independently.** While the review question quizzes are not enforced as closed book, it is highly recommended that students use these as an opportunity to test their own knowledge without extensive use of external sources.

Briefing Note – 25% of final grade

This assignment is an essential course component. Students will write a briefing note to the Environment Minister regarding improvements to the current federal EA process. The briefing note will be addressed to the Cabinet Minister (Minister of Environment and Climate Change) and contain at least 3 main points that should be addressed during a possible review of the current environmental assessment. Antiplagiarism software (e.g., Turnitin) will be applied.

Final Exam – 25% of final grade

The final exam will assess student learning and understanding through questions that focus on synthesis, evaluation, and analysis. The exam will consist of short answer and long answer questions that will require students to make connections between the various content learned in the course. These may include scenario-based and problem-solving based questions that the students will have encountered throughout the modules as well as through the module review quiz questions. Final exams will be submitted through the LEARN Dropbox and will be subject to antiplagiarism (e.g., Turnitin software). The final exam will be scheduled by the registrar's office. Due to the online nature of the course, students will have a 24-hour period to complete the exam.

Late Submissions:

Review Quizzes: Each quiz will continue to be available one week after the due date. This additional week is a built-in flexibility for students who require that additional week. Quiz submissions will not be accepted once the availability of the quiz has ended.

Briefing Note: A 10% penalty will be applied to assignments that are submitted up to one week after the due date. Submissions will not be accepted beyond one week after the due date.

Final Exam: Late submissions will not be accepted.

For extenuating circumstances, students are required to inform the instructor ahead of time and provide supporting documentation (e.g., Verification of Illness form).

Communication with Instructors and TAs

Students' UW email accounts will be used for all communication. Students are responsible to check their UW email and LEARN accounts regularly. All course announcements will be posted to LEARN. An effort will be made by the TAs and the Instructor to deal with email requests, within two business days of receipt (48 hours). The instructor does not respond to emails outside of regular working hours (M-F ~8:30 AM- 5:00 PM). If you require a timelier response, post your question to the LEARN discussion board. The courses LEAD TA will be monitoring the discussion board daily. Further, other students in the course might respond quicker. All emails and communications with the TAs and course instructor must be respectful and professional. Any unprofessional and disrespectful emails will be reported.

Please note it is your responsibility to ensure that your computer is up to date and compatible.

IMPORTANT: Technical Support

If you are unable to access Waterloo LEARN or course content you must contact Technical Support at learnhelp@uwaterloo.ca. **Include your full name, WatIAM user ID, student number, and the course name and number.** Technical support is available during regular business hours, Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 4:30 PM (Eastern Time). Further, trouble shooting for LEARN can be

found here: <https://uwaterloo.ca/learn-help/students>. Often, if you log out of LEARN and exit your web browser and then log back in, you can access LEARN again. Remember that your textbook has a lot of course material in it – so you can access a lot of course content without LEARN, should you need to study etc. Ultimately, if access issues are not due to any University of Waterloo changes/updates, it is your responsibility to fix the problem.

Course and University Policies

Academic integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.]

Students may be required to attest to academic integrity for the course through the submission of an Academic Integrity Honour Statement at the beginning of the term.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Turnitin.com: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are

concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit alternate assignment.

To Avoid Plagiarism: The use of other people's work *must* be properly acknowledged and referenced in all written material such as take-home examinations, essays, research papers, laboratory reports, work-term reports, design projects, statistical data, computer programs and research results. The properly acknowledged use of sources is an accepted and important part of scholarship. Use of such material without complete and unambiguous acknowledgement, however, is an offence under Policy 71.

TIPS for quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing (source: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>)

These three ways of incorporating other writers' work into your own writing differ according to the closeness of your writing to the source writing.

- **Quotations** must be identical to the original, using a narrow segment of the source. They must match the source document word for word and must be attributed to the original author with page number.
- **Paraphrasing** involves putting a passage from source material into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage, taking a somewhat broader segment of the source and condensing it slightly.
- **Summarizing** involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s). Once again, it is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to the original source. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material.