PSY492/592: Conservation Psychology

Course Credit: 4 Credits
Format: 4 hours of lecture each week
Unenforced Prerequisites: PSY201 and PSY202
Class time: TBA
Instructor: Staff
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA
Phone: TBA
Email: TBA

Course Description:

Conservation Psychology explores connections between the study of human behavior and the achievement of conservation goals. People are often cast as villains in the story of environmental degradation, seen primarily as a threat to healthy ecosystems and an obstacle to conservation. But humans are inseparable from natural ecosystems. Understanding how people think about, experience, and interact with nature is crucial for promoting environmental sustainability as well as human well-being.

During this course, students will examine theory and research on human cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to nature. They will review research on people's experience of nature in wild, managed, and urban settings. We will explore ways to encourage conservation-oriented behavior at both individual and societal levels. The course will demonstrate how and why Psychology is relevant to promoting a more sustainable relationship between humans and nature.

Course Content:

This course will cover the following topics:
1 Introducing the field of conservation psychology
2 Attitudes, values, and perceptions
3 Moral psychology and the environment
4 Environment and identity
5 Theoretical foundations for the human response to nature
6 Domestic nature: Cohabiting with animals and plants
7 Managed nature: Zoos, aquariums, and public parks
8 Wild nature: Encounters with wilderness
9 Promoting sustainable behaviors
10 Community psychology and international biodiversity conservation
11 Environmental education
12 The psychology of hope

Textbook:

Student Learning Outcomes for PSY492 (see below for PSY592):

Assuming students have put in the necessary work, at the end of the term they should be able to
• identify the abilities and limitations of human information processing as they relate to sharing
  information about the environment;
• describe the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to facilitating behavior change such as
  those used in community-based social marketing;
• describe the range of motivations people possess to engage in, ignore, or resist environmentally
  preferred behaviors;
• apply behavior change theories and models to develop novel interventions that can influence
  environmental stewardship;
• observe, record and analyze attitude and behavior change in small adaptively managed
  experiments.

Grading (PSY492):

Each of the 3 Experiential Projects (see below for details) will be worth 100 points (a total of 300 points). There will also be a final exam worth 100 points. Total points possible = 400.

A = 90%, B =80%, C = 70%, D = 60% of total points possible.

Student Learning Outcomes for PSY592 (see below for PSY592):

All PSY492 outcomes apply to PSY592 students. In addition, graduate students should be able to:
• assess various efforts and approaches currently used to involve people in solving environmental
  problems;
• compile new ideas to examine the relationship between humans and nature.

Grading (PSY592):

Each of the 3 Experiential Projects (see below for details) will be worth 100 points (a total of 300 points). Each of the 2 Research Paper Assignments (see below for details) will be worth 100 points (a total of 200 points). There will also be a final exam worth 100 points. Total points possible = 600.

A = 90%, B =80%, C = 70%, D = 60% of total points possible.

Experiential Projects:

• SELF-CHANGE PROJECT:

Changing from environmentally damaging behaviors to environmentally beneficial ones can be very challenging, and it is easy to underestimate these challenges when focusing on others’ behavior. To help you understand some of the challenges that can arise and thought processes that accompany these
challenges, you will choose an important conservation behavior change and attempt to carry it out during the quarter. As part of this project, you will keep a journal of your efforts, discussing challenges you are facing as you attempt to change your behavior. You will summarize your project in a project portfolio (including journal entries + summary of your experience) at the end of the term.

**CONSERVATION PROGRAM DESIGN PROJECT:**

Imagine that you are a member of a team of scientists employed by an environmental organization or government agency (or a group of students at working to increase campus sustainability!). Your goal is to design a program to address a specific environmental problem that is dependent on human behavior, such as global warming, habitat loss, etc. Your program should reduce a behavior harmful to the environment (for example, driving large vehicles), and/or increase an alternative behavior that is better for the environment (for example, bicycling). Identify a specific organization that could potentially implement your program. Students may want to consult the "Tools for Change" website for case examples of successful community projects.

PART 1: Research the science and policy of the environmental issue, brainstorm potential psychological solutions, and propose a solution. Write a memorandum describing the problem you are addressing (ex: the impact of driving on global warming), and describing and justifying your program, in light of psychological theories and research, and the ways in which they have previously been applied. (About 5 pages)

PART 2: Design a study (ideally, an experiment) to evaluate the effectiveness of your proposed program. Include proposed method, expected results, and implications of the expected results (how would you need to revise your planned program, depending on what you find in your study?). (About 1-2 pages).

**REFLECTING ON MY ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT**

Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees (1996) coined the term "ecological footprint" to describe the impact of an individual human or group of humans on the earth based on their consumption of resources including water, energy, food, space, and various materials. The measurement of ecological footprint is used to estimate the amount of resources and space that would be needed to sustainably support a given lifestyle on a global scale (i.e., how many planets we would need for every individual to live a lifestyle with a particular ecological footprint). The ecological footprint is a heuristic tool for raising awareness and inspiring lifestyle change among individuals. Students will take the ecological footprint quiz online and write a reflection essay. You should include the size of your footprint and comments about the process (e.g., were some of the questions difficult to answer or not directly relevant?).

Questions for consideration in the essay:

- How does your individual footprint compare with the average footprint of a U.S. citizen (30 acres) and with someone living in India (2 acres).
- What impacts might result if everyone in the world enjoyed the same lifestyle? How would that impact you economically, environmentally, socially, and politically? How would it affect your access
to education, employment, and recreation?

- Why would stabilizing U.S. population have a major impact on trends in global resource consumption and environmental damage, despite the fact that the U.S. constitutes less than 5% of the global population?
- Does reducing the size of our footprint necessarily mean reducing our quality of life? Why or why not? Are there ways of enhancing quality of life while lowering impact? (Some examples might include driving a higher mileage car, generating less waste, saving money by using more efficient appliances.)

**Applied Service Project:**

Each student will do a service learning project relevant to Conservation Psychology. Options for this project will be discussed with instructor. Service learning projects will have three components: 1) helping (for at least six hours), 2) analyzing/writing, and 3) participating in discussion about the experience. For the written part, you will describe the project and what you did as a volunteer, what you learned, and your personal reactions to the experience.

**Research Paper Assignment (PSY592 Only):**

Reading, summarizing, and criticizing a research article will give you the opportunity to see how psychologists conduct and present their research. It will also give you the opportunity to evaluate the study and generate new research ideas. In this course, you will write research papers on assigned journal articles. You will be required to write papers on 2 journal articles of your own choice. However, these articles should be related to the topics we cover in the class and have to be approved by me. The paper for each article should contain the citation of the article you summarized. Each paper should be at least 3 pages but no more than 6 pages, typed, single-spaced, 12 font size, and 1” margin on all sides. Your paper should be written as a summary for a non-expert audience. Be sure to use “your own words” when discussing the authors’ ideas and findings. Direct quotes from the paper will NOT be allowed!

In your paper, you will need to identify the following:

1. the purpose of the study (e.g., the motivation; why was it conducted; why was it interesting)
2. the authors’ hypotheses (e.g., the predictions; what did they expect to see)
3. the approach and method (e.g., the rational and design; how the authors tested their hypotheses)
4. the results (e.g., what did they find) and the authors’ conclusions (e.g., what are the implications of the results obtained)
5. (most importantly) the discussion of how these conclusions are relevant in the real world and why the topic of the article is of interest to non-experts.

If the paper describes several experiments, you do not need to detail each one. However, you must describe the most important 1 or 2 experiments in detail, and you must at least mention the goals and conclusions of the other experiments. For example, if the other experiments were designed to exclude alternative explanations for the results from experiments 1 & 2, then describe briefly the differences in the other experiments and how they purported to rule out alternative explanations. Each research paper is
worth 100 points (a total of 200 points for two research papers). Your papers are due before 5PM on Friday of Week 10.

**Academic Honesty:**

I expect students to be honest and ethical in all academic work. Cheating or plagiarism by students is subject to the disciplinary process outlined in the OSU Student Conduct Regulations.

Academic dishonesty is defined as an act of deception in one or more of the following areas:

- cheating--use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids
- fabrication--falsification or invention of any information
- assisting--helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty
- tampering--altering or interfering with evaluation instruments and documents
- plagiarism--representing the words or ideas of another person as one's own

"The goal of Oregon State University is to provide students with the knowledge, skill and wisdom they need to contribute to society. Our rules are formulated to guarantee each student freedom to learn and to protect the fundamental rights of others. People must treat each other with dignity and respect in order for scholarship to thrive. Behaviors that are disruptive to teaching and learning will not be tolerated, and will be referred to the Student Conduct Program for disciplinary action. Behaviors that create a hostile, offensive or intimidating environment based on gender, race, ethnicity, color, religion, age, disability, marital status or sexual orientation will be referred to the Affirmative Action Office" (from the Dean of Students’ Office). Please visit this website for more information: [http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/achon.htm](http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/achon.htm)

**Students with disabilities:**

Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 541-7374098.