Australia’s Animals and Environment

Fall 2020

Instructor Information

- Laura McLauchlan
- Consultation by appointment.
- Lm197@nyu.edu (Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails)

Course Information


What is unique about the lifeforms on this ancient continent? How do environmental questions in Australia compare to those internationally? What can we learn from studying Australian human environmental relations in cross-cultural perspective? What can anthropology teach us about how to find (and do) hope in this time of environmental crisis?

With an eye to practices of hope, this course focuses on looking at traditional, marginal and alternative ways in which people have and can relate to the world around us. We will particularly use our studies to consider how it is that we, as humans, might live well with place. While this course is grounded in Anthropological approaches, it is suitable for students from all academic backgrounds.

In Part 1 of the course, we will look at Western approaches to animal-environmental relating and compare these to indigenous (particularly Indigenous Australian) ways of living with the world around us. In Parts 2 and 3, using Australian examples, we will consider the relationship between different worldviews and how humans interact with both animals and the broader environment. Finally, in part 4, we will be thinking about hope: how can we take what we have learned in this course and apply it in the world, wherever we might end up?
Course Requirements

Weekly Reading Responses
This assessment requires that students submit a small weekly piece of around 200 words to in response to the readings for the week. Students will be graded on engagement with the texts and, in particular, for considering what (if anything) in the readings might matter for ongoing environmental care.

Each week students are also required to comment on at least one other student’s response.

Nb: there might not be hopeful elements in all the readings—students are encouraged to look for aspects of hope but not to force them!

Embodied Reflection (500 words)
In this brief assignment, students are asked to attend to a critter they have personal experience with. This could be any sort of animal: a pet, a ‘pest’, an animal you love or one you are afraid of. With particular focus on the Vincianne Despret’s work on partial connections, students will attend to both the possibilities of empathetic knowing as well as the physical and social barriers to interspecies connection. In this short reflection you will be encouraged to look at what the limits of knowing someone of another species are. Questions you might ask include, what cultural factors might be at play in your meeting of this other form of life? What sort of biological limits are there and are there ways you overcame these? Students are also encouraged to think about modes of representation—how might we represent partial relationships in ways that encourage the attempt to meet one another and yet avoid reductive or universalising knowledge claims?

Essay 1 (1500 words)
This assignment asks students to think about a question of Australian human-environmental relating in a way which challenges Western humanist ways of approaching the issue. How might your chosen environmental situation look differently when viewed through the position of a different species? What about through a different worldview?

You will be supported in class by both Laura and your peers to both chose a topic you wish to analyse as well as to apply an analytical approach which helps you to see the issue in a different light. Students will be primarily assessed on their demonstrated understanding of the concepts and their analysis of the Australian environmental question at hand. Style, overall quality of the writing, as well as originality and thoughtfulness of representation will also be considered.

Essay 2 (2000 words)
In this assignment, students are asked to attend to an emergent, marginal or speculative mode of animal-human relating in Australia or overseas. From what you have learnt in this course, and through parochializing practices and attitudes that are accepted as norms, what else might be possible? What other worlds might be possible? Students may attend to historical cases where change has been made, to cultural comparison of different modes of interspecies relating, to speculate on entirely new worlds (with some theoretical grounding in the present world!) or, following Anna Tsing, to attend to an emergent possibility of things being different.
Students will be graded on use of concepts from the course, contextualisation (natural-cultural) of current attitudes and careful consideration of difference and/or the process of change-making.

Written work must include appropriate citations and references (reference lists are not included in the required number of pages). It must conform to the American Anthropological Association Style Guide (AAA Style Guide), which is available on the NYU Classes site for our course. It should also follow the spelling of Aboriginal terms laid out in the short NYU Style Guide prepared for this course (adapted from the AAA Style Guide and available on the NYU Classes site).

**Grading of Assignments**

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments/Activities</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Reading Responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied Reflection</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>TBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>TBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>TBC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this course, your total numerical score, calculated from the components listed above, is converted to a letter grade without rounding.

Extra credit: Site policy does not allow grading of work outside of the assignments included in the syllabus. The final grade will only be calculated from the assessment components listed here and no other work, whether additional or substituted, is permitted.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

**Letter Grades**

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Explanation of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Grade</td>
<td>Explanation of Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Work is unfinished or unsubmitted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade Conversions**

For this course your total numerical score, calculated from the components listed above, correspond to the following letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 to &lt; 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 to &lt; 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84 to &lt; 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 to &lt; 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 to &lt; 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74 to &lt; 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70 to &lt; 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67 to &lt; 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65 to &lt; 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 to &lt; 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Schedule

PART 1: GROUNDWORK AND FIELDWORK: STUDYING ANIMALS AND ENVIRONMENT IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Week 1

Introducing animals and environments in cross-cultural context

While Euro-American ways of relating to the more-than-human world are often treated as being universally ‘true’, Western ways of framing humans, animals and environmental relations are the product of a very particular history. They can also be linked to a great deal of environmental harm.

In order to help us to consider the environment with new eyes, we will be considering Euro-American lifeways as one among many. In this lecture, we will begin with a sea of stories from many cultures regarding what humans, animals and environments are and how they are related. We will also raise questions we will attend to throughout this course, such as what is a human? What is an animal? What is animality? What is an environment? And for whom?

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Week 2

Caring for and as Country: Introduction to Indigenous Australian Environmental Relations

In contrast to the sorts of separations of nature/culture human/animal we identified in Western approaches to the environment last week, many cultures do not rest on clear separations of nature and culture. In this lecture, we will begin to look in more depth at some of the ways in which Indigenous Australians have and continue to relate to and care for the broader environment.

We will look at what it means to be related to the more that human world. What does it mean to care for country? What does it mean to care as country? What is a totem, and why does it matter? How are non-indigenous scholars starting to pick up on these wisdoms and how can we work with indigenous knowledge without participating in appropriation of traditional knowledge?
Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


PART 2: ANIMALS IN AUSTRALIA

Week 3

Bower Bird Fieldtrip. Challenging human exceptionalism: Who has culture? Multispecies ethnography and more-than-human meanings

Fieldtrip with Dr. Hollis Taylor

Here, use the frameworks students have learned in part 1 to apply to real-world matters of environment and animal-human relatings. In this lecture we will look at (and begin a practice of) multispecies ethnography, an emergent mode of attending to other lifeways and the natural cultural questions of how we relate.

What kind of insight can humans have into the lives of others? How do other species come to know and understand us? What does it mean when humans and more-than-humans come to share culture and language? What sorts of communications have and do animals/humans/environments share? What might be the biological limitations of our ability to connect and is this static?

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:

Week 4
Multispecies life in Sydney: Urban animals
What happens when humans and more-than-human critters move in together? As Donna Haraway has argued, more than humans are not just good to think with but also “good to live with”. But who is co-habitation good for? In this lecture we will follow the history and politics of humans keeping pets, domesticating and entrapping animals. We will also consider what liberation and love might be and what disciplines it might require.

Here we will think about the critters living here in Sydney: the little penguins in Manly and the flying foxes living throughout the city to consider a penguin and bat-eyed view of the environmental changes to have taken place in Sydney over the past 230 years.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Week 5
New arrivals on Country: Introduced Animals in Indigenous Country
Guest Speaker: Petronella Vaarzon-Morel

In this week, we will begin to look at how humans become differently oriented towards other species. Which other animals are humans called to care for? Which are we not? How do different attitudes mean that different species are welcomed?

We will look at some of what Anna Tsing calls ‘Arts of Inclusion’ as they are practiced around the world, in which people call to other humans to care for particular others. We will also think, about how such cares come to constitute who ‘we’ are as humans. Despite ‘rational’ arguments about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ animals, how might human love (or loathing) of other species be a matter of more-than-rational connection that not only influences how members of different species are treated, but which also fundamentally shapes human worlds and our sense of who we are?

In the second part of this session, we will have a guest lecture from Petronella Vaarzon-Morel on the ways in which introduced donkeys and camels have been welcomed-by, lived-with and worried-for by Indigenous Australians.

Required Reading:
- Vaarzon-Morel, P. 2017. Alien relations: Ecological and Ontological Dilemmas Posed for Indigenous Australians in the Management of "Feral" Camels on their Lands. In...
Week 6

Conservation and de-extinction work in Australia: Fieldtrip to the Zoo Field Trip: Taronga Zoo with Dr. Paul Mason

In this class, we will think about both the particular sorrows of extinction as well as considering the potential violence hidden in conservation practice. What sorts of categories matter in questions of conservation? What do such categories do? What do they prevent? How else might life be valued? How does conservation and anti- or de-extinction work in practice in Australia? To look into these questions in more depth, we will be heading to Taronga Zoo to speak with resident anthropologist, Paul Mason.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Week 7: SEMESTER BREAK – NO CLASS

PART 3: ENVIRONMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Week 8

Drought, fire, flooding: How does the environment matter?

In this third part of the course, we will use our understanding of both the social and material aspects of our relationships with the environment to think about broader environmental challenges in Australia. In this lecture, we will introduce how the environment in Australia...
has shaped human lives and identities as well as looking at how colonial land care practices have both impacted, and been impacted by, the environment of Australia.

How have traditional land care practices been adapted to drought and floods? How have indigenous people worked with fire and drought? How have introduced practices of dwelling and farming overlooked local environments?

**Required Reading:**

**Week 9**

**Extractionism and Indigeneity**

Extractionism has caused environmental damage world-wide, however, when extraction takes place on Indigenous land it not only threatens physical safety, it also potentially clashes with cultural understandings of country. While, in many instances, the limitations of Native Title legislation have meant that indigenous people have not been able to oppose mining on their land, there are also instances in which indigenous support has been actively given to mining operations. In this class, we will look at the debate and conflict around mining on country, investigate the sorts of mentalities behind extractivism and ask, alongside Elizabeth Povinelli, whether rocks can die.

This class will be illustrated by footage from a selection of indigenous-led anti-mining and anti-fracking documentaries.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Week 10**

**Climate change in multispecies and climate justice perspectives – climates ancient and current**
Australia is home to the most ancient continuous culture in the world. How do we understand climate change in this light? While, in the previous lecture, we have looked at the effect of climate and environment over the last 230 years, we will start this lecture by tracing climate shifts from the ancient traces in known in Indigenous law. How does climate change we are currently experiencing differ from these previous shifts in climate?

Coming into the present, we will look at climate change through the lens of climate justice. Here we will also attend to changes in the barrier reef, using a multi-species perspective (with both the spatial and temporal shifts that this implies) to get a different view on climate change. Here we will ask, how might a multi-species perspective be useful for approaching climate change? How do the attitudes of Australian humans to the barrier reef influence attitudes to climate change? How might such attitudes both be useful for mobilising action on climate change as well as overlooking issues of climate justice?

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Week 11

Environmental Activism in Australia: Climate change and making change

In this lecture, we will look at some of the strategies used to make changes in Environmental realms in Australia. How did climate policy get blocked in the ‘90s? What have people been doing since then? We will also look at the historical case of changing the ozone layer… how did the different policies make a difference to this? In what ways are environmental approaches in Australia ‘masculinist’ and why does this matter? How have different strategies of activism made a difference? (that is, consumerist/individualist/mobilisations/policy-focused strategies)

I will look at my own research into Environmental Activism in Australia, particularly into the ways in which people are able to sustain movements and make lasting change. We will also watch the film *The Bentley Effect* and talk about the sorts of strategies used in that campaign, particularly the ways in which community-building is often an overlooked but vital aspect of creating successful environmental campaigns.

Required Reading:
Week 12

Corporate Entanglements: Palm oil and thinking with the trouble

Guest Speaker: Dr. Sophie Chao

In this lecture, we will look at how multinational corporations challenge both the environmental care of a particular place as well as place-based relationships with the more than human world. In this lecture, we will be thinking with the work of Dr Sophie Chao, who has conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork in rural West Papua, where she looked at how deforestation and monocrop oil palm expansion reconfigured the multispecies lifeworld of indigenous Marind communities.

With palm oil in mind, we will also consider one of the greatest challenges of environmental work today: how do we fight against the destruction we are part of?

Required Reading:

- Shotwell, A. 2016. Chapter 1. Against Purity: Living ethically in compromised times, Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press.

Recommended Reading:


Week 13

What happened (and is happening?) to the rainbow serpent?

In this lecture we will look at the role that the rainbow serpent has played in Indigenous conservation. Looking at the work of Veronica Strang, we will also consider the ways in which other water beings have played a role in caring for environments in other societies. How might the more-than-secular beings matter in environmental care and why might Euro-American imaginaries be dismissive of them? Is this changing?

Embedding our discussions both in understandings of Enlightenment rationality and the work of Gregory Bateson, we will ask: what has happened to water serpents? What is happening to them now? Here, we will also look at the importance of Taniwha in caring for waterways in Aotearoa, and in the recognition of the personhood of the Wanganui River.
PART 4:

Week 14

Collecting Hope

In this session, we will think about possible hopes for the future. Students will each present their proposals for their final projects in small groups and receive peer feedback in class. We will also discuss what hope is and what it might look like in both our lives and in our final projects. While we are facing a great deal of environmental struggle, there are also often hopeful stories in the margins. Throughout the course, students will have been attending to elements of hope they have discovered in lectures, readings and their independent learnings. As well as acknowledging moments of despair, in this session, we will have time to share small (or large!) stories of hope as well as to review moments of hope from throughout the course.

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Week 15

Composting, sustaining, re-seeding

What does it mean to make change in a world that is fundamentally relational? How can we digest and perhaps transform the worlds we live in and the multispecies relationships that...
make our worlds? In this lecture, we will think about how to be implicated/grounded change-makers and attend to the humus/humour/humility of change-making with an eye to the relational.

Throughout this course we have been looking at different ways in which humans have conceived of their relationships with the world around them. In this final lecture, we will look at what shifts in our ontologies might mean for how we look after ourselves and others. In this lecture, we will also think about how relational ontologies can be useful for sustaining ourselves and consider cross-cultural methods of healing with more-than-human worlds.

Required Reading:
- Shotwell, Alexis. 2016. “The point, however, is to change it.” Against Purity: Living ethically in compromised times. Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press.

Recommended Reading:

Course Policies

Submission of Work
Assignments (excluding in-class presentations and exams) must be submitted electronically via NYU Classes. It is the student’s responsibility to confirm that the work has been successfully been uploaded. In the unlikely event that a submission to Classes fails, students must immediately submit the work to their instructor as well as the Academic Programs Coordinator via email before the original submission deadline accompanied by an explanation of the issue. Please note that the work will not be graded until it is uploaded to NYU Classes. All in-class presentations and exams must be completed during the scheduled class time. An assessment component is considered completed when the student has met all the terms for that assessment component as outlined by the instructor.

All written assignments must be submitted at the due date and time outlined in the syllabus. An assessment component receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the work is late (including weekend days) up to a maximum of 10 points. If the work is completed beyond five days after the due date, it receives a mark of zero, and the student is not entitled to feedback for that piece of work. Because failure to submit or fulfil any required assessment component will result in failure of the course, it is crucial for students to complete every assignment even when it will receive a mark of zero.

Extensions
Any request for approval to submit an assignment after the due date must be received by the instructor, in writing, prior to the due date. The request must include evidence of work in progress before an extension is considered. If an extension is granted and the work is submitted by the agreed time, the late penalty will be waived. If an extension is granted and a student fails to submit within the agreed time, the late penalty will apply from the original due date of the assignment. Students will not be granted an extension because of workload commitments in other classes: assignment deadlines are available to students from the beginning of semester.

Plagiarism Policy

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University's plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person's words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form) without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU's various schools and colleges.

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades. The class roster will be marked at the beginning of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are expected to be present for the duration of the session: anyone leaving class early will also be considered absent. This attendance policy also applies for classes involving a field trip or other off-campus visits. It is the student's responsibility to arrive at the agreed meeting point on time. If you are travelling on a weekend, or during the break, you must plan to return to Sydney the day prior to your next class. No excused absences will be given to students who miss class on the same day that they return from a trip, even when this is due to circumstances outside of the student's control (such as a delayed flight).

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalised by a two percent deduction from the student's final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

Faculty cannot excuse an absence. Requests for absences to be excused must be directed to the Academic Programs Coordinator. Students must provide appropriate documentation for their absence. In the case of illness, students must contact the Academic Programs
Coordinator on the day of absence. They must provide medical documentation to the Academic Programs Coordinator within three days of the absence in order to be medically excused. The note must be obtained from a medical professional licensed to practise in Australia. The note must include a medical judgement indicating that the student was unfit to attend class/work on the specific day or dates of the absence. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Academic Programs Staff.

**Religious Observance**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Academic Programs Coordinator in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Classroom Expectations**

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period. In all classes we expect that students will follow the common classroom expectations outlined here in order to support constructive and effective classroom experience.

- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
- Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.
- Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
- The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
- Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.
- Be mindful of the space you take up in class and make space for others.
- Listen actively and be engaged and present when others are speaking.
- Do not use profanities in class discussion (they may still occasionally appear in course readings and assignments where considered appropriate)
- Criticise ideas, not people (groups and individuals).
- Use 'I' statements when giving opinions. Don’t try to speak for any group with which you identify.
You will be advised if there are additions to these common procedures for participation in this class.

**Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging and Equity**

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “…not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU Sydney we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

- fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
- promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

**Provisions to Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 or mosescsdd@nyu.edu as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

**Instructor Bio**

Dr Laura McLauchlan (Ph.D., University of New South Wales) is a multispecies ethnographer whose research interests lie at the intersection of material feminism, multispecies studies and environmental activism. In particular, she is interested in the ontological and material aspects of human-environmental relationships. Her current research centres on how our self-concepts and worldviews influence how we interact with and care for our environments and vice versa. Her anthropological work focuses on the crafts of those engaged in a wide range of ecological care and environmental activism and, in particular, attends to often overlooked everyday practices and emergent ontologies which might allow for greater environmental flourishing.

Laura currently teaches Environmental Justice and Environmental Advocacy and Activism at the University of New South Wales and Literature and the Environment at New York University Sydney.