



Environmental Studies (ENVS) 608

Questioning Extinctions (Revision 1)

Status:	Replaced with new revision, see the course listing  for the current revision 
Delivery mode:	Grouped study 
Credits:	3
Area of study:	Arts
Prerequisite:	None
Precluded:	MAIS 752 REV 7, September 2017
Faculty:	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences 

Overview

This course brings critical and creative attention to the contemporary proliferation of extinction narratives to grapple with the global ecological moment. In scientific studies, humanities scholarship, futures studies, and popular culture, we find warnings of an imminent mass extinction event

brought on by anthropogenic climate change. Through self reflection, critical analysis, and creative thinking, we will explore how narratives of extinction motivate action, bring on political paralysis, incentivize technological solutions, call for different ethical relations, and/or work to determine certain futures rather than others. We will consider how different narratives structure the way we think about the social and ecological worlds, and which “we” the narratives we read are directed to. We will read texts that address extinction as a problem of environmental justice, and which bring into view the unequal distributions of environmental harm to some communities and geographical regions. We will also read texts that emphasize multi-species entanglement and call for ethical care and consideration for the more than human world.

While grappling with extinctions of plants, nonhuman animals, ecosystems, and the lifeways that emerge from and are entangled with them is a novel activity for those whose reflections have only recently been activated by the current climate crisis, there are many for whom grappling with the ending of worlds is not new. We will engage with Indigenous and Black studies scholars, as well as scholars from the Global South, who describe how the loss of their worlds has already happened and continues to happen, and how this loss of world involves relationships to land, plant and animal species, languages, and cultural practices which together make up the biocultural fabric of a world. We will consider how attending to the narratives of those who have already experienced bio-cultural loss affects possibilities for imagining different futures.

Outline

- Unit 1: Introduction
- Unit 2: Extinction Discourses
- Unit 3: Species Loss and Biocultural Entanglements
- Unit 4: Critical Perspectives
- Unit 5: Bringing It All Together

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. identify types and instances of bio-cultural loss and articulate if and how they result from the systems and processes driving global ecological change (**MA-IS program outcome** [↗](#) : *integrated learning*).

2. critically assess how extinction is framed in different narratives and how the implications of this framing for social and political actions and ethical relations (**MA-IS program outcome** [↗](#) : *social relevance*).
3. compare different narratives of environmental and biocultural loss by considering their implications for environmental justice, social equity, and ethical relations with nonhuman species (**MA-IS program outcome** [↗](#) : *social relevance*).
4. evaluate different extinction narratives in terms of their degree of challenge to or reproduction of dominant social, political, cultural, ethical, economic, and ontological frameworks (**MA-IS program outcome** [↗](#) : *paradigm challenge*).
5. consider the affective or emotional impacts of catastrophic environmental narratives, how these are informed by your social positionality and geographic location (**MA-IS program outcome** [↗](#) : *self-critical thinking*).
6. engage in critical but compassionate self-reflection with respect to one's positionality in relation to biocultural loss and global ecological change as well as one's perspectives and investments in catastrophic climate narratives (**MA-IS program outcome** [↗](#) : *self-critical thinking*).

Evaluation

To receive credit for this course, students must participate in the online activities, successfully complete the assignments, and achieve a final mark of at least 60%. Students should be familiar with the Master of Arts—Interdisciplinary Studies **grading system** [↗](#). Please note that it is students' responsibility to maintain their program status. Any student who receives a grade of "F" in one course, or a grade of "C" in more than one course, may be required to withdraw from the program.

The following table summarizes the evaluation activities and the credit weights associated with them.

Activity	Weight
Weekly Discussion Forum Participation	20%
Autoethnographic Reflection on Land	P/F

Activity	Weight
Explication and Critical Frame Analysis	15%
Applied or Engaged Project	15%
Reflective Response Essay and Questions	10%
Research Essay Proposal and Peer Review	10%
Final Essay	30%
Total	100%

Materials





Digital course materials

Links to the following course materials will be made available in the course:

`{resourceReference}`

All reading and audiovisual materials for this course are available online and linked at appropriate points in the course.

Important links

- › [Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies](#) 
- › [Focus Areas](#) 
- › [Courses](#) 
- › [Fees and Funding](#) 

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery methods may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

Updated March 11, 2025
