

Cognition in the Wild

OSHER Spring 2024

Tuesdays, 3:30pm-5:00pm
540 Arapleen Dr., Room 232

Co-Instructors

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Office Hours and Location

By appointment

Optional Materials

We strive to support local businesses, so we suggest you buy these books at the new Ken Sanders Rare Book Store location in the Leonardo Museum in downtown Salt Lake City (209 E 500 S, Salt Lake City, UT 84111).

Required: *The Nature Fix* by Florence Williams
ISBN-13: 978-0393242713

Optional: *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey
ISBN-0-671-69588-6

General Course Information

Course Description

Thoreau went into the woods in the 1850's to escape the hustle and bustle of city life. Today, our senses are overstimulated and overtaxed by the modern world. This course will explore ways that immersion in nature can help restore our cognitive resources and decrease the stress associated with city life. We will review theoretical perspectives and scientific research surrounding the effects of exposure to nature on human health and well-being. Using an environmental neuroscience lens, the course will focus on how humans interact with the natural environment. How does nature affect mental health? How does nature affect cognitive health? How does interacting with nature reduce stress and make us more creative? Can we encourage people to spend time in nature, while still conserving it? What are some of the barriers to accessibility, especially for groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the outdoors?

Expectations, Goals, and Learning Outcomes

This course is a seminar format in which we will collectively read papers or books on various topics and then have class discussions about the material. Class periods will generally consist of lecture-style presentations from the instructors on a given topic, followed by class discussions in which we discuss the content of the lecture and readings from that week. The class is designed to be a collaborative experience, where we learn from each other. We will sample quite broadly from the literature and focus on the intersection between the sciences and humanities. The goals of this course are as follows:

1. To understand and describe the various theories underlying the health and cognitive benefits of time spent in nature.
2. To critically evaluate the scientific research that has been done related to nature, stress, and cognition.
3. To actively engage in group discussion and respectful debate surrounding the topics we will discuss in class.

4. To consider scientific evidence through an interdisciplinary lens—including taking multiple diverse perspectives into account regarding the human connection to nature.
5. To understand the barriers to accessibility to nature, especially for diverse groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the outdoors.

Course Schedule and Readings

Week	Topic	Readings before class:
Week 1: March 26, 2024	Course Overview Theoretical Approaches	
Week 2: April 2, 2024	Technology and Nature	<i>The Nature Fix</i> : Intro, Ch. 1, Ch. 2 “Solitude” from <i>Desert Solitaire</i>
Week 3: April 9, 2024	Nature and the Brain	<i>The Nature Fix</i> : Ch. 8, Ch. 9 McDonnell & Strayer (2024)
Week 4: April 16, 2024	Nature and Stress Physiology	Scott et al. (2021) Park et al. (2009)
Week 5: April 23, 2024	Nature as a Clinical Intervention	<i>The Nature Fix</i> : Ch. 7, Ch.10, Ch. 11 Bratman et al. (2015)
Week 6: April 30, 2024	Red Butte Garden EEG Demo	<i>The Nature Fix</i> : Ch. 3, Ch. 4, Ch. 5

Student Resources

Campus Safety

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit <http://safeu.utah.edu/>.

Wellness Statement

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student’s ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness (801-581-7776; <https://wellness.utah.edu/>). The Counseling Center (<https://counselingcenter.utah.edu/>) is another excellent resource, offering services that include counseling and a mindfulness clinic.

Veterans Center

If you are a student veteran, the University of Utah has a Veterans Support Center on campus. They are located in Room 161 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F, 8-5 p.m. For more information about what support they offer, a list of ongoing events and links to outside resources exists at this page: <https://veteranscenter.utah.edu/>. Please also let me know if you need any additional support in this class for any reason.