

## **Environment and Story (ENST10001)**

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Consultation by appointment anytime on Mondays and Tuesdays only.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This subject introduces students to the skills of interdisciplinary thinking, writing and reading, and brings together knowledge and perspectives from different disciplines for discussing complex social and environmental challenges. Drawing from disciplines such as literature, cultural studies, media studies, philosophy and environmental studies, the relationship between humans and the natural environment will be explored. The subject will consider the role of stories as a cultural medium for storing and communicating the knowledge and values of a society. We will raise questions such as: What is a natural environment or “nature”? How do humans relate to nature? How do we socially and ethically position animals, plants or landforms? How is nature represented in our major stories and cultural narratives? Is society listening to the stories of the land? This subject engages with a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarship to enable students to theorise the interaction of different knowledge systems in relation to land management.

## **WEEKLY TOPIC LIST**

For the 2018 delivery of this unit, the semester is divided into three thematic clusters, thereby shifting the terrain of “Environment and Story” from the local, through to the regional and global perspectives. Doing so situates indigenous and non-indigenous Australian story(telling) in its wider context—geographically, ethically, economically, politically, ecologically and socially.

July 16

### **Pre-semester: Walking**

Before class begins you are asked to familiarize yourself with Billibellary’s Walk, a recent attempt to increase awareness of the Wurundjeri people’s connection to the lands and waters that comprise the University of Melbourne’s Parkville campus.

<b>Step One</b>	<b>Step Two</b>	<b>Step Three</b>
<a href="#">Watch this</a>	<a href="#">Download this</a>  or  Read Andrews et al (2017)	Take the self-guided tour around campus

## **Part A: Local**

July 23

### **Week 1: Air**

How do you understand and experience your environment? What *environments* do you inhabit? What types of frameworks and worldviews may people call upon to make sense of these relationships? This week we start posing such questions, by engaging several different types of “stories”. Martin Nakata opens up about the process of constructing a speech on (non-)indigenous ecological knowledge. Val Plumwood retells her experience of “being prey” to a crocodile in Kakadu. Whilst Taylor confesses to how he experienced his own ecological awakening.

<b>Required reading</b>	<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
Nakata (2010); Nakata (2007)	Plumwood (1996)	Taylor (2015)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to critically evaluate the role that story(telling) plays in our understanding of and relationship to “the environment”; and (2) to identify the ecological knowledge that each of us—as teachers and students—brings.

July 30

**Week 2: Water\*\***

The Gunditjmarra are known to have built sophisticated aquaculture systems along the lava flow and wetland areas of the Budj Bim area several thousand years ago. Through select readings and a guest lecture, we ask: In what ways does Gunditjmarra knowledge challenge contemporary scientific understandings of human history? And what are the prospects for a re-gathering of the Gunditjmarra knowledge, story and engineering practices?

<b>Required reading</b>	<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
Gib and the people of Gunditjmarra (2010)	McNiven and Bell (2010)	Richards (2011)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to gain an understanding of the ways of life of the Gunditjmarra people, with particular reference to their system of aquaculture; and (2) to question the way in which contemporary understandings of science and technology are constructed.

\*\* Invited lecture: Damein Bell (CEO, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation) [[Read more](#)]

August 6

**Week 3: Country\*\***

There is a lawlessness of not respecting the rights of country—including land and waters—whom can *heal*. Which begs the question: can an ecological consciousness be brought to bear on issues such as health and reconciliation, which are often understood as ‘social’ issues?

<b>Required reading</b>	<b>Required reading</b>
Black (2016)	Arabena (2015)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to develop an understanding of human health in an ecological context, and the ecological dimension of reconciliation in Australia; and (2) to identify the role that Indigenous knowledge plays in responding to ecological realities.

\*\* Invited lecture: Lou Glover (Department of History, University of Wollongong)

August 13

**Week 4: Healing\*\***

Chinese medicine is brought and sold at Barkley Square, whilst its efficacy is debated by academics and practitioners around the world. But why is bush medicine almost invisible even in this country? This week we examine traditional aboriginal healing practice as past, present and future simultaneously.

<b>Required reading</b>	<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
Healy (2018)	Langton (2018a)	Arabena (2018)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to ground our otherwise abstract theorising in problems that actually arise, namely public health; and (2) to consider the importance of the creative arts in communicating Aboriginal knowledge.

\*\* Fieldtrip and curator's tour: Medical History Museum, The University of Melbourne [[Read more](#)]

### **Part B: Regional**

August 20

#### **Week 5: Touring\*\***

Tourism Australia statistics show that many overseas tourists, as well as Australians, are keen to learn more about Australia's first peoples. However, there are undoubtedly both benefits and costs to tourism for aboriginal peoples.

<b>Required reading</b>	<b>Required reading</b>
Langton (2018b)	Parks Australia (2011)

The learning objectives for this week are: to understand the structural capacities of market economies to respond to ecological realities; to understand the growing role of Indigenous land management within the Australian economy; and (2) to reflect upon the prospects of the current economic system to address ecological crises.

\*\* Invited lecture: Marcia Langton (Associate Provost, The University of Melbourne) [[Read more](#)]

August 27

#### **Week 6: Melanesia\*\***

Despite concerted attempts beginning in the 1970s, West Papua remains a province of Indonesia—the largest taxpayer, but also one of the poorest. For this reason, there are people, like the exiled Benny Wenda, who are still fighting for independence. What global flows are driving the independence movement of West Papua? How can, if at all, bounded states and borderless markets take into consideration the fate of the Earth and indigenous peoples? Are we—through our everyday practices—implicated in such injustices to distant strangers?

<b>Required reading</b>	<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
Taylor (2011)	Council on Ethics (2008)	Wenda (2017)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to contextualise the ecological crisis in relation to corporate interests; (2) to consider the strategies of indigenous peoples in cooperation and conflict elsewhere in the Pacific.

\*\* Invited lecture: Benny Wenda (Chairperson, The United Liberation Movement for West Papua)  
[\[Read more\]](#)

September 3  
**Week 7: Polynesia\*\***

The prospect of human and non-human extinction increasingly predominates academic discourse on the environment in the Humanities, and perhaps also the Sciences. This week Thom van Dooren will discuss his project “Extinction Stories: Inhabiting Landscapes of Loss”, which explores the ways in which the loss of species, and efforts to prevent these losses, shape the contours of local people’s lives and the landscapes they inhabit in Hawaii.

<b>Required text</b>	<b>Required text</b>
van Dooren and Rose (2016)	van Dooren (2015)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to contextualise the ecological crisis in relation to species loss and care, by way of human intervention; (2) to consider the role of story(telling) for indigenous peoples elsewhere in the Pacific.

\*\* Invited lecture: Thom van Dooren (Sydney Environment Institute, The University of Sydney)  
[\[Read more\]](#)

September 10  
**Week 8: Micronesia\*\***

Nuclear colonialism is not unique to Monte Bello, Emu Field and Maralinga. In the Marshall Islands too, the United States conducted more than five dozen nuclear weapons tests, many far more powerful than those inflicted by the British on aboriginal peoples, lands and waters. This week our guest lecturer Desmond Doulatram discusses grassroots and policy-oriented efforts to bring justice to the Marshallese, as well as its global significance.

<b>Required text</b>	<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
Jetnil-Kijiner (2018)	Mitchell (2017)	Smith-Norris (2011)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to contextualise the ecological crisis in relation to specific sites of nuclear colonialism, that demonstrate how past wrongs affect possible futures; and (2) to consider the strategies of indigenous peoples in cooperation and conflict elsewhere in the Pacific.

\*\* Invited lecture: Desmond Doulatram (Radiation Exposure Awareness Crusaders for Humanity—Marshall Islands) [[Read more](#)]

### **Part C: Planetary**

September 17

#### **Week 9: Activism**

Discussion of “the environment”, however broadly or narrowly it is construed, is seldom uplifting. No less in the face of a clash of worldviews, species loss and extinction, and climate change. As the semester draws to a close, we will be drawing together the various threads of the course, not to compare our notes of the despair but to locate and harness some resemblance of *hope*.

<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
Fourmile (2002)	Powless (2012)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to reflect upon the role that ecological processes and systems play in framing the interaction of different knowledge systems; and (2) to reflect upon the role of ecological knowledge within broader projects of social transformation.

September 24

#### **< MID-SEMESTER BREAK >**

October 1

#### **Week 10: Climate\*\***

“We need new ways of speaking about uncertain futures. The term “climate change” is often too vague and removed for the here and now of rising seas, changing temperatures and species devastation to sink in. Australians’ habitats—our homes and our cultures—are at risk. The changing climate will disproportionately affect Indigenous people, as well as affect them differently. Because land and sea are inextricably linked with Indigenous cultural identities, a changing climate threatens ceremony, hunting practices, sacred sites, bush tucker and bush medicine, which in turn affects law, home, health, education, livelihood and purpose. But there is a second sense in which Indigenous people are being removed from the language of “climate change.” Indigenous people feel a unique sense of responsibility to the land and to their children.”  
– Ellen van Neerven (2016)

<b>Required text</b>	<b>Option 1 of 2</b>	<b>Option 2 of 2</b>
van Neerven (2016)	Birch (2015)	van Neerven (2014, 67–123)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to consider how the creative arts (particularly literature) help us gain a better scholarly and personal understanding socio-ecological engagements; and (2) to contextualize (global) climatic change in (local) stories of—and from—place.

\*\* Invited lecture: Ellen van Neerven [[Read more](#)]

October 8

**Week 11: Extinction\*\***

“Around the swamp, the air was charged up like an electrified cat, always stifling and crowded. Oblivia dreamt the old woman was in the kitchen talking about her life, but her voice was jumping simultaneously between stories about times and places in the world that no longer existed. *All dead, just like me now. Extinct. Uninhabitable.* She was breathless with excitement. It was as though the old woman still wanted to breathe life into the stories of all those people in her life that she had seen escaping from their lost countries, taken to sea by a swan.” – Alexis Wright (2013, 74).

Required text	Option 1 of 2	Option 2 of 2
Wright (2013, 6–74)	White (2014)	Wright and Zable (2013)

The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to consider how the creative arts (particularly literature) help us gain a better scholarly and personal understanding socio-ecological engagements; and (2) to contextualize human and non-human extinction in stories of—and from—place.

\*\* Invited lecture: Alexis Wright, Boisbouvier Chair in Australian Literature, The University of Melbourne [[Read more](#)]

October 15

**Week 12: Worldviews**

There are systems of thought and systems of being and knowing. Ecological concerns draw into conflict and cooperation different systems of thought that reflect particular interests and values. We ask: What is the role of ecological critique within broader social analysis? What role does Indigenous knowledge play in the shaping of future ecological relations in Australia? And what ecological knowledge is useful for bringing together different knowledge sources?

Required text	Option 1 of 2	Option 2 of 2
Bradley and Johnson (2014)	Todd (2015)	Rockström et al (2009)

The learning objectives for this week are: The learning objectives for this week are: (1) to gain a working definition of various concepts for describing ecological crises and related social exploitation (e.g. the Anthropocene, anthropocentrism, domestication, oppression, domination, etc.); and (2) to understand the way in which using these concepts is itself a decision that reflects particular interests and values.

## TEXT LIST

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- . 2018. 'Healing: "I", Torres Strait Islander'. In *The Art of Healing: Australian Indigenous Bush Medicine*, edited by Jacqueline Healy, 27–29. Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne.
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- Mitchell, M. X. 2017. 'Offshoring American Environmental Law: Land, Culture, and Marshall Islanders' Struggles for Self-Determination During the 1970s'. *Environmental History* 22 (2): 209–34. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emw101>.
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- . 2016. 'The Country Is like a Body'. *Right Now*, 9.
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- Plumwood, Val. 1996. 'Being Prey'. *Terra Nova* 1 (3): 32–44.
- Powless, Ben. 2012. 'An Indigenous Movement to Confront Climate Change'. *Globalizations* 9 (3): 411–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2012.680736>.
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## ASSESSMENT TASKS

### Assessment Tasks 1 and 2: Tutorial Participation and “Dialogue”

Due: Assigned Week (from Week 2)

Task	Criteria	Grade
<p><b>You choose the topic. You get the class thinking about it.</b></p> <p><b>Step 1:</b> In tutorials in Week 1, you are to select a weekly topic that you are <b>passionate and/or interested</b> in.</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> In preparing for your assigned week, you <b>consider the commonalities and differences</b> between the set texts. Your task will be to <b>introduce something that you deem interesting and important</b> (i.e. an idea, text, opposing viewpoint, personal experience, news item, etc.) to illuminate your chosen topic.</p> <p><b>Step 3: “Just do it!”</b> Each student is allocated five (5) minutes (and no more than ten (10) minutes each) for this purpose at the beginning of the tutorial.</p> <p>Please note, you are not required to give a formal presentation or “speech”, although you may. You are encouraged to instead use role play, simulations, staged dialogues/interviews, personal narratives, and other interactive activities to illuminate your argument. You are thereby encouraged to approach this task as one of <b>experimentation and play</b>—take risks, and so long as preparation and team work are evident, you will be rewarded.</p>	<p>(1) <b>critically engaging</b> with the required text/s and ideas covered in lectures, as well as evidence of additional research;</p> <p>(2) the ability to <b>clearly and succinctly evaluate</b> the key themes and ideas being discussed; and</p> <p>(3) the ability to <b>respect and listen to others</b>, and to continually <b>interrogate oneself</b>.</p>	<p>10% (participation) + 20% (dialogue facilitation)</p>

**Assessment Task 3: 500-word “Reflective” Essay**

Due: Week 3 (online, by 11:59pm, Sunday, August 5)

Task	Criteria	Grade
<p><b>What role does “story” play in thinking about “the environment”?</b> Respond in relation to two or more scholars or texts. (Hint: start by looking at the Nakata readings from Week 1).</p> <p>This assessment is designed for you to begin to interrogate the ecological knowledge and system/s that your chosen scholars or texts possess.</p> <p><b>It might help for you to reflect upon the following sorts of sub-questions in devising your responses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- On what do your chosen scholars and texts <i>differ</i>? Or <i>agree</i>?</li><li>- <i>Where</i> do those <i>similarities</i> and <i>differences</i> come from? (i.e. a worldview, a theory, an academic discipline, a site of investigation, a geographical location, a language, etc.)</li><li>- Responding to the scholars and texts that you have chosen, what does “the environment” <i>look</i> and <i>feel</i> like, to you?</li></ul>	<p>(1) to clearly identify a working definition of “the environment”, and to clearly and succinctly express where that meaning derives from;</p> <p>(2) to point to similarities and differences between your sense of “the environment”, and the scholarly literature (e.g. the Nakata reading from Week 1—or any others you find in your research); and</p> <p>(3) to articulate the role of story(telling) in relating to the environment.</p>	20%

**Assessment Task 4: 2,000-word “Research” Essay\*\***

Due: Week 5 (in tutorial) and Week 12 (online, by 11:59pm, Sunday, October 15)

<b>Task</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<p><b>You pose the question. You deliver the answer.</b></p> <p><b>Step 1: Before consulting your lecturer, you are to choose and develop a topic</b> relevant to Environment and Story in the widest possible sense (e.g. cross-cultural issues for engaging Indigenous Environmental Philosophy). Bring a one-page, printed copy of an annotated bibliography for your chosen topic to the tutorial in Week 5.</p> <p><b>Step 2: Together in tutorials, in Weeks 5 and 6, we will refine your topics into precise questions</b> (e.g. Indigenous knowledge cannot be translated into Western knowledge-ways. Discuss.).</p> <p><b>Step 3: Submission.</b> Week 12. (online, by 11:59pm, Monday, October 15)</p>	<p>(1) to clearly identify a working definition of “the environment”, and to clearly and succinctly express where that meaning derives from in reference to at least ten (10) scholarly texts;</p> <p>(2) to critically evaluate similarities and differences between your sense of “the environment”, and the scholarly literature;</p> <p>(3) to articulate the value of story(telling) in relating to the environment; and</p> <p>(4) to connect all of the above with the scholarly literature.</p>	50%

**Sample questions:**

1. The CBD and Kakadu both constitute “the environment”. Discuss.
2. Aboriginal ecological knowledge cannot be “integrated” into Western Science. Discuss.
3. In what ways, if at all, does the notion of “wilderness” in Australia conflict with the acknowledgement of 65,000 years of human settlement, and aboriginal homelands?
4. Environmental justice is unattainable since the cause and effects of climate change are unevenly distributed across space and time. Discuss.
5. Under what circumstances is it morally justified to eat animals and plants that suffer?
6. You may devise your own question in consultation with your peers and the teaching staff in Weeks 3 and 4.