

# STUDY GUIDE

## ***How to talk about “nature”?***

**Organised by**

**Brandenburg University of  
Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg**

1. IDENTIFYING DATA.		
· Course Name.	How to talk about “nature”?	
· Coordinating University.	Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg	
· Partner Universities Involved.		
· Course Field(s).	Environmental Humanities, Environmental History, Environmental Anthropology, Political Ecology	
· Related Study Programme.	Environmental and Resource Management (ERM) (Bachelor and Master level) World Heritage Studies (WHS) (Master level) Transformation Studies (TS) (Master Level)	
· ISCED Code.	0521 Environmental sciences 0314 Sociology and cultural studies 0222 History and archaeology	
· SDG.	3 – 5 - 11 – 12 - 13 – 15	
· Study Level.	<b>Both Bachelor (B) and Master (M) students</b> Staff and PhD students welcome	
· EUNICE Key Competencies	[Indicate the Key Competencies offered by the course.]	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green – strongly</li> <li>• Orange - moderately</li> <li>• Red – partially</li> <li>• Blank cell - not at all</li> </ul>	
	Problem solving	strongly
	Teamworking	strongly
	Communication	strongly
	Self-management	strongly
Cognitive flexibility	moderately	

	Digital competence	Partially
	Technical competence	Partially
	Global intercultural competence	strongly

· Number of ECTS credits allocated.	6 ECTS
· Mode of Delivery.	live, synchronous online course, individual on site fieldwork (local) where necessary
· Language of Instruction.	English
· Course Dates.	06. October, 2026 – 26. January, 2027
· Precise Schedule of the Lectures.	The course is delivered weekly through synchronous lectures and seminars held every Tuesday from 17:30 to 20:30.
· Key Words.	Nature; Wilderness; Anthropocene; Animal Studies; Plant Ethics; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; Oral Traditions;
· Catchy Phrase.	“Since taking this course, I’ve been experiencing parks, landscapes, and cities differently. Nothing is purely nature or purely culture anymore.”

· Prerequisites and co-requisites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prerequisites: None. There are no required courses to be completed beforehand.</li> <li>- Study Levels: Bachelor (B) and Master (M)</li> <li>- Required Linguistic Skills: English level required for admission to BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg (usually B2 level).</li> </ul>
· Number of EUNICE students that can attend the Course.	Total number is 20 (2 from each participating university)
· Course inscription procedure(s).	Eunice platform

## 2. CONTACT DETAILS.

· Department.	Chair of Technoscience Studies – Faculty 5
· Name of Lecturer.	Dr. Francesc G. Rodríguez Mansilla
· E-mail.	rodriguf@b-tu.de
· Other Lecturers.	Prof. Dr. Astrid Schwaz (schwarza@b-tu.de)

### 3. COURSE CONTENT.

"How to Talk About Nature?" engages the question of what "nature" is, how it is construed, and how we act with, in, or against it. This is an inquiry that is ontological and epistemological at the same time. Different cultures have developed different ways of thinking about and practising the culture/"nature" distinction, and the course probes these usages through historical and contemporary theoretical perspectives. It also examines how "nature" and technology are entangled in contemporary debates, offering insight into reading, writing, and visual practices about "nature".

### 4. LEARNING OUTCOMES.

After passing the module, students should be able to:

- Interrogate the concept of "nature" and expose its ideological, sociotechnical, cultural, and political manifestations.
- Recognise and value other forms of engaging with and knowing "nature" that are usually marginalised in dominant frameworks, including indigenous, oral, and more-than-human perspectives.
- Understand the main philosophical theories of "nature" in relation to the Western world, along with their cross-cultural dimensions in other contexts.
- Apply philosophical, historical, ethnographical, and socially informed positions to contemporary issues about "nature" (e.g., "nature" and colonialism, the climate crisis, environmental justice, "nature" as a scientific object, sociotechnical and political representations of "nature").

### 5. OBJECTIVES.

- To complicate students' common-sense views of "nature" and, at the same time, facilitate their understanding of complex issues relating to "naturecultures".
- To foster reflection on the ethical issues arising in relation to "nature."
- To enable students to combine critical thinking about "nature" with the ability to collaborate and act with reciprocity, engaging constructively with texts, peers, and more-than-human others.
- Understand the power of narratives, visual practices, and storytelling to shape our environmental present and future.

## 6. COURSE ORGANISATION.

### UNITS

- |     |                                                         |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Introduction                                            |
| 2.  | Nature's reality                                        |
| 3.  | "Nature" as wilderness                                  |
| 4.  | Event: "Your Wilderness"                                |
| 5.  | Oral cultures and "nature" awareness                    |
| 6.  | The "nature" of non-human animals                       |
| 7.  | The "nature" of plants                                  |
| 8.  | "Nature" extensionism                                   |
| 9.  | The contested "nature" of the Anthropocene              |
| 10. | From climate change to climate crisis                   |
| 11. | Environmental justice                                   |
| 12. | Geoengineering: a technofix for "nature"?               |
| 13. | Environmental ethics and animal ethics: an introduction |
| 14. | Wrap-up session and pop-quiz evening                    |

### LEARNING RESOURCES AND TOOLS.

Weekly assigned readings (available on Moodle), Moodle learning platform, and academic field trip [destination announced at the beginning of the semester, local option for remote students].

### PLANNED LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS.

The course combines lectures and seminars, incorporating role-playing exercises (e.g., debating nature governance as mayor of Toronto, Canada), group work on problem-solving situations (e.g., conservation dilemmas in environmental governance), pop quiz evenings, open public events such as the Plant Ethnography Forum, the special session "My Wilderness," and guest speaker sessions, among others.

## 7. ASSESSMENT METHODS, CRITERIA AND PERIOD.

Two assignments from the following three options (35% each, 70% total):

- Article Review
- Reading with Reciprocity

- Plant Ethnographic Journal

**Oral presentation / Collaboration group** (or alternative assignment based on answers to two readings on Moodle): 15%

**Short essay "My Wilderness":** 15%

The course is graded on the German university scale: 1.0 (excellent), 2.0 (good), 3.0 (satisfactory), 4.0 (sufficient), 5.0 (insufficient/fail), and assigned in line with the university's framework § 15 (1), (4) and (5).

**OBSERVATIONS.**

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND TEACHING MATERIALS.

(all available on the Moodle page of the course)

Abram, D. (1997). *The Spell of the Sensuous*. Vintage Books Editions.

Adams, D., Hardman, M., & Larkham, P. (2015). Exploring guerrilla gardening: gauging public views on the grassroots activity, *Local Environment*, 20(10), 1231-1246.  
<https://10.1080/13549839.2014.980227>

Anderson, E. (2012). Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life. In C. R. Sunstein & M. C. Nussbaum (Eds.): *Animal Rights: Current debates and new directions* (Chapter 13). Oxford University Press.

Baskin, J. (2019). Competing imaginaries of solar geoengineering. In J. Baskin: *Geoengineering, the Anthropocene and the End of Nature* (pp. 123-161). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Berger, J. (1980). Why look at animals? In J. Berger: *About Looking* (pp. 3-28). New York: Pantheon Books.

Booth, A.L. (2003). We are the Land: Native American views of nature. In Selin, H. (Ed.): *Nature Across Cultures. Science Across Cultures: The history of non-Western science* (pp. 329-249), vol 4. Springer.

- Castree, N. (2017). Nature. In International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology (eds D. Richardson, N. Castree, M.F. Goodchild, A. Kobayashi, W. Liu and R.A. Marston).
- Cronon, W. (1996). The Trouble with Wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature. *Environmental History*, 1(1), 7-28.
- Crutzen, P. J. (2002). Geology of Mankind. *Nature*. Vol. 415, 23.
- Hinchliffe, S. (2007). What are Geographies of Nature? In S. Hinchliffe: *Geographies of Nature: societies, environments, ecologies* (pp. 7-22). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Jasanoff, S. (2010). A New Climate for Society. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27(2-3), 233-253.
- Malm, A., & Hornborg, A. (2014). The Geology of Mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative. *The Anthropocene Review*, 62-69.
- O'Neil, J. (2006). Who Speaks for Nature? In Y. Haila, & C. Dyke (Eds.): *How Nature Speaks* (pp. 261-277). Duke University Press.
- Robert, T. J. (2018). Environmental Justice. In M. M. Boström, & D. J. Davidson (Eds.): *Environment and Society* (pp. 233-255). Palgrave Studies in Environmental Sociology and Policy.
- Sandler, R. (2017). What is Environmental Ethics? In R., Sandler: *Environmental Ethics: Theory in practice* (pp. 1-15). Oxford University Press.
- Stilgoe, J. (2015). *Experiment Earth: Responsible innovation in geoengineering* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.
- Temper, L., Del Bene, D., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2015). Mapping the Frontiers and Front Lines of Global Environmental Justice: the EJAtlas. *Journal of Political Ecology* 22(1), 255-278.
- Whitehead, H., & Rendell, L. (2015). *The cultural lives of whales and dolphins*. Harvard University Press.