

# Experiential Human Ecology

**Instructor : C. Uhl**

## **Introduction**

Ecologists study the health of land and water ecosystems but avoid any serious examination of Homo sapiens, the agent provoking ecological devastation on Earth's ecosystems. Indeed, the present-day human population-- 6.4 billion people--now affects virtually all of Earth's vital functions. In this course we gather around the question: What might it mean to be fully human? In the exploration of this question, we will study Homo sapiens the way an ecologist might study any other mammal species.

All phases of the human experience—birth, upbringing, schooling, settlement, feeding, reproduction, work, play, conflict, aging and death--will be placed under scrutiny through a combination of readings, discussions, exercises, and field studies. A central paradox that we will dive deeply into is the following: Many aspects of contemporary life engender a sense/feeling of isolation/separation; yet, the world view emerging from ecology and modern physics points to our fundamental embeddedness in the Earth/cosmos. These seemingly conflicting ways of seeing create a kind of cognitive dissonance and lead me to ask: “How might I/you “unlearn separation?”

The metaphor I have in mind as we begin is that of “journey.” I am inviting you to take a **trip** with me; asking you to trust me to guide you into new waters. While I can't tell you the destination, I believe each of us has the opportunity to travel far and deep in proportion to our capacity to take risks and trust in ourselves and each other.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **I-Separation and Connection Over Time**

**Week 1-“Story” as connector or divider?:**

**Readings:**

-Genesis (Bible)

-The Universe is a Green Dragon (B. Swimme)

**Exploration: *Walk Through Time***

**Field Study: Beliefs: Visiting a Church, Sanga, Temple (see below)**

**Week 2-Language, numeracy, science as connector or divider?**

**Readings:**

-The Age of Separation (C. Eisenstein)

-Saving the Indigneous Soul (M. Prechtel)

**Field Study: Experiencing the world without words/numbers (see below)**

**Week 3- Institutionalization and “Development” as separator or connector?**

**Readings:**

-Technology, Trauma and the Wild (C. Glendinning)

-Selections from The Development Dictionary (W. Sachs)

**Field Study: Studying humans (See full assignment below)**

## **Part II: The Human Life Cycle: Separation or Connection?**

**Week 4--Human Birth: Separation vs. Connection**

**Readings:**

-Birth, Hospitals and the Human Spirit (J. Robbins)

-Selection from The Continuum Concept (J. Leidloff)

**Week 5-Human Child Raising: Separation vs. Connection**

**Readings:**

-The Ecopsychology of Child Development (A. Barrows)

-Nature and Madness (P. Shepard)

-TBA

**Field Study: Experiencing play (See full assignment below)**

**Week 6- Human Schooling: Separation vs. Connection**

**Readings:**

- The Seven-Lesson School Teacher (J. T. Gatto)
- Selections from Walking on Water (D. Jensen)
- The Grace of Great Things (P. Palmer)

**Field Study: The Learning Manifesto (See full assignment below)**

**Week 7- Human Technological Dependence: Separation vs. Connection****Readings:**

- The Web + the Plow (L. Monke)
- Tyranny of Technology (J. Mander)
- Virtual Nature (D. Orr)
- The Technology of Being (M. Birch)

**Field Study: The Techno-Fast (See full assignment below)**

**Week 8- Relationship to our Bodies: Separation vs. Connection****Readings:**

- The Skill of Ecological Perception (L. Sewall)
- Selection from A Natural History of the Senses (D. Ackerman)
- Selections from Buddha's Nature (W. Nisker)

**Field Study: Breath.... Movement.....**

**Week 9- Human Livelihood: Separation vs. Connection****Readings:**

- Are We Happy Yet? (A. Durning)
- The March of the Monoculture (H. Norberg-Hodge)
- Why Work? (B.Black)
- America, Mexico and Beyond (J. Sawyer)

**Field Study: Job Shadowing**

### **Week 10- Human Interrelations: Separation vs. Connection**

#### **Readings:**

- The Age of Rage (C. Honore)
- Speed (D. Orr)
- Spare the Rod (R. Eisler)
- Love and Resistance in Wartime (C. Hedges)
- Beyond Good and Evil (M. Rosenberg)

#### **Field Study: Two Experiments**

### **Week 11- Death and Dying: Separation vs. Connection**

#### **Readings:**

- How we Die
- Selection from Medical Nemesis by I. Illich

#### **Field Study. Hospice**

### **Week 12- Human Food Procurement: Separation vs. Connection**

#### **Readings:**

- Hamburger and a Coke (J. Ryan and A. During)
- Selection from Fast Food Nation
- Control of the World's Food Supply (K Lehman and A. Krebs)
- New Life at the Roots (C. Estes)

#### **Field Study: Eating from the land....**

### **Week 13-Relations with other Biological Beings: Separation vs. Connection**

#### **Readings:**

- The Psychopathology of the Human-Nature Relationship (R. Metzner)
- The Ecology of Magic (D. Abram)
- Selection from The Voice of the Infinite in the Small (J. Lauck)

### **Week: 14-Where Do We Go From Here: Separation vs. Connection**

## **Readings:**

-A Life Well Lived (P. Palmer)

-Selections from Loving What Is (B. Katie)

**Field Study: Doing The Work *ala* Byron Katie**

## **A Typical Week**

This is a 3-credit course that meets once a week. Here is what I will expect of you (and myself) in a “typical week”:

- **Before class: Careful reading of several papers (about 50 pages/week)**
- **Before each class: An Angel assignment where I invite you to respond to a query connected to the week’s readings.**
- **In class: An examination of the theme for the week** with particular emphasis on examining unexamined beliefs.
- **In class (most weeks): An active exploration** aimed at unlearning isolation/separation.
- **After selected classes: An individual “field study” where you take some sort of action.** I ask you to put your field-trip findings in a course journal. Field trip assignments will be given on the day of class and should be done (including journal entry) before the next class meeting.

## **Evaluation**

As I reflect on the many years I spent in schools, I realize that I didn’t learn much at all and I know that I am not alone. A big part of the reason that I didn’t learn much is that I wasn’t given the freedom to choose what I wanted to learn. Instead, a curriculum was imposed on me. This is not the case for you in this course. You have freely chosen it and you have the freedom to exit from the course should you so chose.

The sadness of my own experience in schooling and the fact that I now work at a public education institution creates both challenge and tension in my life. I ask myself: How might I teach in a way that cultivates a genuine desire for learning instead of fear and deadness and how might I give you, the student, the authority to assess the fullness and depth of your own learning? In my case, I know that desire for learning springs forth when I am given choice/freedom (i.e., when I get to be the architect of my learning!). I also know that I am much better able to assess the fullness and quality of my

learning than some outside “authority”. These realizations lead me to create a learning environment in this course that avoids rigid assignments and imposed grades.

**Open-ended Assignments.** Starting this week, my assignments for both field explorations and ‘angel’ reflections will be in the form of suggestions. I will tell you, in effect, what I will be doing and invite you to join me. If you find that you have little desire to follow the lead I offer, trust yourself (I do) to devise an exploration that is genuinely exciting and challenging for you.

**Collaborative Grading.** Throughout the semester I will comment on your journal writings and on your Angel assignments. However, I will not be assigning grades to these assignments, nor will I assign a final course grade. You will be the one assigning your final grade. Here’s how we will do this. At the end of the semester I will invite you to sit with me for a conversation to explore your journey in the course. As part of this conversation, I might ask you questions such as:

-What do you believe are good criteria for assessing the value and importance of this course for you?

-What did you learn about yourself through your work in this course? And what did you learn about the arts of living and suffering? In this conversation I will be asking you to be very concrete in your responses....

-In what way, if any, will you live your life differently as a result of the study that you have done in this course?

-Who, in your circle of friends/acquaintances has benefited from your participation in this course? Again, my request will be that you speak in very specific ways. At the end of this conversation, I will ask you to determine your grade.