

University of Waterloo
School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability
ERS 275: Environment and Popular Culture (Film) (Winter 2021)

1. INFORMATION

Instructor:	Shefaza Esmail [s23esmai@uwaterloo.ca]
Class Time:	Tuesday 11:30am – 12:50pm (Virtual Classroom, recorded)
Class Q&A:	Thursday 9:00am – 10:20am (Virtual Classroom, may be recorded)
Office Hours:	Available upon request. Email instructor or TAs as required.
LEARN	Primary platform for course delivery - frequent class announcements; assignments submitted to LEARN Dropbox; discussion posts.
TA Contacts:	TBD

2. TEACHING APPROACH:

The SERS approach is one of ‘solutions-based education’. At the end of this course, we’d like you to have a broad understanding of the contemporary environmental issues and the role that film may play in grappling with, or possibly even helping to resolve, those issues. The weekly environmental themes serve as broad hooks for us to explore complex, multidisciplinary issues.

“Why film”? Environmental problems are a prominent aspect of daily life, regardless of discipline. Visual media are also a significant part of popular culture right now worldwide, and both reflect and, to some extent, shape discussions of the day. The approach in this class is to examine these media with some rigor and develop skills to critically “consume” from them. In our increasingly visual and online culture, the knowledge and skills you develop in this course can be applied across many different future contexts, e.g., roles in science communications, art, culture and environment, advocacy and multi-media engagement.

This course is based on a modified ‘flipped classroom’. We expect that you will have already read the foundation materials (e.g., chapters or articles) and watched the relevant film **before** the class meetings. By completing the foundational reading before class, it frees us to use the classroom time to bring in experts in the field and expand upon the readings and films, try new activities, debate, apply conceptual knowledge to case studies, ask questions, and engage in discussion. This flipped classroom approach is hugely beneficial for your experiential learning and knowledge retention and, it is a lot more fun to teach.

The class time on Tuesday will be dedicated to bringing in experts in the field to speak to the weekly theme and their own experiences and expertise in working on projects that relate to the weekly theme. There will not be conventional lectures in this course. You must attend class to benefit from the speakers’ expertise and engage in them in discussion. The class time on Thursday will be dedicated to expanding on the readings and the films, trying new activities, looking at case studies, and for general Q&A (which may not be recorded). You are welcome to watch the recorded synchronous classes in your own time if you are unable to make it.

3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

There are no prerequisites for ERS 275. The course has been designed to be both highly accessible and appeal to students who range from science 'experts', to environmental 'activists' to the 'just curious' crowd. This accessibility was pedagogically intentional: we want the greatest number of disciplines, perspectives, opinions and lived experiences brought to the classroom discussion rather than a homogeneous space of "just environmentalists".

The course will encourage questions, such as: How do you assess the truth of what you are being told in non-fictional documentaries and fictional "story" films relating to the environment? How do you identify biases and where do you go to get an "objective" view of what you have watched? And, for some of us, how do you meaningfully contribute to this vehicle for advancing the discussion on environmental issues? Where are the opportunities and how do you prepare to jump on them?

Regardless of where you are starting from, upon completion of the course requirements, you should be able to:

- Critically examine assumptions that have been part of your existing knowledge base.
- Recognize the underlying complexities associated with human development and environmental sustainability and communicate the accompanying emotions.
- Understand and explain the roles of, and challenges associated with, contemporary film in defining, analyzing, and resolving environmental issues.
- Critically analyze and evaluate both fictional and non-fiction films' environmental claims and proposed solutions from different disciplinary perspectives.

4. COURSE STRUCTURE

The course is designed around environmental themes. Films and readings have been selected that address these themes. The number of weeks dedicated to each theme will vary. The general structure of the course requires you to read the assigned readings and watch the assigned film before the synchronous class sessions, which will be dedicated to creating meaningful discussion on the films and readings. There will be two 1.5-hour synchronous sessions each week. One session will be dedicated to discussing the reading and the second session will be dedicated to discussing the film. The only exception to the rule will be when guest speakers (experts in the field) join the class to chat about a particular environmental theme.

The proposed schedule for the course is as follows. Some of the items on this schedule may be subject to change but will be confirmed by the first day of class in the Winter 2021 term.

5. COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	CONTENT FILMS	READINGS	SPEAKERS (TBD)
Week 1 (Jan 11- Jan 15)	Course Intro and Admin details Films: 1) 5 min National Geographic video 2) Human Psychology and Environment	A reading on social interaction and online biases Ritter (2012)	Course Instructor
Week 2 (Jan 18- Jan 22)	FOUNDATION: Global scale of change Film: ANTHROPOCENE: The Human Epoch	Lewis and Maslin (2015) Koger and Du Nann Winter (2010) Ingram (2014)	Steve Quilley (ERS Professor)
Week 3 (Jan 25- Jan 29)	FOUNDATION: Local scale of change Films: The Biggest Little Farm	Moore (2016) Hay (2019)	Jennifer Forde (Farmer's Markets) Buchi Onakufe (Organic Farming)
Week 4 (Feb 1- Feb 5)	FOUNDATION: Implications of change at every level Film: Soylent Green (1973) The Ceremony (Special Screening)	Editorial Essay (2018) Hughes (2013)	Tania Da Silva Becca Redden (The Ceremony Filmmakers) Panelists: Francesca Cardwell (Health Geographer) Wanjiku Chiuri (Gender and Environment)
Week 5 (Feb 8- Feb 12)	FOUNDATION: Humans are fallible Film: I Heart Huckabees	Beattie, Sale & McGuire (2011) Gifford (2011) Vess & Arndt (2008)	Igor Grossman (Psychology Professor)
Feb 13 - 21			
Week 6 (Feb 22- Feb 26)	ISSUES: Overconsumption Films: 1) The Stories of Stuff (2007) 2) The True Cost	McNaughtan (2012)	Maddie Resmer (Indigenous business owner)

Week 7 (Mar 1- Mar 5)	ISSUES: Extraction Film: Avatar (2009) The Carbon Rush	Brown and Ng (2012) Taylor, Bron (ed). (2013) Ivakhiv (2014)	Amy Miller (Canadian Filmmaker)
Week 8 (Mar 8- Mar 12)	ISSUES: Extinction (biodiversity and conservation) Films: 1) Jane (2017) 2) The Lorax (1972 version; <i>hope</i>)	Starosielski (2011)	
Week 9 (Mar 15- Mar 19)	ISSUES: Pollution (all) Film:	Weik von Mossner (2014) *CLASS WILL BE ON THURSDAY THIS WEEK	Ian Rowlands
Week 10 (Mar 22- Mar 26)	HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD [1/3]: Film: TBD	Seelig (2019) Shapiro and Park (2018)	Ian Rowlands
Week 11 (Mar 29- Apr 2)	HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD [2/3]: Film: A Force More Powerful (Episode 1 or Episode 2)	https://www.non-violent-conflict.org/force-powerful-english/ Short Films Due	Environment Alumni: Eryn Stewart (Indigenous Clean Energy) Larissa Jerome (Community- Supported Agriculture)
Week 12 (Apr 5 – Apr 9)	HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD [3/3]: Films uploaded by students	Film Festival! Showcase of your videos	

6. COURSE ASSESSMENTS

Individual Reflections (30%)

Writing prompts will be prescribed along with each weekly film assigned for this course. Students use the writing prompts to response guides for each individual reflection assignment. Student are expected to write coherently and concisely their cognitive and emotional reactions to each film as well provide a brief critique of the film's approach to the environmental topic covered. **The reflections should not exceed one page single-spaced.**

The 30% weight is distributed evenly among the ten reflection assignments; each reflection is weighted at 3% of the final grade and is due at the end of each week on Friday by 11:30pm through the LEARN Dropbox.

Discussion Post Debates (20%)

Students will be provided 5 themed discussion forums on LEARN Discussion page along with questions to prompt and guide the discussion for each theme. Students are expected to contribute at least 4 positive and thoughtful comments in each themed discussion. The themed discussions will span, on average, two weeks of course content. Students are expected to demonstrate professionalism and respect for fellow classmates.

The 20% weight is distributed evenly among the five discussion themes; each themed discussion participation is weighted at 4% (therefore, each positive and thoughtful comment is weighted at 1%) of the final grade. The **themed discussion posts will be available for a limited time of 3 weeks** to encourage students to keep up with the weekly content.

Film-making Project (50%)

The film-making project is a Knowledge Mobilization assignment and will be a group effort. The aim of the film-making project is for the students to choose one environmental theme and convey a message related to that theme **in less than 3 minutes!** Another important aim of the project is to encourage the development of teamwork skills in a remote learning environment. Students will be assigned to groups before the Winter Reading Week and be given opportunities to interact in their groups and will submit the following assignments along scaffolded deadlines that will be outlined on the first day of class:

- Team Charter – Beginning of Project (5%)
- Film Plan (5%)
- Final Film Product (30%)
- Comments– 5 positive and thoughtful comments on separate videos (5%)
- Team Charter – After Project (5%)

Late Penalties

Individual Reflections: Students have 5 days past the assignment regular due date to submit assignments. Assignments submitted after the 5-day grace period will be subject to a 10% late penalty total. Assignments will not be accepted past 2 weeks after the assignment due date.

Discussion Posts: Discussion posts will be available for a limited time. Students have a time window within which to add their responses.

Film-making Project: Due to the nature of the film showcasing, students will have a 2-day grace period following the due date to submit the final project. Assignments will not be accepted beyond the 2-day grace period.

7. REQUIRED READINGS (available through LEARN)

Week 1

1. Ritter, Barbara A. (2012) Chapter 3 Say that to my Face: Factors Inherent to the Online Environment that Increase the Likelihood of Harassing and Prejudicial Behavior. In L.A. Wankel & C. Wankel (Eds.), *Misbehavior Online in Higher Education*. [https://www-emerald-ISSN: 2044-9968/doi:10.1108/S2044-9968\(2012\)0000005005](https://www-emerald-ISSN: 2044-9968/doi:10.1108/S2044-9968(2012)0000005005)

Week 2

2. Ingram, David in: Weik von Mossner, A. Editor (2014). Chapter 1: Emotion and Affect in Eco-films: cognitive and Phenomenological Approaches. *Moving Environments: affect, emotion, ecology and film*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Pg: 23-39. <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/upress/2014-12-07/1/9781771120036>
3. Koger, Susan M. and Deborah Du Nann Winter (2010) Chapter 2: The Nature of Western Thought. *The Psychology of Environmental Problems*, 3rd Edition. Taylor and Francis Group, New York, NY. Pg: 31-62.
4. Lewis, S., Maslin, M. Defining the Anthropocene. *Nature* 519, 171–180 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14258>

Week 3

5. Hay, Elspeth. (2020). What if we're thinking about agriculture all wrong? <https://heated.medium.com/what-if-were-thinking-about-agriculture-all-wrong-dc8cd1df32c8>
6. Moore, Ellen Elizabeth (2016) Green Screen or Smokescreen? Hollywood's Messages about Nature and the Environment, *Environmental Communication*. 10(5): 539-555, DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2015.1014391

Week 4

7. Editorial Essay (2018). Environmental Themes in Popular Narratives. *Environmental Communication*. 12 (1):1-6.
8. Hughes, Rowland (2013). The Ends of the Earth: Nature, Narrative, and Identity in Dystopian Film. *Critical Survey*. 25(2): 22-39

Week 5

9. Beattie, Geoffrey, Laura Sale and Laura McGuire (2011). An inconvenient truth? Can a film really affect psychological mood and our explicit attitudes towards climate change? *Semiotica*. 187(1/4): 105-125.
10. Gifford R (2011) The Dragons of Inaction: Psychological barriers that limit climate change mitigation and adaptation. *American Psychologist*, 66(4): 290.

11. Vess M, Arndt J (2008) The nature of death and the death of nature: The impact of mortality salience on environmental concern. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42: 1376–1380. doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2008.04.007.

Week 6 [May need a different one]

12. McNaughtan, Hugh (2012). Distinctive consumption and popular anti-consumerism: the case of Wall-E. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*. 26(5): 793-766.

Week 7

13. Brown, William and Jenna Ng (2012). Avatar: An Introduction. *Animation: an interdisciplinary journal*. 7(3):221-225.
14. Ivakhiv, Adrian in: Weik von Mossner, A. Editor (2014). Chapter 8: What Can a Film Do? Assessing Avatar's Global Affects. *Moving Environments: affect, emotion, ecology and film*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Pg: 159-178. <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/upress/2014-12-07/1/9781771120036>
15. Taylor, Bron (ed). (2013) Selected chapters in *Avatar and Nature Spirituality*. **Prologue:** Avatar as Rorschach; **Introduction:** The Religion and Politics of Avatar; **Epilogue:** Truth and Fiction in Avatar's Cosmogony and Nature Religion. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Week 8

16. Starosielski, Nicole (2011). 'Movement that are drawn': A history of environmental animation from The Lorax to Fern Gully to Avatar. *International Communication Gazette*. 73(1-2):145-163

Week 9

17. Weik von Mossner, A. (2014a). Melodrama, Emotion, and Environmental Advocacy: A Cognitive Approach to Erin Brockovich. *Anglia*, 132(2), pp. 292-309. Retrieved 6 Feb. 2020, from doi:10.1515/ang-2014-0031

Week 10

18. Seelig, Michelle I. (2019). Popularizing the environment in modern media. *The Communication Review*. 22 (1): 45-83.
19. Shapiro, Matthew A. and Han Woo Park (2018). Climate Change and YouTube: Deliberation Potential in Post-video Discussions. *Environmental Communication*. 12(1):115-131.

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.