Indigenous Ecologies

**Professor:** Lee Bloch  
**Email:** lbloch@brandeis.edu

**Class Time:** M & W 5:00-6:20 PM  
**Office Hours:** 2:30-4:30 or by appt.

**Class Location:** Brown 115  
**Office Location:** Brown 327

---

**Course Description**

This course investigates (1) environmental justice from the perspective of settler colonialism and Indigenous self-determination struggles and (2) interdisciplinary questions about environmental science and the nature of nature from the perspective of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in place. In a moment in which toxic ecologies and anthropogenic climate shifts proliferate across the globe, how can we re-situate contemporary environmental anxieties within the historical context of extractive projects undertaken on stolen land (and how these projects disrupt place-based, multi-species relationships and ways of knowing)? As dominant narratives the nature of nature crumble and scholars across disciplines increasingly question these categories, how might Native American and Indigenous studies (NAIS) intervene in the theory and practice of living together in more than human worlds? When can Indigenous knowledges be integrated into dominant conservation efforts and scientific discourses, and when do they exceed these practices and present radical alternatives? Building on Indigenous critiques in the philosophy of science, this class will discuss Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to human and nonhuman others. We will situate these interdependencies within a historical context, attending to intersections with oral traditions, global political forces, anthropogenic climate change, and Indigenous sovereignties.

---

**Course Goals**
In this course, students will read, discuss, and analyze interdisciplinary scholarship that bridges issues in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Describe how environmental justice issues play out in relation to Indigenous sovereignty struggles in settler colonial context;
- Explain Indigenous critiques of the Anthropocene concept;
- Articulate how Indigenous knowledges relate to interdisciplinary conversations about conservation, living together in multispecies worlds, and moving beyond the nature/culture binary;
- Intelligently discuss the politics of knowledge within colonial nation-states, as well as research methodologies that center environmental science on Indigenous realities (i.e., Indigenous sciences).

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course. Students who have completed prior coursework in Native American and Indigenous studies, anthropology, sociology, critical race theory, gender and sexuality studies, environmental studies, or the philosophy of science will be particularly well positioned for this course.

Grading

Students will be graded on participation in class discussions and written assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post #1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post #2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post #3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final essay</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Essay Reflections</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A: The student consistently makes creative contributions to class discussions and moves the conversation forward in significant ways. The student draws connections course materials to extend key concepts. Engages with both the instructor and with fellow students.

B: The student consistently contributes to class discussion and demonstrates a solid understanding of course materials. The student thinks through the readings, other students’ comments, and one’s own points well. Engages with both the instructor and with fellow students.

C: The student sometimes participates in class discussion and understands the basic facts of the readings, but perhaps not the big picture.

D: The student only infrequently participates in class discussion or makes statements that are unrelated or do not advance the project of the course. Only has a partial understanding of the materials. Spotty attendance.

F: The student does not consistently come to class, does not participate in or disrupts class discussion, or misses the point of course materials.
Participation
Class time will privilege discussion, with some time devoted to lecture as needed. As such, students must come to class having completed the readings and be prepared to discuss them. Please print out articles and essays so that you may reference them in class.

Departing from a “banking” model of education in which knowledge is “deposited” in students’ brains and “withdrawn” in tests, the goal of these discussions will be to practice the tools of critical analysis. Students are expected to reflect upon, deepen, and identify tensions or limits of the frameworks and critiques developed in the readings.

Talking about how one fits in within systems of colonial domination may make some non-Native students feel uncomfortable. I encourage students to “lean in” to this discomfort as part of the learning process. At minimum, students are expected to work to understand the arguments presented through the course.

Writing Assignments
All alignments must be proofread. The final essay must be double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins and numerated pages.

Blog Posts
Students will write three short essays over the course of the semester in the form of blog posts. Posts should stay within a limit of 750 words, not including citations. These will focus on course readings.

Please note that there are five deadlines for blog posts over the course of the semester, but you only have to complete three. If you complete four posts, I will drop your lowest grade. However, I will not accept five posts.

In addition to writing blog posts, I expect students to read and comment on their peer’s posts.

Final Paper
The final paper will be between 8-10 double-spaced pages in length. This assignment will take a synthetic approach to the semester.

Alternative Creative Option
Students may opt to take a more creative approach to the final essay, such as making a comic, painting, photo essay, etc. Students electing this option must write a 3-4 page explanation of their project, including how it relates to course materials and themes. Students must get approval from the professor before taking this option.

Late Policy
Late assignments will be docked five points for each day they are late.

Post-Assignment Reflections
Within 36 hours of completing each essay, please submit a brief response to the following two questions: 1) What do you think you did well in this assignment? 2) What could you have done better if you had more time?

These will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. Reflections that I consider good faith efforts will pass. I will only read your response after I grade your assignment. The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on your own learning process and identify areas you might continue to think through in the future.

**Extra Credit**
I may give you two points extra credit for attending events on Indigenous issues or settler colonialism held at Brandeis or in Greater Boston. You will have to write a 1-2 paragraph response that both summarizes and responds to the event. I retain discretion to determine whether or not any event is eligible for extra credit, so please consult with me beforehand.

**Academic Integrity**
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

**Communications**
Updates regarding the class, including syllabus changes and snow days, will be communicated by email.

**Email Policy**
I will respond to reasonable email inquiries within a reasonable timeframe: usually within 24 hours. I expect your emails to be courteous and professional: it is good etiquette to include a salutation and signature and to make the subject line relevant to the content. Proofread all emails before sending. Although grammar and email etiquette standards are ultimately a means of reproducing social hierarchies, I promise that having these skills will make your life easier.

**Students with Disabilities**
I do my best to make the classroom accessible. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

**Trigger Warnings**
Some of the materials we cover may be emotionally difficult and could trigger past traumas. If you need to step outside during class, you may always do so without academic penalty. You do not need to discuss your reactions with me afterwards, but if you wish to, I welcome such conversations as an important part of the coursework.
Assigned Texts


Schedule of Readings

**Week 1: Course Introduction**

January 16:

- No readings

**PART I: COLONIAL ECOLOGIES**

**Week 2: Water is Life**

January 21 (no class)

January 22:


- Essays in *Cultural Anthropology*’s blog series, “Standing Rock, #NoDAPL, and Mni Wiconi”

January 23:


**Week 3: Rethinking the Anthropocene**

January 28:


January 30:

**Week 4: Laying Waste**

February 4:
- Voyles, Wastelanding, pages vii-86

February 6:
- Guest Speaker: Jennifer Weston

**Week 5: Laying Waste**

February 11:
- Voyles, Wastelanding, pages 87-150

February 13:
- Voyles, Wastelanding, pages 151-218

*Blog Post 1 Due Feb 13: The Water Is Life Movement/Rethinking the Anthropocene*

**Week 6**

NO CLASS

**PART II: DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES**

**Week 7: Research in Colonial Contexts**

February 25:
- Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 1-60

February 27:
- Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 61-126

*Blog Post 2 Due Feb 27: Wastelanding*

**Week 8: Research in Colonial Contexts**

March 4:
- Guest Speaker: Larry Spotted Crow Mann

March 6:
- Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 127-233
Week 9: The Construction of Nature
March 11:
- Hoover, *The River is in Us, preface*

March 13:
- Hoover, *The River is in Us, 1-68*

Week 10: Caring for Land (and Water)
March 18:
- Hoover, *The River is in Us, 69-122*

March 20:
- Hoover, *The River is in Us, chapters 123-218*

Blog Post 3 Due March 20: Decolonizing Methodologies

Week 11: Caring for Land (and Water)
March 25:
- Hoover, *The River is in Us, 219-276*

March 27
- Indigenous Science Statement on the March for Science
- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Preface” and “Planting Sweetgrass”

Week 12: Indigenous Science
April 1:
- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Tending Sweetgrass”

April 3
- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Picking Sweetgrass”

Week 13: Indigenous Science
April 8:
- Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Braiding Sweegrass”

Blog Post 4 Due April 8: The River is in Us

April 10:
- Guest Lecture TBA

Week 14: Indigenous Science
April 15:
  • Film: Putuparri and the Rain Makers

April 17:
  • Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Burning Sweetgrass” and “Epilogue”

**Week 15**
NO CLASS

**PART III: CIRCLING AROUND**

**Week 16: Indigenous Materialisms**

April 27:

April 29:

**Blog Post 5 Due April 29: Braiding Sweetgrass**

**Week 17: Life and Extinction**

May 3