

## Aesthetics and human behavior: Theories for ecological design and planning SYLLABUS

This seminar will introduce and critically discuss theories about human experience of landscapes. These theories and readings, drawn from social science, design, and philosophy of aesthetics. It will focus on how aesthetic experiences may affect human well-being, ecosystem services, and sustainability of landscapes, and it will ask students to consider how these effects could inform ecological design and planning interventions in cities, transportation systems, and rural areas.

The course will have two activities: First, a series of student-led discussions to establish the conceptual foundation related to the course topic. Second, discussions of topics related to individual student papers, in which students pursue their interests in digging deeper into some aspect of the conceptual foundations or their application in design or planning.

**CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION DISCUSSION TOPICS** All students must complete all required readings listed below in advance of the date for our discussion of the readings. All students should be prepared to contribute to discussion comparing the readings. Each student will be assigned to lead discussion of one reading in each week. Your leadership assignments will be made after the first class meeting. **The leader should explicate that reading and raise questions to compare it with other readings assigned that week or read previously in the seminar.**

1. What is ecological design and planning?
  - a. Urban ecology – Pickett et al. 2010
  - b. Urban ecological design – Hill, 2007, in Novotny and Brown, Cities of the Future
2. What are aesthetic experiences of landscapes?
  - a. Aesthetics of nature – Berleant & Carlson, Carlson & Berleant 2004
  - b. Aesthetics and landscape preferences – Stephen Kaplan 1987
  - c. Culture and changing landscape structure – Nassauer 1995
  - d. Appearance vs. function – Nassauer 1992, Eaton 1997
  - e. Aesthetics of ecological design - Saito 2002
  - f. The shared landscape – Gobster et al 2007
3. How might aesthetic experiences of landscapes affect ecosystem services including well-being?
  - a. Landscape as a human right – Menatti 2017
  - b. Aesthetics as a cultural ecosystem service – Fish et al. 2016
  - c. Nature experience as psychological ecosystem service– Bratman et al. 2019
4. How might aesthetic experiences be related to human behavior that changes landscapes? How should these experiences and behaviors affect ecological design and planning?
  - a. Cultural norms for landscape appearance aka “messy ecosystems” – Nassauer 1995
  - b. Cultural sustainability - Nassauer 1997.
  - c. Stewardship, care, and relational values - West et al. 2018
  - d. Sustainable landscape design – Meyer 2008

**STUDENT PAPERS** All students will write a short (less than 5000 words with references) fully referenced (APA Style) paper in which they summarize the literature related to some topic of their choice. A proposal (less than 400 words) that describes the topic of this paper and what journals, books, or other refereed sources they intend to use for writing the paper is due on March 9, 5 pm. The remainder of the term will be devoted to supporting you in exploring the paper topics you have chosen and refining your writing. Papers are due on April 11 at 5 p.m.

**To help you begin to think about your paper, here are some possible starting points for focusing your paper:**

**Land use contexts** - any of these topics could be addressed comparatively – looking at different cultural or geographic contexts, or be digging into one particular cultural or geographic context

- Residential landscapes
- Urban green spaces
- Nature-based solutions and green infrastructure
- Riparian landscapes
- Countryside cultural landscapes
- Agricultural landscapes
- Wildlands
- Rewilding
- Governance of aesthetic experience
- Disparities in aesthetic experience

**Digging deeper into a topic introduced in seminar discussions** – not limited to the ideas below.

- Aesthetics and ecology – Naturalness and nature
- Aesthetics and ecology - Environmental function and appearance
- Aesthetics and Cultural Ecosystem Services
- Aesthetic experiences of landscapes and Well-being –
- Sense of place, place attachment and stewardship
- Cues to care theory
- Policy or implementation cases that exemplify or challenge the topic as discussed

## **SEAS Land Acknowledgement**

*The School for Environment and Sustainability acknowledges the university's origins through an 1817 land transfer from the Anishinaabek, the Three Fires People: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Bodewadami as well as Meskwahkiasahina (Fox), Peoria and Wyandot. We further acknowledge that our university stands, like almost all property in the United States, on lands obtained, generally in unconscionable ways, from indigenous peoples. In addition, our research on environmental science and sustainability has benefited and continues to benefit from access to land originally gained through the exploitation of others. Knowing where we live and work does not change the past, but understanding and acknowledging the history, culture, and impacts of colonial practices is an important step towards the creation of an equitable and sustainable future.*

**REFERENCES FOR REQUIRED READING** Note that all of these readings should be downloaded from their original sources via the University of Michigan library, unless noted as available only elsewhere.

- Berleant, A. and A. Carlson (1998). "Introduction." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56(2): 97-100.
- Bratman, G. N., C. B. Anderson, M. G. Berman, B. Cochran, S. de Vries, J. Flanders, C. Folke, H. Frumkin, J. J. Gross, T. Hartig, P. H. Kahn, M. Kuo, J. J. Lawler, P. S. Levin, T. Lindahl, A. Meyer-Lindenberg, R. Mitchell, Z. Ouyang, J. Roe, L. Scarlett, J. R. Smith, M. van den Bosch, B. W. Wheeler, M. P. White, H. Zheng and G. C. Daily (2019). "Nature and mental health: An ecosystem service perspective." 5(7): eaax0903. May need to copy from: <http://advances.sciencemag.org/>
- A. Carlson and Berleant, A. and (2004). Introduction: The aesthetics of nature. In *The aesthetics of natural environments*. Peterborough, Ont. :, Broadview Press.
- Eaton, M. M. (1997). The beauty that requires health. In *Placing Nature: Culture in Landscape Ecology*. J. I. Nassauer. Washington, D. C., Island Press: 85-107
- Fish, R., A. Church and M. Winter (2016). "Conceptualising cultural ecosystem services: A novel framework for research and critical engagement." *Ecosystem Services* 21: 208-217
- Gobster, P., J. Nassauer, T. Daniel and G. Fry (2007). "The shared landscape: what does aesthetics have to do with ecology?" *Landscape Ecology* 22(7): 959 - 972.
- Hill, K. (2007). Urban ecological design and urban ecology: As assessment of the state of current knowledge and a suggested research agenda. *Cities of the Future*. V. Novotny and P. Brown. London: 251-260 (*The Recommendations section is not required reading*).
- Kaplan, S. (1987). "Aesthetics, Affect, and Cognition: Environmental Preference from an Evolutionary Perspective." *Environment and Behavior* 19(1): 3-32.
- Menatti, L. (2017). "Landscape: from common good to human right." *International Journal of the Commons* 11(2): 641-683.
- Meyer, E. K. (2008). "Sustaining beauty. The performance of appearance: A manifesto in three parts." *Journal of landscape Architecture* 3(1): 6-23.
- Nassauer, J. I. (1992). "The appearance of ecological systems as a matter of policy." *Landscape Ecology* 6(4): 239-250.
- Nassauer, J. I. (1995). "Culture and changing landscape structure." *Landscape Ecology* 10(4): 229-237.
- Nassauer, J. I. (1997). Cultural sustainability: aligning aesthetics and ecology. *Placing Nature: Culture in Landscape Ecology*. J. I. Nassauer, ed. Washington, D. C., Island Press: 65-83. Download from: <https://www.joan-nassauer.com/works>
- Pickett, S. T. A., M. L. Cadenasso, J. M. Grove, C. G. Boone, P. M. Groffman, E. Irwin, S. S. Kaushal, V. Marshall, B. P. McGrath, C. H. Nilon, R. V. Pouyat, K. Szlavecz, A. Troy and P. Warren (2010). "Urban ecological systems: Scientific foundations and a decade of progress." *Journal of environmental management* 92(3): 331-362.
- Saito, Y. (2002). "Ecological Design." *Environmental Ethics* 24(2): 243-261.
- West, S., L. J. Haider, V. Masterson, J. P. Enqvist, U. Svedin and M. Tengö (2018). "Stewardship, care and relational values." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 35: 30-38.

**GRADING** Participation in class discussions each week may raise or lower your grade by one level (e.g., from B+ to A+ or from B+ to C+).

Quality of your leadership of class discussion of one reading each week. 9 points/week = 63%  
Paper on topic you select. 37%

**Experiencing stress and seeking help:** *Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc. If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers many resources, some of which are listed at [Resources for Student Well-being](#) on the Well-being for U-M Students website. You can also search for additional resources on that website.*

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

January 6 – Course introduction - Nassauer. Personal introductions by students.

### **STUDENT LED DISCUSSIONS -**

January 13 - What is ecological design and planning?

January 20 - What is ecological design and planning? Further discussion

January 27 - What are aesthetic experiences of landscapes? Part 1

February 3 - What are aesthetic experiences of landscapes? Part 2

February 10 – How might aesthetic experiences of landscapes affect ecosystem services including well-being?

February 17 - How might aesthetic experiences be related to human behavior that changes landscapes? How should these experiences and behaviors affect ecological design and planning? Part 1

Feb 24 - How might aesthetic experiences be related to human behavior that changes landscapes? How should these experiences and behaviors affect ecological design and planning? Part 2

Feb 26 – March 7 - Winter Holiday

Wednesday, March 9 -- **STUDENT PAPER PROPOSAL DUE 5 PM.**

March 10 & 17 – Individual zoom meetings to discuss your paper proposal.

Monday, March 21 -- **REVISED STUDENT PAPER PROPOSAL DUE 5 PM.**

March 24 - DISCUSSION 1 STUDENT-SELECTED TOPICS – related to papers in progress

March 31 - DISCUSSION 2 STUDENT-SELECTED TOPICS – related to papers in progress. **OPTIONAL DEADLINE TO SUBMIT A DRAFT PAPER FOR FEEDBACK ON WRITING STYLE AND ORGANIZATION.**

April 7 - Class meeting for Q/A about completion of student papers.

Monday, April 11 – **STUDENT PAPER DUE 5 PM.**

April 14 – Presentation and discussion of student papers.

April 21 (exam date) – Presentation and discussion of student papers. Course review discussion.