



**S F S** THE SCHOOL  
FOR FIELD STUDIES

# Environmental Ethics and Development

## SFS 3820

**Syllabus**  
**4 credits**

The School for Field Studies (SFS)  
Center for Environmental Justice and Mekong Ecologies  
Siem Reap, Cambodia

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

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## **COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

***Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.***

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that they may present. In other words, this is a field program, and the field can change.

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## Course Overview

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Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy and social science that studies the moral relationship between human beings and the environment and its non-human components. Ethics are often defined as a way of thinking and approaching decisions in life dealing with what is acceptable or right and what is unacceptable or wrong. However, this course is predominantly not a philosophy course. Instead, this course takes a pragmatic approach to environmental ethics looking, through a variety of thematic scenarios, at how decisions relating to the environment can be made through an applied ethical lens. Following an introduction to the foundations of environmental ethics and the cultural context of Cambodia, we explore ethical problems that are pertinent to environmental studies. This course examines contemporary environmental dilemmas and topics as they affect Cambodia and the rapid development of these countries.

We all recognize that environmental problems can be incredibly complicated, morally, socially, politically, and ecologically. When it comes to environmental issues, we should ask: what are we responsible and accountable for as individuals? This question should be asked within two contexts: the first being the context and belief systems of the learner (US based college-aged students), and the second being the context and belief systems of the people in the places we visit at our international locations. Because questions related to environmental ethics are influenced by various scales, we will constantly be asking whether an American (or other developed nation) sense of the environment helps or hurts when it is projected onto a different part of the world.

This course uses a scenario-based approach to explore environmental ethics across seven different thematic scenarios that present real challenges in environmental management.

- Pollution in a Cambodian Village and National Park (Phnom Kulen)
- Waste Management and Public/Private Sector Relationships in Environmental Governance
- Mekong River Development Dilemmas
- Indigenous Peoples Access to Natural Resources and Conservation
- Conservation and ethical dilemmas
- Dams and (Sustainable?) Development
- Food Security, Water Governance and Environmental Impacts in the Mekong Region

Through these scenarios, this course will explore the following questions;

How are policy and day to day 'field' decisions relating to the environment and development made to be in line with an accepted standard of what is ethical? What framework do we use to make ethical decisions? What tools are available to ensure that decisions made are ethical? What global norms exist upon which ethical decisions for the environment are made? And how do these norms apply to the cultural context of the Mekong Basin?

This course will draw upon the foundations of the environmental ethics movement, customary environmental principles and evolving international norms, as well as regional customs and local cultural beliefs to explore environmental ethics and development in the Mekong region.

## Learning Objectives

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The learning objectives of this course may include:

- Students will be able to critically analyze the complexities in environmental philosophy including the responsibility to future generations, the problem of moral standing of human and non-human species and wilderness, sustainability regarding human development, global environmental challenges, and environmental justice.
- Students will become acquainted with concepts and methods of ethics that apply to issues regarding development, public policy making, environmental laws, public attitudes regarding humankind's dealings with the natural world.
- Students will critically assess alternative approaches to, and defenses of, a code of responsibility to nature (i.e., an environmental ethic).
- Students will also explore the role that religion plays in developing an environmental ethic.
- Students will receive a set of tools with which to formulate his/her own environmental ethic and to articulate and defend these ideas with clarity and consistency.
- Students will understand the complexity of legal and policy issues regarding environmental management and cultural heritage with specific focus on Cambodia.

## Assessment

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The evaluation breakdown for the course is as follows:

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Ethics Field Book / Journal Entries	20
Field Exercises (FEXs)	
Spirituality and Ethics	10
Indigenous People and Land	20
Stakeholder Scenario Activity	10
Participation/ Discussions	5
Final Exam	35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Note: quizzes may be added to the assessment schedule if faculty members feel the need. Grade corrections in any of the above items should be requested in writing at least 24 hours after assignments are returned. No corrections will be considered afterwards.

### Ethics Field Book/Journal Entries (20%)

Students will have the opportunity to explore a range of ethical scenarios not only in class but also through field trips throughout the semester. For each of these field trips – which coincide with the applied scenarios being examined, students will be asked to prepare a field book entry. Within each entry, students should explore the ethical conundrum in the field, writing about their experience, interpretation of the issues and delving into how the scenario is being approached and how it may/ should be addressed.

Field books are intended to include relevant observations and reflections. Students may use a variety of methods to create a field book entry whether that be through site descriptions and observations, informal interviews, illustration, photos, personal reflection and writing that highlights significant

learning moments. The objective of field book journals is to develop skills for creating permanent records of activities, events, feelings based on observation and reflection. The standard for grading will be based on your ability to express your experiences in meaningful ways related to ethical issues and dilemmas. Each student will submit their journal field book for review on specific dates.

### Field Exercises (30%)

Unlike field book entries, Field Exercises (FEXs) are more formal scholarly works. You will complete 2 FEXs where you address ethical and development topics in more depth, drawing not only on your field observations, but also on scientific papers and research. For FEXs you are required to use the APA Referencing System and formal writing styles (including an introduction and conclusion). When referencing field notes and field observations use the following format - this includes an in-text citation in brackets but no entry in your bibliography.

1. **Spirituality and Ethics (10%):** Local Cambodian beliefs make important contributions to social norms and notions of what is right and wrong – they are an important component of the moral framework of Khmer society. Some locations are frequently visited to pay homage to spirits and Buddhist icons in order to show deference and ask advice for a moral dilemma. For this FEX undertake a visit to the shrines of Yiey Tep and Preah Ang Chek / Preah Ang Chom. These shrines are in front of the Royal Palace in Siem Reap. Yiey Tep is located in the middle of the road between the gardens and the palace, and the Buddhist shrine is located in the gardens. Observe how Cambodians provide offerings at these locations.

*Briefly describe the spirits here and their place within Cambodian cosmology. Write about your experience of visiting these places – including how people give offerings. How is spirit veneration here different to western ideas of religion and science?*

2. **Indigenous Peoples' Access to Natural Resources and Conservation (20%):** Bunong indigenous communities have strong cultural connections with their surrounding forests. However, few communities have secure land tenure over their ancestral forests with much traditional community land being designated as wildlife sanctuaries, economic land concessions or sold to outsiders. Many villages struggle with ongoing challenges such as logging, land grabbing and access to natural resources. Following class briefings, field discussions and your visits to the communities of Andoung Kralang, Loav Ka and Putrom you should develop a position paper that explores issues of land security, community access to natural resources, and participation in conservation and natural resource management.

### Stakeholder Scenario Activity (10%)

This assessment requires no prior preparation. Students will be given a fictitious land use scenario and assigned the role of a stakeholder. Students will then come up with a position on the land use scenario from the perspective of their assigned stakeholder and debate with other stakeholders.

### Participation/Discussions (5%)

Throughout the semester several class discussions will take place which will explore ethical topics in depth. Students will have the opportunity to express their opinions and investigate ethical approaches to a particular topic among their peers. In preparation for discussions students may be expected to complete and review a reading either individually or in a group. All students will be expected to prepare several “points of discussion” to share in order to foster healthy respectful debate and clear expression of various outlooks and positions.

### Final Exam (35%)

The final exam must be completed in about 2 hours; it will be writing intensive. You will be given time to study for the exam; a class period will be designated as “review.” You will be examined on what you have been taught in class and in the field, and what you have been asked to read, so make sure you attend all lectures/field sessions and understand works from the required reading section.

### Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

### General Reminders

**Readings** – You are expected to have read all the required articles and book chapters prior to each class. Information from required readings will be part of the course assessments. All readings are available as PDFs on the Student Drive or from Internet hyperlinks. It is encouraged that “optional readings” be reviewed by students. The reading list might be updated or changed during the semester and some readings that are initially listed as optional may be changed to required.

**Plagiarism** – using the ideas or material of others without giving due credit – is cheating and will not be tolerated. A grade of zero will be assigned for anyone caught cheating or aiding another person to cheat either actively or passively. All assignments unless specifically stated should be individual pieces of work.

**Deadlines** – Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated to promote equity among students and to allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. As such, deadlines are firm; extensions will only be considered under extreme circumstances. Late assignments will incur a penalty of 10% of your grade for each day you are late. After two days past the deadline assignments will not be accepted anymore. Assignments will be handed back to students after a one-week grading period.

**Participation** – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than what you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the program is mandatory because your actions can significantly affect the experience you and your classmates have while at SFS. Therefore, it is important that you are prompt for all land and water-based activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and Directed Research, and simply get involved.

## Course Content

**Type:** **D:** Discussion, **FC:** Field Components, **GL:** Guest Lecture, **L:** Lecture, **O:** Orientation

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Required Readings
ED 1	Course Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenario-based approach</li> <li>• Field booking and FEXs</li> </ul>	L	1.5	Escobar, 2008.
ED 2	Framing Environmental Ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values and ethics</li> <li>• History of environmental ethics</li> </ul>	L	3.0	Cronon, 1996 Buscher et al., 2017.
ED 3	Regional Customs and Local Beliefs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of spirituality in environmental ethics</li> <li>• Traditional beliefs and the environment in Cambodia</li> <li>• Field trip: Visit to Angkor Wat and observation of local beliefs</li> </ul>	L; FC	6.5	Ang, 1998. Guillou, 2017. Gross, 2003.
ED 4	Applied Scenario 1: Environmental Pollution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of pollution</li> <li>• The role of environmental education in reducing pollution and role of Monks in Education</li> <li>• Field trip: Visit to Phnom Kulen National Park</li> </ul>	L; FC	3.0	Freinkel, 2011. Liboiron, 2021.
ED 5	Applied Scenario 2: Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of the state in conservation</li> <li>• The role of the market in conservation</li> </ul>	L; FC	5.5	Brockington et al., 2012.
ED 6	Applied Scenario 3: Waste Management and Public/Private Sector Relationships in Environmental Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance and the environment; rights, duties of states / individuals</li> <li>• Role of environmental policy</li> </ul>	L; FC	4.0	Mitchell, 2008.
ED 7	Applied Scenario 4: Mekong River Development Dilemmas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics and Transboundary Environmental Issues</li> <li>• Overview of trans boundary issues in the Mekong River Basin</li> </ul>	L; FC	5.5	Hirsch, 2016. Sneddon, 2006. Beasley et al., 2009.
ED 8	Applied Scenario 5: Development and Deforestation	L; FC	4.0	Milne et al., 2015. Le Billon, 2002.

No	Title and outline	Type	Time (hrs)	Required Readings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding forest change</li> <li>Cambodia and deforestation</li> </ul>			
ED 9	<p>Applied Scenario 6: Indigenous Peoples Access to Natural Resources and Conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mechanisms for addressing community rights</li> <li>Indigenous land rights in Cambodia</li> <li>Protecting traditional knowledge of land use</li> </ul>	L; FC	7.5	Li, 2014. Neth et al., 2013.
ED 10	<p>Environmental Justice Principles: A Framework for Ethical Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distributional ethics</li> <li>Defence of territory</li> <li>Reparations</li> </ul>	L	4.0	Schlosberg and Caruthers, 2010. Rodriguez, 2020.
ED 11	<p>Applied Scenario 7: Food Production, Water Governance and Environmental Impacts in the Mekong Delta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impact of climate change on rice production</li> <li>Food security and production in the Mekong Delta</li> <li>Global and transnational environmental impacts</li> </ul>	L; FC	9.5	Bach et al., 2012. Grove, 2014.
ED 12	<p>Environmental Ethics in Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applying an ethical framework at Angkor</li> <li>Theoretical models and the practice of decision making</li> <li>Discussion: Review of field booking entries and learning moments</li> </ul>	L; D	3.0	Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2013. Walsh, 2018. Patel, 2009.
ED 13	Final exam review session	D	1.5	
	<b>Total contact hours</b>		<b>58.5</b>	



## Reading List

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\*Readings in **Bold** are required

1. **Ang C. (1988). The place of Animism within Popular Buddhism in Cambodia the example of the monastery. *Asian Folklore Studies*. 47(1) pp.35-41.**
2. **Bach H, Bird J, Clausen TJ, Jensen KM, Lange RB, Taylor R, Viriyasakultorn V and Wolf A (2012). *Transboundary River Basin Management: Addressing Water, Energy and Food Security*. Mekong River Commission, Lao PDR.**
3. **Beasley, I., Marsh, H., Jefferson, T. A., & Arnold, P. (2009). Conserving dolphins in the Mekong River: the complex challenge of competing interests. In Campbell, I. (ed) *Aquatic Ecology in The Mekong* (pp. 363-387). Academic Press.**
4. Brigham, K. (2022). How the fossil fuel industry is pushing plastics on the world. CNBC. Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/29/how-the-fossil-fuel-industry-is-pushing-plastics-on-the-world-.html>
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6. **[Büscher, B., Fletcher, R., Brockington, D., Sandbrook, C., Adams, W. M., Campbell, L., Corson, C., Dressler, W., Duffy, R., & Gray, N. \(2017\). \*Half-Earth or Whole Earth? Radical ideas for conservation, and their implications\*. \*Oryx\*, 51\(3\), 407–410.](#)**
7. Campbell, S. (2020). Debt collection as labour discipline, *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie sociale*, 28(3), 729-742. Retrieved Sep 1, 2022, from <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/saas/28/3/soca12917.xml>
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10. Colm, S. (1997). Land Rights: The challenge for Ratanakiri's Indigenous Communities. *Watershed* 3(1): 1-9.
11. **Cronon, William (1996). "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28. Available at [https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble\\_with\\_Wilderness\\_Main.html](https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html)**
12. De la Cadena, M., & Blaser, M. Introduction: Pluriverse: A proposal for many worlds in De la Cadena, M., & Blaser (Eds.). (2018). *A world of many worlds*. Duke University Press.
13. **Escobar, A. (2008). *Nature in Territories of difference: place, movements, life, redes*: Duke University Press.**

14. Fairhead, J. and Leach, M. (1998) *Forests of Statistics: Deforestation in West Africa in 'Reframing Deforestation' – Global Analysis and Local Realities*, Routledge, New York
15. Foltz, R. C. (2003). *Worldviews, religion, and the environment*. Thompson Wadsworth: Belmont, California.
- 16. Freinkel, S. (2011). A Brief History of Plastic's Conquest of the World:**
17. Cheap plastic has unleashed a flood of consumer goods. *Scientific American*. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-brief-history-of-plastic-world-conquest/>
18. Frewer, T. (2021). Reconfiguring vulnerability: climate change adaptation in the Cambodian highlands. *Critical Asian Studies*, 53(4), 476-498.
- 19. Gross, R.M. (2003), Towards a Buddhist Environmental Ethic, in Folk, R.C (eds.) Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: an anthology, chapter 5, Wadsworth.**
- 20. Grove, K. (2014). Biopolitics and adaptation: Governing socio-ecological contingency through climate change and disaster studies. Geography Compass, 8(3), 198-210.**
- 21. Guillou, A.Y. (2017) Khmer potent places: Parami and the localization of Buddhism and monarchy in Cambodia. The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology, 18 (5), 421-443**
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31. Lin, K. (2001). Finding the Right Chemistry: The U.S. Chemical Industry in Asia. *Business and Politics*, 3(2), 185-202. doi:10.2202/1469-3569.1024
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38. Oganda, M. (2019). Decolonising Conservation: It Is About the Land, Stupid! The Elephant. Available at: <https://www.theelephant.info/culture/2019/06/27/decolonising-conservation-it-is-about-the-land-stupid/>
39. **Patel, R. (2009). Food sovereignty. *The journal of peasant studies*, 36(3), 663-706.**
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