



GEO 4373

Local Cultures/Global Nature

Section: RVC

Internet/Fully Online

Fall Term 2026

Course Time Zone: Eastern Time (ET). Course due dates and times are according to this time zone.

Professor Information

Jacquelyn Johnston

Roles: Primary Instructor

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Phone: 305-348-7555

**Office Hours: Please see signup form in Modules - Tuesdays on campus
noon - 4pm**

Office Location: SIPA 315

Department or Academic Unit: Global and Sociocultural Studies

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

Local Cultures / Global Nature examines relationships among culture, society, and the environment from a geographic perspective. The course explores how ideas about nature, wilderness, landscapes, species, and environmental change develop across different historical and cultural contexts and influence human-environment relationships. Through case studies drawn from diverse places and environments, students examine environmental knowledge, cultural landscapes, human relationships with plants and animals, Indigenous land-use practices, conservation, environmental governance, and contemporary environmental management. Emphasis is placed on comparing perspectives, evaluating environmental classifications and practices, and understanding how local environments are connected to broader social, ecological, and historical processes. Throughout the course, students consider how commonly used environmental concepts and classifications shape the ways people understand, manage, and interact with environments.

Textbook and Course Materials

Readings will be in Modules

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: na

Publisher: na

Publication Date: na

Copyright Date: na

ISBN 10: na

ISBN 13: na

Chapters/Pages: na

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for \$22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the [Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop](#).

Readings, Materials, and Open Educational Resources (OER)

Materials will be provided by Module

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- **Analyze how understandings of nature, landscape, and environmental classification vary across historical, cultural, and geographic contexts.**
- **Explain key geographic approaches to relationships among culture, society, and the environment.**
- **Compare different forms of environmental knowledge and perspectives on human-environment relationships.**
- **Evaluate the development and consequences of environmental policies, classifications, and management practices through**

geographic case studies.

- **Communicate research findings and evidence-based analysis effectively to academic and public audiences.**
- **Develop and investigate a focused research question using appropriate evidence and geographic concepts.**

Expectations of this Course

This is an online course, which means all of the coursework will be available online. Expectations for performance in an online course are the same as for a traditional course. In fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills which can make these courses more demanding for some students.

Students are expected to:

- **review the getting started page located in the course modules;**
- **introduce yourself to the class during the first week by posting a self-introduction in the appropriate discussion;**
- **take the practice quiz to ensure that your computer is compatible with the learning management system, Canvas;**
- **interact online with instructor and peers;**
- **review and follow the course calendar and weekly outlines;**
- **log in to the course at least 2 times per week;**
- **respond to discussions by the due date specified;**
- **respond to emails and/or Canvas messages within 2 days;**
- **submit assignments by the corresponding deadline;**

- **Late work will be accepted; however, I cannot guarantee feedback will be as detailed for assignments and discussions submitted more than one day after the deadline.**
 - **Please note: but the Material Annotation Assignments in Kritik unfortunately cannot be late since Kritik doesn't allow late submissions**

The instructor will:

- **log in to the course 3-5 times a week;**
- **respond to discussion postings within 7 days of the deadline;**
- **respond to emails within 24-48 hours;**
- **grade assignments within 7 days of the assignment deadline;**
- **provide opportunities for rough drafts, revisions and provide detailed feedback.**

Assignments & Assessments

Reading Quizzes

Each module, students will have the opportunity to review key concepts from that module, including reading and supplemental materials by taking a short quiz (10 points each). This assignment will serve as an assessment of your Global Awareness: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of contemporary global changes, including their historical geographies and dynamics.

The purpose of the quizzes is to clarify the meanings of the key concepts from the module, thus making the composition of the Required Material Annotation Assignments more effective and efficient. The core concept

definitions covered in the quizzes will directly relate to the Material Discussion posts, which serve to help students prepare annotations that can be directly incorporated into the final papers.

- All quizzes will be online.
- Each quiz will be comprised of ten questions worth one point each
- Each student will have two attempts to complete each quiz, and only the best grade earned will be used to calculate your final grade in our course.

Current Events/Personal Reflection Discussions

This is a more informal weekly opportunity to work through impressions and personal reflections about the topics covered from that week. Students may earn extra credit in this discussion if they complete significant novel research and share their compelling research with the class (this could be academic articles, primary documents, YouTube links to primary discussions related to the topic, art, music, etc.).

- This assignment will serve as an assessment of your Global Perspective: Students will be able to analyze issues from multiple perspectives on global change. To earn full points, students are required to respond to at least 2 posts by other students and develop meaningful connections with each other. I encourage discussions to be driven by student experiences, interests, and hobbies where global connections evolve organically; if the discussions do not achieve meaningful exchange of global perspectives by mid-semester, I may create more structured smaller discussion groups to encourage meaningful conversations.

Final Project: Troubling Nature

A Public-Facing Intervention Project

The Challenge

Throughout this course, we will challenge something that can initially seem very simple:

What is nature?

Ideas about nature are never only descriptions of the world around us. Categories such as *wild, natural, pristine, native, nonnative, invasive, pest, weed*, and *wilderness* emerge through particular histories, cultures, scientific traditions, political systems, economic interests, and relationships.

And these ideas have **material consequences**.

They influence which landscapes are protected or developed, which plants are cultivated or removed, which animals are welcomed or killed, whose environmental knowledge is valued, which communities have access to environmental resources, and what kinds of relationships with the more-than-human world are considered possible.

For your final project, you will choose **one environmental issue, relationship, category, policy, practice, landscape, species, ecosystem, or commonly held assumption about “nature”** and spend the semester learning to see it differently.

Then you will do something with what you have learned.

Your challenge: Identify something about “nature” that we have been taught to take for granted—and trouble it.

What Does It Mean to “Trouble” Nature?

To *trouble* something does not mean you must prove that it is simply wrong.

Instead, troubling means examining something that appears obvious, natural, inevitable, or beyond question.

You might ask:

- Who or what is being defined as a problem?
- How did it become understood that way?
- Who has the authority to define it?
- What histories or relationships are hidden by that definition?
- Whose knowledge counts?
- Who or what is understood to belong?

- Who benefits from the dominant approach?
- Who or what bears its consequences?
- What plants, animals, insects, ecosystems, environments, or human communities become invisible?
- What alternatives become possible when we understand the issue differently?

You will not need to answer every question. Think of these as tools you can use to investigate your topic.

What Can I Study?

Almost anything relevant to the relationships between **culture and nature**.

Your project might focus on an animal, plant, insect, ecosystem, landscape, environmental process, conservation practice, development project, environmental policy, environmental injustice, scientific category, cultural representation, or another topic relevant to the course.

You might trouble categories such as **native/nonnative, invasive, pest, weed, nuisance, wild, feral, pristine, degraded, useful, harmful, protected, or disposable**.

You might investigate wetlands, beaches, forests, parks, lawns, urban waterways, coastal environments, agricultural landscapes, protected areas, or the Everglades.

Or you might examine environmental issues such as wildlife management, restoration, pesticide use, landscaping, prescribed fire, flooding, urban heat, tree canopy, pollution, conservation, development, tourism, environmental education, photography, mapping, or environmental justice.

Choose something that makes you genuinely curious.

Building Your Project: Modules 1–6

You will **not complete this project all at once**.

During Modules 1–6, you will complete a series of short assignments that allow you to investigate your topic through the different ideas we encounter in the course.

Your project is expected to change as you learn.

Changing your question, reconsidering your assumptions, discovering that the issue is more complicated than you originally thought, or even changing your position is **not a failure of the project**.

That is the project working.

Grading

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Points Available	
Weekly reading quiz	6	10	60	
Current events discussions	6	10	60	disc yo re:
Final Project Development	5	20	100	
Final project	1	100	100	
Social Science Communication	1	30	30	Visu of yc
Total			350	

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Proctored Exams

Please note that the information contained in this section applies only if your course requires a proctored exam.

Through a careful examination of this syllabus, it is the student's responsibility to determine whether this online course requires proctored exams. Please visit our [Student Proctored Exam Instructions](#) webpage for

important information concerning proctored exams, proctoring centers, and important forms.

Schedule of Topics

Module 1 — Understanding Nature and Landscape

- Geographic approaches to nature and culture
- Historical understandings of wilderness
- Cultural landscapes
- Landscape representation and photography
- Human-environment relationships
- Indigenous environmental knowledge
- Political ecology
- More-than-human geography
- Comparing different approaches to understanding environments

Project Development: Topic selection, preliminary topic exploration, and positionality statement.

Module 2 — Environmental Categories and Human-Environment Relations

- Geographies of domestication
- Wild and domestic classifications
- Native and nonnative species
- Environmental classification
- Human-animal relationships
- Urban environments

- Historical development of environmental management practices
- Relationships among scientific knowledge, cultural values, and environmental decision-making

Project Development: Develop a research question and investigate the historical background of the selected topic.

Module 3 — Environmental Belonging and Coexistence

- Human-wildlife interactions
- Urban and domestic environments
- Pest and nuisance classifications
- Species management
- Multispecies coexistence
- Environmental conflict
- Cultural attitudes toward animals and other organisms
- Relationships among environmental management, place, and everyday life
- Comparative geographic case studies

Project Development: Examine categories, definitions, and boundaries relevant to the selected research question.

Module 4 — Indigenous Knowledge and Historical Landscapes

- Indigenous environmental knowledge
- Indigenous food systems
- Historical ecology
- Land-use history

- Forest gardens
- Plant cultivation and domestication
- Human modification of landscapes
- Amazonian and North American case studies
- Relationships among culture, knowledge, and environmental management
- Methods for interpreting historical landscapes

Project Development: Identify relevant stakeholders, perspectives, sources of knowledge, and relationships associated with the selected topic.

Module 5 — Conservation, Governance, and Environmental Management

- Conservation geography
- Environmental governance
- Environmental institutions
- Endangered species management
- Government agencies and environmental policy
- Institutional decision-making
- Land management
- Competing land-use priorities
- Environmental policy implementation
- Geographic case studies of conservation practice

Project Development: Evaluate the social, environmental, and geographic consequences of existing policies or practices.

Module 6 — Research, Ethics, and Environmental Communication

- **Geographic research methods**
- **Research ethics**
- **Positionality**
- **Representation**
- **Visual and textual communication**
- **Evaluating environmental information**
- **Public geography**
- **Environmental communication**
- **Audience and purpose**
- **Translating research for public audiences**
- **Evidence-based recommendations**

Project Development: Develop a proposed public-facing application of the semester's research.

Module 7 — Final Project: Troubling Nature

Research, Analysis, and Public Communication

Students will synthesize concepts and research developed throughout the semester to examine a specific environmental topic, practice, policy, landscape, or human-environment relationship.

Students will:

- **Apply geographic concepts to a specific environmental issue.**
- **Incorporate course readings and independent research.**

- Evaluate the historical and geographic context of the topic.
- Compare relevant perspectives and sources of knowledge.
- Analyze environmental classifications, policies, or practices where appropriate.
- Evaluate consequences and potential alternatives.
- Develop an evidence-based public-facing project for an appropriate audience.
- Reflect on the development of their research question and conclusions over the semester.

Final Deliverables: Public-facing project, written research rationale, and final reflection.

Course Communication

Communication in this course will take place via the Canvas Inbox. Check out the [Canvas Conversations Tutorial](#) or [Canvas Guide](#) to learn how to communicate with your instructor and peers using Announcements, Discussions, and the Inbox. I will respond to all correspondences within 24 hours.

I also accept communication via my faculty email, jajohnst@fiu.edu. I will usually respond within a few days, except on weekends or holidays. For faster responses, please use Canvas Inbox.

The message feature is a private, internal, CANVAS-only communication system. Users must log on to CANVAS to send/receive/read messages. There are no notifications in CANVAS to inform users when a new message has been received; therefore, it is recommended that students check their messages routinely to ensure up-to-date communication.

In addition, your professor will post course announcements, alerting students of upcoming deadlines, feedback on assignments, and other important information. Please make sure to read them carefully and get

back to your professor immediately if you have any questions or concerns. Please make sure to include detailed questions or explain your concerns so your professor is better prepared to answer them on a timely-manner.

Policies & Resources

Please review the [FIU's Policies webpage](#). The policies webpage contains essential information regarding guidelines relevant to all courses at FIU, as well as additional information about acceptable netiquette for online courses. For additional information, please visit [FIU's Policy and Procedure Library](#).

As a member of the FIU community, you are expected to be knowledgeable about the behavioral expectations set forth in the [FIU Student Conduct and Honor Code](#).

Zoom Video Conference

Zoom is a video conference tool that you can use to interact with your professor and fellow students by sharing screens, chatting, broadcasting live video/audio, and taking part in other interactive online activities.

Zoom meetings can be accessed via the Zoom link in the course navigation menu. Once you click on the Zoom link, it will route you to join the meeting for the respective class session. You will also be able to view upcoming meetings, previous meetings that you have already joined, and meeting recordings. Before joining an actual class session:

- Reference the [Zoom Student Tutorials](#) to learn about the tool, how to access your meeting room, and share your screen.
- Access the [Zoom Test Meeting Room](#) to test out the software before joining an actual session.

If you encounter any technical difficulties, please contact the [FIU Canvas Help Team](#). Please ensure you contact support immediately upon the issue occurring.

Nondiscrimination Statement

The **Office of Civil Rights** (OCR) is responsible for ensuring that FIU maintains a workplace and learning environment free from discrimination, where current and prospective faculty, staff, and students are treated equitably. If any student, employee, or applicant has a sincere and reasonable belief that they have been discriminated against or harassed based on age, color, disability, marital status, ethnic or national origin, race, religion, retaliation, sex, or any other protected category, they can report their concerns to the OCR team through report.fiu.edu.