

University of Toronto, School of the Environment
ENV 1001: Environmental Decision-Making: Interdisciplinary Perspectives
Winter 2021 – Prof Steve Easterbrook,
Wednesday 12-3pm (Eastern time zone), online

Contact information:

Instructor: Professor Steve Easterbrook, <sme@cs.toronto.edu>

Steve's Office hours: online Mondays 3-4pm Eastern or by appointment.

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Course location – online: The course will make use of a series of online tools. Our core course site will be the online learning platform *Quercus*; we may also make use of Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, MS Teams, Sharepoint documents, Slack, and other tools as needed. Zoom links and Readings will be available online through Quercus.

Course overview

Description: ENV1001 is the core course for the graduate Collaborative Specialization in Environmental Studies at the School of the Environment. This course addresses the topic of “environmental decision-making,” which we understand broadly as the challenging process of how humans engage with the natural world, and the many iterative (and sometimes invisible) decisions we make about how to organize human societies and activities. While decision-making is itself a field of study, this course takes a more flexible interpretation of the term, involving choices about, and affecting, the environment.

Drawing on insights from across a range of disciplines—throughout the humanities, social sciences, and natural and applied sciences—and with attention to fields beyond academia, we consider multiple perspectives on the environment. Through bi-weekly guest lectures, student presentations, group projects, and individual written assignments, we explore worldviews and values (what assumptions we make about the world that shape the kinds of decisions we can make), conflicting interests and information (at multiple scales), and decision-making models and tools (a survey of the range of tools that are available), along with questions of uncertainty, adaptation, and iterative decision-making processes.

In a time of online learning provoked by the global pandemic, we will also turn analytic attention to the benefits and challenges associated with virtual technologies for interdisciplinary collaboration, research, and decision-making. As travel becomes constrained not only by the pandemic, but also as a response to climate change and environmental degradation, we anticipate the need for these tools will increase in the future. In the class, we will consider how online platforms may be useful in enabling ongoing research efforts at a distance, and how different strategies and tools may be designed for better communication and action.

Students should emerge from the course with a broader perspective on environmental and social challenges, enhanced communication skills across disciplines, and additional experience working in diverse teams. In addition, students should also leave the course more confident about the options for inter-disciplinary collaboration online. Our central goal in the course and the Collaborative Specialization program is to enable conversations to take place within and beyond the classroom about the challenges of human-environment relationships, with new ideas on creative and just approaches to social and political decisions.

Structure: Weekly 3-hour online classes. The course is aligned with the School of the Environment's Environment Seminar Series, so six of the twelve weeks of class will have an invited guest lecturer. These seminars will be open to the public. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in our synchronous online class sessions and posted on Quercus (UofT's online course platform). Please note that this is a seminar course, rather than a lecture course; active engagement in online sessions is expected (and crucial to the value of the course!) Please also note that there is quite a bit of reading and other work outside our two-hour weekly classes—full engagement and preparation will make our class sessions better.

Assignments (details available on Quercus)

- Weekly participation: 20% (continuous)
 - attendance, active listening & engagement each week
 - weekly participation in online discussion board chats & activities
- One-time guest seminar speaker facilitation: 20% (varying deadlines)
 - Pre-seminar posting of reflection paper and discussion questions
 - In class mid-seminar coordination of break-out room discussions
 - In class, post-seminar facilitation of small group discussion
- Individual “3-minute thesis” presentation: 15% (due week 5)
 - to be recorded and posted online
- Individual written assignment: 20% (due week 7)
- Group-based project: 25% (due week 12)

In case of unexpected challenges (guest speaker cancellations, student illness, other emergencies, etc.), grading policies may be changed as follows:

- Deadlines may be moved (as a class or individually; extensions are possible)
- Guest speaker facilitation may be altered to involve shorter/longer student-facilitated discussions, including without a seminar speaker (with discussions to be based on assigned readings and possible supplementary video material)
- Individual students facing challenges may be exempted from group projects, with alternate assignment options and/or grades redistributed to other assignments.

Class topics and readings: order of classes may change; advance notice will be given

Week 1: Jan 13: Introduction

Week 2: Jan 20: *Guest: Dr Margaret Klein Salamon, clinical psychologist and climate activist.*

Week 3: Jan 27: Environmental decision-making in times of crisis

Week 4: Feb 3: *Guest: Dr Nadege Compaore, political science, UofT*

Week 5: Feb 10: *Guest: Prof Nicole Spiegelaar, Sch of the Environment & Trinity College, UofT*

Winter Term Reading week: Feb 17 - No class;

Week 6: Feb 24: Systems thinking

Week 7: Mar 3: *Guest: Mr Garth Lenz,*

Week 8: Mar 10: Decision-making tools

Week 9: Mar 17: *Guest: Dr Megan Lickley*

Week 10: Mar 24: Environmental Values

Week 11: Mar 31: *Guest: Dr. Daegan Miller,*

Week 12: April 7: Uncertainty and Adaptation

Policies and Expectations

In general: In this course, you can expect that I will strive to be fair, respectful, prepared, responsive, and enthusiastic. In return, I anticipate you will be respectful of your classmates and of me, be prepared, and be flexible. We are all learning new skills, practices, and norms with online learning arrangements, and doing so amidst a series of personal, community, and global challenges. I hope that together we can foster a safe and engaging online space, and I will rely on all of you to help create that environment.

Online course site: We will have a course website (Quercus) for readings, course announcements, course materials, and discussions. We will also use tools including Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, Slack, MS Teams, and more. Please check in frequently with the Quercus site. Please also be patient with this site, and all our online tools, as we will encounter glitches and challenges. If/when communication on the site goes awry, please feel free to use email for assignments, questions, etc.

Deadlines and late penalties: I anticipate all assignments will be submitted on time. However, some of you may find yourselves with valid conflicts and challenges, especially in light of your diverse programs and courses of study, and the exceptional challenges of this particular time (illness, caregiving duties, housing and financial insecurity, technological connectivity challenges, etc.). Please contact me as early as possible if you anticipate being unable to meet deadlines. Please also contact your group members if you run into challenges during the group project. As this is a seminar class, attendance is the bedrock of the course, enabling us to build a strong community and develop enriching conversations across weeks—still, we'll need to be flexible and understanding when conflicts and problems arise. If you know in advance you need to miss class, it helps me tremendously to be aware of these absences.

Backups and rough drafts: You are strongly advised to keep rough drafts and backup copies of all assignments and essays you submit. Please take a minute at the start of the term to set yourself a backup strategy. Whether it's a backup external hard drive, a web-based cloud service like Dropbox or Google Drive, or some other option, it's important you have multiple copies of your work in the case of a hard drive failure or computer problem (this is important not only for this course, but also (especially!) for your research and thesis/dissertation projects). In a time where, working from home, you may not have access to a printer or multiple computer stations (as at the UofT library), this may be even more important.

Names: If your name on the official course registration list does not, for any reason, match the name by which you would like to be addressed (and under which you would like to submit assignments and sign emails and be addressed in class) please let me know. I am not able to change official course lists, but I can certainly call you by your preferred name. Also, please let me know the pronouns you use (mine are he/him). I encourage you always to begin your interactions in academic settings with more senior scholars using formal forms of address—especially “Dr.” or “Professor” titles for profs/instructors. That said, as graduate student colleagues, I am happy to have formal or informal exchanges with you: you are welcome to call me Dr./Prof. Easterbrook, Prof. Steve, or Steve, whichever makes you most comfortable. (If you use a title for me, though, please choose “Dr.” or “Prof.”, not “Mr.”)

Exceptions and Assistance: The University has many resources to help students who need assistance for any number of reasons, both in and outside of the classroom, including library, academic, and health and counseling resources. That said, I know these may be difficult to access from a distance and may be overburdened during this unusual year. Let's aim to work together as a class to help each other find academic support in the midst of challenges. The University remains committed to providing allowances for religious observances, as do I. A few helpful resources:

- <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/gradlife/Pages/Grad-Wellness.aspx>
- <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Writing-Centre.aspx>
- <http://uoft.me/religiousaccommodation>
- <http://familycare.utoronto.ca/resources/>

If you are struggling or you encounter unanticipated challenges or crises during the term (whether for academic and/or personal reasons), please seek the support you need as early as possible, as best you can. Some students find themselves facing challenges unexpectedly. If you find yourself in a difficult situation, even if you have not yet gone through all the official channels, it is best to let me know right away that you are seeking university assistance and may need accommodations (you do not need to disclose the details of your situation to me). If you will need accommodation from me for any reason, in the classroom or on coursework and assignments, please let me know as soon as you can.

Academic integrity: The seriousness of academic integrity really cannot be stressed enough, and is perhaps even more important in these virtual times and spaces. Academic integrity remains **essential** to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously, seeing these as serious academic offenses. As graduate students, your academic integrity will be the foundation of your scholarly and practitioner careers.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, through the School of Graduate Studies. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from your instructor or other institutional resources. As some norms differ across disciplines and universities, please take a moment to familiarize yourself with UofT policies.

- <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/facultyandstaff/Pages/Academic-Integrity.aspx>
- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>
- www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Using someone else's words without using quotation marks
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without instructor permission
- Making up sources or facts
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University