



**S F S** THE SCHOOL  
FOR FIELD STUDIES

# Environmental Ethics and Development

## SFS 3820

**Syllabus**  
**4 credits**

The School for Field Studies (SFS)  
Center for Environmental Research in Conservation and Development Studies  
Siem Reap, Cambodia

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

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## **COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

***Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.***

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that they may present. In other words, this is a field program, and the field can change.

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## Course Overview

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Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy and social science that studies the moral relationship between human beings and the environment and its non-human components. Ethics are often defined as a way of thinking and approaching decisions in life dealing with what is acceptable or right and what is unacceptable or wrong. However, this course is predominantly not a philosophy course. Instead, this course takes a pragmatic approach to environmental ethics looking, through a variety of thematic scenarios, at how decisions relating to the environment can be made through an applied ethical lens. Following an introduction to the foundations of environmental ethics and the cultural context of Cambodia, we explore ethical problems that are pertinent to environmental studies. This course examines contemporary environmental dilemmas and topics as they affect Cambodia and the rapid development of these countries.

We all recognize that environmental problems can be incredibly complicated, morally, socially, politically, and ecologically. When it comes to environmental issues, we should ask: what are we responsible and accountable for as individuals? This question should be asked within two contexts: the first being the context and belief systems of the learner (US based college-aged students), and the second being the context and belief systems of the people in the places we visit at our international locations. Because questions related to environmental ethics are influenced by various scales, we will constantly be asking whether an American (or other developed nation) sense of the environment helps or hurts when it is projected onto a different part of the world.

This course uses a scenario-based approach to explore environmental ethics across seven different thematic scenarios that present real challenges in environmental management.

- Pollution in a Cambodian Village and National Park (Phnom Kulen)
- Waste Management and Public/Private Sector Relationships in Environmental Governance
- Mekong River Development Dilemmas
- Indigenous Peoples Access to Natural Resources and Conservation
- Conservation and ethical dilemmas
- Dams and (Sustainable?) Development
- Food Security, Water Governance and Environmental Impacts in the Mekong Region

Through these scenarios, this course will explore the following questions;

How are policy and day to day 'field' decisions relating to the environment and development made to be in line with an accepted standard of what is ethical? What framework do we use to make ethical decisions? What tools are available to ensure that decisions made are ethical? What global norms exist upon which ethical decisions for the environment are made? And how do these norms apply to the cultural context of the Mekong Basin?

This course will draw upon the foundations of the environmental ethics movement, customary environmental principles and evolving international norms, as well as regional customs and local cultural beliefs to explore environmental ethics and development in the Mekong region.

## Learning Objectives

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The learning objectives of this course may include:

- Students will be able to critically analyze the complexities in environmental philosophy including the responsibility to future generations, the problem of moral standing of human and non-human species and wilderness, sustainability regarding human development, global environmental challenges, and environmental justice.
- Students will become acquainted with concepts and methods of ethics that apply to issues regarding development, public policy making, environmental laws, public attitudes regarding humankind's dealings with the natural world.
- Students will critically assess alternative approaches to, and defenses of, a code of responsibility to nature (i.e., an environmental ethic).
- Students will explore the role that religion plays in developing an environmental ethic.
- Students will receive a set of tools with which to formulate his/her own environmental ethic and to articulate and defend these ideas with clarity and consistency.
- Students will understand the complexity of legal and policy issues regarding environmental management and cultural heritage with specific focus on Cambodia.

## Assessment

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The evaluation breakdown for the course is as follows:

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Ethics Field Book/Journal Entries	10
GIS Activities	10
Field Exercise	30
Stakeholder Scenario	10
Participation/Discussions	10
Final Exam	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

### Ethics Field Book/Journal Entries (10%)

The objective of field book journals is to develop skills for creating permanent records of activities, events, feelings based on observation and reflection. The standard for grading will be based on your ability to express your experiences in meaningful ways related to ethical issues and dilemmas.

Students will submit each entry as typed-up notes. Each entry should be 500-1000 words.

Each entry must include:

- A title (in a font larger than the text body) and date the field notes were taken
- The location of the activities (in the format: village, commune, district, province).
- A detailed description of what you observed. Make sure Khmer words (places or names of things) are accurately transcribed. Try to accurately record what people said if it was an interview – include quotes where possible.
- Photos. Each entry should include at least one accompanying photo. All photos should be captioned and include the date they were taken, the location of where they were taken (GPS coordinates) and a single-sentence description of what the photo is showing.
- A brief reflection on the significance of what you have observed and heard - what conclusions have you come to and what are the ethical dimensions of the issue?

### GIS Activities (10%)

Students will have several GIS tutorials and mapping sessions. The first tutorial will be on how to take waypoints and the basics of QGIS. Later, students will conduct a mapping activity in the field and use a drone to take aerial images of farmlands in Brome. Students will take waypoints of agricultural lands that will be used to make a basic land use map. All the assessments for this class will be done in class and in the field. If students complete the tasks during the tutorials, they will get full marks.

### Field Exercise (30%)

Unlike field book entries, Field Exercises (FEXs) are more formal scholarly works. You will complete 1 FEX where you address ethical and development topics in more depth, drawing not only on your field observations, but also on scientific papers and research. For the FEX you are required to use the APA Referencing System and formal writing styles (including an introduction and conclusion). When referencing field notes and field observations use the following format - this includes an in-text citation in brackets but no entry in your bibliography.

1. **Indigenous People and Land:** Bunong indigenous communities have strong cultural connections with their surrounding forests. However, few communities have secure land tenure over their ancestral forests with much traditional community land being designated as wildlife sanctuaries, economic land concessions or sold to outsiders. Many villages struggle with ongoing challenges such as logging, land grabbing and access to natural resources. Following class briefings, field discussions and your visits to the communities of Bousra, Loav Ka and Putrom you should develop a position paper that explores issues of land security, community access to natural resources, and participation in conservation and natural resource management. You are to come up with an argument about Indigenous relations to land and contemporary efforts to provide tenure security and conserve forest areas.

Key questions are: does the ICLT system adequately secure Indigenous territories for Indigenous communities? Does the protected area system protect Indigenous territories or alienate Indigenous people from their lands? You should focus on the case study sites and make sure to include quotations, relevant facts and observations from those we interviewed. Students who develop their arguments through reference to broader literature and arguments around indigenous land, will get higher marks.

Students will also be required to make one map for this FEX (further instructions will be provided in class. The map should simply demonstrate arguments made in the FEX. It could for instance show ICLTs lands for a certain village. Make sure the map helps to clarify information for the reader. Think about scale, labels and which layers make sense to display (e.g. provincial boundaries? Village waypoints? satellite image?).

This FEX will be split into two parts: the literature review and the final FEX. The literature review is part of the FEX and should be written as a section of the FEX rather than a separate assessment (when you hand in the final FEX, the literature review will be included). It will be marked prior to the FEX but the grades will go toward the 30% of the FEX.

### Stakeholder Scenario Activity (10%)

This assessment requires no prior preparation. Students will be given a fictitious land use scenario and assigned the role of a stakeholder. Students will then come up with a position on the land use scenario from the perspective of their assigned stakeholder and debate with other stakeholders.

### Participation/Discussions (10%)

During each lecture, time will be set aside for discussion of assigned reading. Each student is expected to complete the assigned reading prior to class. Students will be marked on how they engage in these discussions throughout the semester.

### Final Exam (30%)

There is one final combined exam that will be 2 hours; it will be writing intensive. You will be given time to study for these exams; a class period will be designated as “review.” You will be examined on what you have been taught in class and in the field, and what you have been asked to read.

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### Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

### General Reminders

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**Honor Code/Plagiarism** – SFS places high expectations on their students and we hold students accountable for their behaviors. SFS students are held to the honor code below. SFS has a zero-tolerance policy towards student cheating, plagiarism, data falsification, and any other form of dishonest academic and/or research practice or behavior. Using the ideas or material of others without giving due credit is cheating and will not be tolerated. Any SFS student found to have engaged in or facilitated academic and/or research dishonesty will receive no credit (0%) for that activity.

*“SFS does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in any form. While participating in an SFS program, students are expected to refrain from cheating, plagiarism and any other behavior which would result in a student receiving credit for work which they did not accomplish on their own. Students are expected to report any instance of cheating or plagiarism by others.”*

**Deadlines** – Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated to promote equity among students and to allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. As such, deadlines are firm; extensions will only be considered under extreme circumstances. Late assignments will incur a penalty of 10% of your grade for each day you are late. After two days past the deadline, assignments will no longer be accepted. Assignments will be handed back to students after a one-week grading period. Grade corrections for any assessment item should be requested in writing at least 24 hours after assignments are returned. No corrections will be considered afterwards.

**Content Statement** – Every student comes to SFS with unique life experiences, which contribute to the way various information is processed. Some of the content in this course may be intellectually or emotionally challenging but has been intentionally selected to achieve certain learning goals and/or showcase the complexity of many modern issues. If you anticipate a challenge engaging with a certain topic or find that you are struggling with certain discussions, we encourage you to talk about it with faculty, friends, family, the HWM, or access available mental health resources.

**Participation** – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the course is mandatory, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and class activities, and simply get involved.

## Course Content

**Type: D:** Discussion, **FC:** Field Components, **T:** Tutorial, **L:** Lecture

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Required Readings
1	Course Introduction	L	1.5	Li, Tania M., 2007.
2	Foundations in Environmental Ethics Part One – capitalism and the environment	L; T	2.0	Bookchin, 1982. (pages 20-35)
3	Foundations in Environmental Ethics Part Two – Nature, Culture	L; T	2.0	Cronon, 1996.
4	Cambodian Cosmologies and the Forest	L; FC	5.0	Guillou, 2017.
5	Applied Scenario 1: Conservation	L	4.0	Kelly, 2011. Peasant Voices in Conservation, 2024.
6	Applied Scenario 2: Environmental Pollution and Waste	L; FC	4.0	Amerio, 2021.
7	Applied Scenario 3: Development Dilemmas	L; FC	8.0	Li, 2010. Araghi, 2012.
8	Applied Scenario 4: Dams	L; FC	4.0	Sneddon, 2012.
9	Environmental Justice	L	2.0	Rodriguez, 2020. Escobar, 2008. (pages 1-18)
10	Applied Scenario 5: Indigenous Peoples's Access to Natural Resources	L; FC	5.0	Milne, 2013.
11	Applied Scenario 6: Living on the Lake	L; T	5.0	Campling, 2012.
12	Environmental Ethics in Practice	L	2.0	Walsh, 2018. (Chapter 2) Rosset and Martinez- Torres, 2013.
13	Stakeholder Scenario	D	2.0	
14	Exam review	D	2.0	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>48.5</b>	
		<b>UMN Instructional Hours*</b>	<b>58.2</b>	

*\*UMN defines an instructional hour as a 50-minute block. SFS syllabi are written in full 60-minute hours for programming purposes. Therefore 50 full hours = 60 UMN instructional hours (for four credit courses) and 25 full hours = 30 UMN instructional hours (for two credit courses).*

## Reading List

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\*Readings in **Bold** are required

1. Ang C. (1988). The place of Animism within Popular Buddhism in Cambodia the example of the monastery. *Asian Folklore Studies*. 47(1) pp.35-41.
2. **Araghi, Farshad. (2012)**. “The Invisible Hand and the Visible Foot: Peasants, Dispossession and Globalization.” In *Peasants and Globalization*, 111–47. Routledge.
3. **Armiero, Marco. (2021)**. “The Case for the Wastocene.” *Environmental History*, Cambridge University Press.
4. Bach H, Bird J, Clausen TJ, Jensen KM, Lange RB, Taylor R, Viriyasakultorn V and Wolf A (2012). *Transboundary River Basin Management: Addressing Water, Energy and Food Security*. Mekong River Commission, Lao PDR.
5. Beasley, I., Marsh, H., Jefferson, T. A., & Arnold, P. (2009). Conserving dolphins in the Mekong River: the complex challenge of competing interests. In Campbell, I. (ed) *Aquatic Ecology in The Mekong* (pp. 363-387). Academic Press.
6. Brigham, K. (2022). How the fossil fuel industry is pushing plastics on the world. CNBC. Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/29/how-the-fossil-fuel-industry-is-pushing-plastics-on-the-world-.html>
7. Brockington, D., Duffy, R., & Igoe, J. (2012). 2. Histories and Geographies of Protected Areas. In *Nature unbound: conservation, capitalism and the future of protected areas*. New York: Routledge.
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11. Coff, C. (2013). A Semiotic Approach to Food and the Ethics in Everyday Life, *Journal of Agriculture Environmental Ethics*, vol. 26, pp.813-25.
12. Collins, Y. A., Macguire-Rajpaul, V., Krauss, J. E., Asiyambi, A., Jiménez, A., Bukhi Mabele, M., & Alexander-Owen, M. (2021). Plotting the coloniality of conservation. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 28:1.
13. Colm, S. (1997). Land Rights: The challenge for Ratanakiri’s Indigenous Communities. *Watershed* 3(1): 1-9.

14. **Cronon, William (1996).** "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28. Available at [https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble\\_with\\_Wilderness\\_Main.html](https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html)
15. De la Cadena, M., & Blaser, M. Introduction: Pluriverse: A proposal for many worlds in De la Cadena, M., & Blaser (Eds.). (2018). *A world of many worlds*. Duke University Press.
16. **Escobar, A. (2008).** *Nature in Territories of difference: place, movements, life, redes*: Duke University Press.
17. Fairhead, J. and Leach, M. (1998) *Forests of Statistics: Deforestation in West Africa in 'Reframing Deforestation' – Global Analysis and Local Realities*, Routledge, New York
18. Foltz, R. C. (2003). *Worldviews, religion, and the environment*. Thompson Wadsworth: Belmont, California.
19. Freinkel, S. (2011). *A Brief History of Plastic's Conquest of the World*:
20. Cheap plastic has unleashed a flood of consumer goods. *Scientific American*. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-brief-history-of-plastic-world-conquest/>
21. Frewer, T. (2021). Reconfiguring vulnerability: climate change adaptation in the Cambodian highlands. *Critical Asian Studies*, 53(4), 476-498.
22. Gross, R.M. (2003), *Towards a Buddhist Environmental Ethic*, in Folk, R.C (eds.) *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: an anthology*, chapter 5, Wadsworth.
23. Grove, K. (2014). Biopolitics and adaptation: Governing socio-ecological contingency through climate change and disaster studies. *Geography Compass*, 8(3), 198-210.
24. **Guillou, A.Y. (2017).** Khmer potent places: Parami and the localization of Buddhism and monarchy in Cambodia. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 18 (5), 421-443
25. Geyer, R. (2020). A brief history of plastics. In M. Streit-Bianchi, M. Cimadevila and W. Trettnak (Eds) *Mare Plasticum-The Plastic Sea* (pp. 31-47). Springer, Cham.
26. Heyd, T. (2006). Nature, Culture, and Natural Heritage: Toward a Culture of Nature. *Environmental Ethics* 27: 339-354.
27. Hirsch, P (2016). The shifting regional geopolitics of Mekong dams. *Political Geography*, 51(), 63–74. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2015.12.004
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33. **Li, T. M. (2010)**. To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations. *Antipode*, 41, 66–93. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00717.x
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35. Liboiron, M. (2021). Introduction. In *Pollution Is Colonialism*. New York: Duke University Press.
36. Lin, K. (2001). Finding the Right Chemistry: The U.S. Chemical Industry in Asia. *Business and Politics*, 3(2), 185-202. doi:10.2202/1469-3569.1024
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38. **Milne, Sarah. (2013)**. "Under the Leopard's Skin: Land Commodification and the Dilemmas of Indigenous Communal Title in Upland Cambodia." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3
39. Milne, S., & Mahanty, S. (2015). The political ecology of Cambodia's transformation. In Milne, S. and Mahanty, S. (Eds) *Conservation and Development in Cambodia* (pp. 19-45). London: Routledge.
40. Milne, S., Kimchoeun, P., & Sullivan, M. (2015). Shackled to nature? The post-conflict state and its symbiotic relationship with natural resources. In Milne, S. and Mahanty, S. (Eds) *Conservation and Development in Cambodia* (pp. 46-68). London: Routledge.
41. Murdock, Esme. (2021) *Conserving Dispossession? A Genealogical Account of the Colonial Roots of Western Conservation, Ethics, Policy & Environment*, 24:3, 235-249, DOI: 10.1080/21550085.2021.2002625
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