

**Sarah Hill**  
**Engendering the Environment**  
Western Michigan University, 2000

Do women do a better job of caring for nature, cross-culturally, than men? Does nature have a gender? What do contemporary environmental movements tell us about gender? And what do contemporary gender politics tell us about the environment? This seminar explores some of today's most vexing environmental issues by examining some deeply held contemporary and historical notions about gender and nature.

The course will begin with a basic introduction to a "tool kit" of gender studies. This section will be primarily devoted to providing all students with a grounding in the contributions that feminist scholarship has made to studying nature. Subsequent segments will address bundles of contemporary environmental issues. A final segment will be devoted to group projects of students' own choosing.

Class participation will be evaluated both on student's contributions to group discussions, as well as contribution of written questions on reading assignments to be turned in at the beginning of each second class period (i.e., the second meeting of each week). Students will not be required to turn in written questions for weeks in which one of the short essays are due. Short essays must be four doubled-spaced pages in 12 point type pages with standard, one inch margins. The final assignment, while presented as a group, must be accompanied by a separate 15-20 page paper from each student.

Course Requirements

Class Participation (30%)

general:	10%
discussion 1:	10%
discussion 2:	10%

Short Essays (2- 15% each): 30%

Project

presentation:	15%
Final paper/web-site:	25%

**Segment One: Key Concepts for Gender and Environmental Studies**

The first several weeks of the course will work on grounding students in a common vocabulary. In this segment students address the following questions: What is gender? What is sex? Is there a "nature" of gender? How is gender a cultural product? How does gender interact with, race, age and other "natural" social divisions?

**Week One (1 & 3 Feb.): Introduction**

Thursday

“Gender in comparative Perspective”

Martin, Emily. 1991. “The egg and the sperm: How science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles.” *Signs*. 16(31): 485-501.

### **Week Two (8 & 9 Feb.): Pollution**

Tuesday

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. 1966. London: Routledge. **Introduction (1-7); Chapter 2 (29-40).**

Thursday

Readings from newspaper packet

### **Week Three (15 & 17 Feb.): Spatial Domains**

Tuesday

Hardin, Garrett. (1968) “Tragedy of the commons.” *Science*. 162, 1243-8.

James Lovelock (1988) *The ages of Gaia: A biography of our living earth*. New York: W.W. Norton. **Preface (xiii –xxi); Chapter 2 (15-40); Chapter 7 (144-171).**

Thursday

Video: “The ladies room”

### **Week Four (22 & 24 Feb.): The Gender of Nature in European History**

Tuesday

Merchant, Carolyn. 1990. *The Death of Nature: Women, ecology and the scientific revolution*. New York: Harper and Row. **Preface, Introduction and Chapters 1-4 (xv – 98).**

Thursday

Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (continued). **Chapters 5-8 (99-216).**

### **Week Five (29 Feb. & 2 March)**

Tuesday

Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (continued). **Chapters 9-Epilogue (216-295)**

Thursday

**First Written Assignment:** Ethnography of a gendered space/environment

#### **Segment Two: Engendering Environmental History and Culture**

This segment will address, thematically and chronically, how significant environmental thinkers have represented particular environmental problems. Students will read classic texts of environmentalism for their gender arguments, as well as scholarly literature that provides critiques of environmental movements and concepts. Readings will cover tensions between the conservation-preservation and municipal sanitation movements, the gender of the American frontier, presumptions behind “the population boom,” and critical contradictions within ecofeminism. This segment of the course will provide students with reference points from which to develop their own arguments in the final segment of the course.

### **Week Six (7 & 9 March): American Environmentalist History: Preservation/Conservation**

Tuesday

Thoreau, Henry David. (1936) *Walden, or a Life in the Woods*. **1-115**.

Thursday

Marsh, George Perkins. (1965 [1965]). *Man and Nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. **Introductory (29-43)**.

**Week Seven (14 & 16 March): American Environmentalist History: Toxic Landscapes**

Tuesday

Carson, Rachel (1964) *Silent Spring*. New York: Fawcett. **Foreward-Chapter 9 (xi-153)**.

Thursday

Carson, *Silent Spring* (continued). **Chapter 10-17 (154-300)**.

[SPRING BREAK] (21 and 23 March)

**Week Nine (28 & 30 March): Gender and Nature in 1960s' US Environmentalism**

Tuesday

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*

Thursday

Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (continued).

**Week Ten (4 & 6 April): Gender and Nature in 1960s' US Environmentalism Cont.**

Tuesday

Gibbs, Lois Marie (1981). *Love Canal: My Story*. Albany: State University of New York. **All**.

Thursday

Mazur, Allan. (1998). *The Rashomon Effect at Love Canal*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. **Pages to be assigned**.

**Week Eleven (11 & 13 April): The blameable "other" Issues**

Tuesday

Berkhofer, Robert, Jr. *The White Man's Indian*. New York: Vintage Books. **(Part 1 and pp. 33-44)**

Thursday

Berkhofer, Robert, Jr. *The White Man's Indian*. **(Part 3)**

**Week Twelve (18 & 20 April): Case Studies from the Third World**

Tuesday

Mies, Maria and Shiva, Vandana (1993) Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood (selections)

Thursday

Merchant, Carolyn *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (selections)  
*Film: Salt of the Earth*

**Week Thirteen (25 & 27 April): Week off to meet with instructors and plan group presentations**

**Written Assignment:** Women, men and nature

**Segment Three: Integrating theory and practice**

In this segment students will work in groups of three to four. Each group will conduct a project centering upon critically reading for the gender dimensions of an internet site or sites focusing on environmental issues (perhaps several sites created and maintained by the same organization or sites dealing with similar/the same environmental issues maintained by different orgs.) and the creation a class presentations. Class presentations may include the creation and presentation of group web pages through live web demos. A web page will be created for the class and group projects for which web pages have been created will be linked together and mounted on the UMBC server. Projects will be developed in close consultation with the instructor, and a presentation will be made to the seminar (see Syllabus)

Suggestions: The gender of *el niño*? Exploring internet discussions. Who recycles plastic bags at super markets? Global trade and environmental issues – looking at congressional testimony. Immigration, nature and gender – looking at congressional testimony. What’s sustainable about “sustainable development”? Environmental Justice? – who’s justice? Who’s environment? Corporate advertising campaigns – analyzing print media. Nature and soap operas – study the ads played during soap operas targeted for different demographics. What’s on MTV?

**Week Fourteen (2 & 4 May): Student Presentations**

Tuesday

Presentation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Presentation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Thursday

Presentation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Presentation 4: \_\_\_\_\_

**Week Fifteen (9 and 11 May): Student Presentations**

Tuesday

Presentation 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Presentation 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Thursday

Presentation 7: \_\_\_\_\_

Presentation 8: \_\_\_\_\_

**Week Sixteen (16 May): Student Presentations)**

Tuesday

Presentation 9: \_\_\_\_\_

Presentation 10: \_\_\_\_\_