

**PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**in partnership with the Gap Year Association (GYA)**

**ESM 101: Environmental Sustainability**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**CREDITS: 4 quarter-credits – Continuous Enrollment Course**

Students who plan to use this course to fulfill specific requirements should discuss transfer options and obtain written approval from a counselor or study abroad advisor at their own college/university PRIOR to enrolling in this course.

**PREREQUISITES:**

There are NO prerequisites for this course.

**METHOD OF INSTRUCTION:**

This course is a field-based self-study. The course instructor will correspond with the student and provide written feedback on course assignments via email and other remote communication.

**INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD:**

PSU has approved the following Instructors of Record, one of whom will be assigned to you (typically two+ weeks prior to the beginning of your program):

- Britt Basel, MS - [brittbasel@ecothropic.com](mailto:brittbasel@ecothropic.com)
- Dianna Hahn, MA - [dianna@gapyearassociation.org](mailto:dianna@gapyearassociation.org)
- Alexander Papouchis, MS - [alexpapouchis@gmail.com](mailto:alexpapouchis@gmail.com)
- Cam Sylvester, MA – [ccamsylvester@gmail.com](mailto:ccamsylvester@gmail.com)

Office: 503-206-7336  
[www.gapyearassociation.org](http://www.gapyearassociation.org)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is designed to provide hands-on learning opportunities for undergraduate students who participate in study-away opportunities. It offers the student a chance to learn outside of the classroom, exploring sustainability and technological issues impacting communities locally, regionally, and/or globally. Students will examine specific issues concerning environmental sustainability, observed through travel and service learning during their time away.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS:**

- **Environment of Respect:** Disagreement and diversity of opinions are encouraged. You will be challenged to think critically about the impact of cultural differences, which may emerge in concepts of gender, race, the roles environment has in business and market development, socioeconomic status, physical and cognitive ability, sexuality, and other forms of diversity. You are encouraged to ask difficult questions and engage in discussion and critical reflection. Please be respectful of others, listen, and try to understand differences.
- **Experiential Learning:** In this course, learning is an experiential process in which you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences throughout the term. The richness of the course will depend on the questions, insights, and active participation that you bring.
- **Personal Responsibility:** You are expected to engage fully in the coursework and take action if you need help. Please communicate any concerns about assignments, deadlines, or course activities to your Instructor of Record.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please adhere to university policies. Take special note of policies regarding plagiarism and course withdrawal. Each student is expected to prepare their own assignments, and any assignments submitted should be the sole work of the student. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information, will not be tolerated. PSU's Code of Student Conduct may be found at <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-code-student-conduct-and-responsibility>

## STUDENT OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Gain a working knowledge of sustainability issues in the developing world.
- Relate the importance of ecosystem conservation to the survival of all ecosystems worldwide.
- Build, take part in building, and learn about alternative practices (ie, biogas systems, alternative building techniques, organic farming, greenhouse gasses and carbon offsets, ecosystem management).
- Witness and interview first-hand local artists, environmentalists, and/or environmental managers to learn about current methods and relevant issues.
- Experience and learn about the inherent tensions between local populations and their needs, balanced with issues of environmental conservation.
- Select articles and journals related to the travel/study experience and analyze them critically.

## CONTACT HOURS, EXCURSIONS, AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

A total of **40 volunteer hours** will be facilitated. Additional hours may come in the form of:

- On-site instruction with local guides, group field trips, independent travel, and guest speakers.
- Books, periodicals, and videos provided by on-site organization/tour operator.
- Volunteering with environmental conservation projects (ie, reforestation, invasive species removal, censusing of local fauna, etc.).
- Introduction to, and volunteering on alternative building and/or alternative energy projects and methods.
- Interviews with local inhabitants.
- Optional: Students will use the Internet to access resources and evaluate information sources according to the external criteria, such as the author's credentials, the timeliness of the information, the genre of the source, etc.

## ASSIGNMENTS

**REQUIRED HOURS:** You must complete 40 contact hours as described above. The Gap Year Association will provide verification of hours.

**DAILY JOURNAL:** The journal requirement is an important component of your grade for this course. It will count for 30% of your final grade. Elements that make a strong journal include self-reflection and evidence of critical thinking.

*\*If you are enrolled in multiple courses, you are only required to **maintain one journal** for all courses\**

Journals should be **handwritten and legible**, as handwritten reflections tend to be deeper and more insightful than those maintained digitally. Additionally, many programs have limitations to device usage in different locations; as such, a typed version may not be an option.

Journals will be graded as follows:

- **Self-reflection (20%):** Ask yourself critical questions about the experience you are having. How is this different from what you expected? What personal challenges are you experiencing? How are you learning and growing from this experience?
- **Reflection about your location and host culture (20%):** What is similar to and/or different from your home culture/environment? What is unique about this place/location? How is your day-to-day experience and learning in the host culture challenging or validating your worldviews?
- **Sharing reflections on group dynamics (20%):** What lessons can you take away from the experience you are having with your cohort? How are you developing or changing within the group?
- **Reflection on specific course themes (20%):** Review the student outcomes from the courses you are registered for. In your journal entries, speak directly about your inquiry and learning related to those course themes.

- **Quality & Consistency (20%):** Journaling every day or every few days with focus on the above elements will lead to higher quality journals and a better overall journal grade.

**REQUIRED READING:** You must read at least **ONE** book from the Recommended Reading list and demonstrate knowledge learned and/or perspectives expressed (with [MLA](#) or [APA](#) citations) in your FINAL REPORT.

A **FINAL REPORT** of insights gained from your study-away experience is required in order to complete the course. **Our expectation is that the paper you submit will reflect college-level writing.** Your report should be 8-10 pages in length. Reports must be typed (double spaced) with a cover page that includes your name, the academic quarter (e.g. fall 2021), the name of the program you attended, and the course number.

**Submit a comprehensive report and analysis about ONE volunteer or engaged learning experience at an environmentally focused organization (sustainable agriculture, animal conservation, ecosystem protection, alternative energy, resource conservation and material recycling) during your travel/study experience. In your report, describe the organization and mission, the issue the organization addresses and how you can continue to address the issue moving forward.**

As you research the issue you might want to consider how the issue became a problem, what are the long-term effects of the issue, the history of the organization, how the organization gets funding, how your volunteer work impacted the organization, and what kind of on-going support is necessary to resolve the issue.

Final Report will be graded as follows:

- Description of organization and mission— 10%
- Research and analysis of environmental issue the organization addresses—30%
- Analysis of how you can support the mission/issue after travel— 20%
- Clarity and Organization of Ideas-20%
- Grammar and Punctuation -10%
- Ability to Demonstrate Knowledge from the Required Readings - 10%

## **DEADLINES & SUBMISSIONS:**

All course requirements must be submitted by:

- Fall Semester: January 20th
- Spring Semester: June 20th

## **SUBMITTING JOURNALS & FINAL REPORTS:**

- **Journals:** Once complete, please capture legible images/scans of your handwritten journal and submit as **ONE COMPLETE** document via email/shared drive to your instructor. Instructors reserve the right to refuse your journal submission if it is not legible. Some tips for quality submission when photographing or scanning your journal:
  - Ensure adequate light
  - Use equal camera height/distance if taking photos of journal
  - Turn OFF the flash
  - Pay attention to shadows and reflections
  - Ensure the entire page is captured and sections are not cut off (even margins)!
- **Final report:** Please email or share your final report with your Instructor of Record

## **COURSE EVALUATION:**

- **Daily Journal** (30% of total course grade): Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to, clearly presented ideas and observations, creative thought, and relevant concepts.

- **Final Paper** (70% of total course grade): Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to, appropriate grammar and verb use, format, content relevance, organization, analysis, originality, and summarization skills.
- **Required Readings:** This is a requirement for successful completion of this class and 10% of your paper grade depends on your referencing examples and lessons learned. Citations are required.
- **Required Hours:** The Gap Year Association will provide verification of these hours.
- **Grading:** This course is graded with letter grades A - F. See more details about PSU's grading system [here](#).

## **READING LIST**

**Students must read and cite at least ONE book in the final assignment. The following books have been approved for this course. Any other books not on this list must first be approved by your Instructor of Record.**

### **ALL REGIONS:**

*Cradle to Cradle*, by William McDonough and Michael Braungart  
A manifesto for a radically different philosophy and practice of manufacture and environmentalism.

*Manifestos on the Future of Food and Seed*, by Vandana Shiva  
A short collection of essays about what we eat and how we grow it.

*Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*, by Vandana Shiva  
The story of activists who are fighting corporate maneuvers to control access to water.

*The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, by Elizabeth Kolbert  
A book about the future of the world, and the mass extinction unfolding before our eyes

(Fiction) *Ecotopia*, by Ernest Callenbach  
William Weston, a young journalist, visits Ecotopia, an energy-efficient mini city with no urban sprawl, pollution, and an female dominated government and is determined to report his findings objectively.

*The Omnivore's Dilemma*, by Michael Pollan  
Through an analysis that interlaces history, science, and sociology, Pollan explores how America has shifted priorities around the economics of a single crop and the implications this has on production and consumption of many products.

*This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, by Naomi Klein  
Klein argues that our addiction to carbon is fueling our inability to radically tackle the biggest problem of our time. Climate change is a wake-up call delivered through severe weather events. Klein further explores how it is interwoven through poverty and development.

### **CENTRAL AMERICA:**

*The World Without Us*, by Alan Weisman  
If human beings disappeared instantaneously from the Earth, what would happen? Alan Weisman draws on every field of science to present an environmental assessment of a world without humans.

*Fire In The Turtle House: The Green Sea Turtle and the Fate of the Ocean*, by Osha Gray Davidson

Sea turtles have existed since the time of the dinosaurs. But now, suddenly, the turtles are dying, due to mysterious plague.

*Savage Shore: Life and Death with Nicaragua's Last Shark Hunters*, by Edward Marriott

The true story of Edward Marriott's journeys with the last surviving shark fishermen—a fierce ethnic brew of black Caribs, Nicaraguan Indians, and the descendants of seventeenth-century English pirates.

*Jaguar: One Man's Struggle To Establish The World's First Jaguar Preserve*, by Alan Rabinowitz

In 1983, zoologist Alan Rabinowitz ventured into the rainforest of Belize, determined to study the little-known jaguar in its natural habitat and to establish the world's first jaguar preserve.

## **INDIA:**

*Jungle Lore*, by Jim Corbett

Corbett's autobiography of his life and career as a conservationist in India.

*Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, by Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha

An exploration of the most ecologically complex country in the world. India's peoples range from technocrats to hunter-gathers and its environments from dense forest to wasteland.

*Relicts of a Beautiful Sea: Survival, Extinction, and Conservation in a Desert World*, by Christopher Norment

By telling the story of little known desert creatures, Norment illustrates the beauty of evolution and explores ethical and practical issues of conservation.

## **SOUTH AMERICA:**

*One River*, by Wade Davis

The story of two generations of scientific explorers in South America

*Mother of God: An Extraordinary Journey into the Uncharted Tributaries of the Western Amazon*

Explorer Paul Rosolie's adventure in the uncharted tributaries of the Western Amazon.

*Walking the Amazon*, by Ed Stafford

The story of Ed Stafford who set off to become the first man ever to walk the entire length of the Amazon.