

ENV342H1 Ecology of the Mind: Detailed Course Description

Calendar Description

“Ask not what is inside your head, but what your head is inside of.” – James Gibson. This course will explore how environmental settings shape our psyche: cognition, emotions, perceptions, behaviour, and wellbeing. It approaches the mind as embodied, socio-ecologically situated, and enacted. The course title is inspired by Gregory Bateson’s “ecology of mind” theory, which views the psyche as part of a relational network with the material world that, like biological ecosystems, will interact, adapt and evolve over time. Students will uncover how natural settings enhance sense of security, curiosity, connectedness and clarity, and how nature enhances systems thinking when we attend to its patterns of relationship. Students will understand and experience nature-based systems thinking that inspires more relational, interconnected and process-oriented perception. The course will highlight the psychological losses associated with environmental degradation, and how the benefits of above can be enhanced through nature-based mindfulness and collective environmental engagement.

Topics Covered

Ecology of mind theories; systems thinking and complex adaptive systems; experimental evidence of nature-based psychological restoration, environment-social interactions, place identity, connectedness and mindfulness; landscape preferences and impacts; agency and locus of control in environmentalism.

Methods of Assessment

Participation: Attendance and weekly activities reported on Quercus discussion thread. Weekly activities with prompts for outdoor immersion in the natural environment

Journal: Documenting weekly activities/observations, lecture reflections and reading reflections.

Tests: Two in-class tests will consist of multiple choice, short answers and essay questions based on lecture material.

Application Assignment: A design project or program intervention based on natural settings that restore directed attention, reduce stress, motivate behavioral change, shift perception or support mental wellness.