

PSY4130 Cognition in the Wild

Fall 2023

T/TH 9:10am-10:30am

Social & Behavioral Sciences (BEHS), Room 712

Instructor

Dr. Amy McDonnell, PhD (she/her)

Email

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Office Hours and Location

T/TH 10:30am-11:30am, Business Classroom Building (BUC), Room 308

Contact

Email is the best way to reach me. Please don't hesitate to reach out to set up a meeting. I will do my best to respond to emails within 48 hours.

Note: This syllabus is meant to serve as an outline and guide for our course. Please note that I may modify it with reasonable notice to you. I may also modify the Course Schedule to accommodate the needs of our class. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas under Announcements.

Required Materials

I strive to support local businesses, so I would like to request that you please 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). He will have them in stock waiting for you. These are the only books that you will need to purchase. The rest of the readings will be available on Canvas.

The Nature Fix by Florence Williams

ISBN-13: 978-0393242713

Desert Solitaire by Edward Abbey

ISBN-13: 978-0671695880

General Course Information

Pre-Requisites and Requirements

The pre-requisites for this course involve a "C" or better in PSY 1010 or PSY 1011, or an AP Psychology score of 3 or higher OR IB Psychology score of 5 or higher. This class does not meet a GE requirement.

Course Description

This seminar focuses 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 affect stress? How 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? We will use Southern Utah as a case study in exploring these questions. As part of the course, we will take a 5-day camping trip to Southern Utah. We will hike the slickrock, observe pictographs and petroglyphs, visit several ancient Anasazi dwellings, and try to answer these questions through our own experience.

Expectations, Goals, and Learning Outcomes

This course is a seminar format in which we will collectively read papers, chapters, or books on various topics and then have class discussions about the readings. Tuesday class periods will generally consist of lecture-style presentations from me or a guest speaker on a given topic. Thursdays will consist of student-led 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 class should be fun and thought provoking, but it does require reading, writing, and field experience. 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 understand and implement the scientific method.
3. To be able to critically evaluate the scientific research that has been done related to nature, stress, and cognition.
4. To actively engage in group discussion and respectful debate surrounding the topics we will discuss in class.
5. To develop your own research plan to test a scientific hypothesis.
6. To consider scientific evidence through an interdisciplinary lens—including taking multiple diverse perspectives into account regarding the human connection to nature.
7. To understand the barriers to accessibility to nature, especially for diverse groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the outdoors.
8. To develop an understanding of the threats that face our climate, and the role of the individual in conservation and climate action.

Sustainability Course Attribute

This course fulfills the University of Utah requirements of the sustainability course attribute. Specifically, the four Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will be explored in this course include:

- Goal 3: Good Health & Well-being
- Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
- Goal 13: Climate Action
- Topic Area 4: Nature & Culture

Certain topics and assignments in this course are intended to directly engage discussion surrounding each of these SDGs. To meet Goal 3, we will dedicate two weeks at the beginning of the semester to explicitly explore the intersection between exposure to natural environments, health, and well-being. These topics will then serve as a through line of discussion throughout the semester and are reflected in Learning Outcome #1. You will also hear from speakers whose work revolves around breaking down the “barriers to entry” that keep traditionally underrepresented groups from accessing nature. These discussions, as well as Canvas Discussion Posts related to identifying the gaps in the nature and cognition scientific literature regarding issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion will address Goal 10 and Learning Outcome #7. In the latter half of the semester, we will shift our focus to conservation and climate action, with discussion emerging from the required text *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey. Edward Abbey’s controversial opinions and anecdotes regarding climate action will spark respectful debates about environmental protection. The pillars of Goal 13 and Learning Outcome #8 will be further enhanced by hearing from guest speaker Ken Sanders—a long-time friend of Edward Abbey and Utah conservationist himself. Topic Area 4 will be addressed through reading excerpts from *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer to understand indigenous wisdom regarding the health benefits of being in nature.

Learning Philosophy

This course is meant to pique your interest in the benefits of the natural environment on human cognition and stress. It will expose you to the literature surrounding the physiological, cognitive, and socio-cultural processes involved in the human connection to nature. I will do my best to fulfill this goal, but it is essential that you are engaged with the course in order to meet these outcomes. Attendance in class, active participation in the discussion, and completion of all the readings and written assignments will help you achieve this goal. Please let me know how I can support you in your learning.

Classroom Inclusivity

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

1. Attendance and Participation in Discussion (10%)

Attendance will be taken every class period. You are allowed to miss two classes with no deduction from your grade. Participation is key in this course, so attendance is essential.

2. Weekly Discussion Posts on Canvas (15%)

Each week, you are expected to answer thought-provoking questions or engage in short activities that will be posted on the Discussion Board in Canvas. You are also welcome (and encouraged) to add your own, unprompted thoughts about the readings. Your post will help the discussion leader lead conversation in class on Thursday. Late posts will not receive credit. You may miss two weeks of discussion posts with no deduction from your grade. **Due at 11:59pm on Wednesday evenings (the night before class).**

Note: To receive full credit, discussion posts need to be substantive. Yes/no answers, definitional answers, or mere summary of the texts will not suffice. Posts will need to be at least a paragraph or two long to address all the readings and display critical thinking. The intention of the discussion post is to prompt thoughtful discussion in class on Thursdays.

These posts will be graded on a 0 to 3-point scale:

- 0 = Nothing submitted
- 1 = The post is somewhat superficial, minimally related to the readings
- 2 = Good points/work, but they are limited in scope and could be more substantive
- 3 = Meaningful, thought-provoking work that stimulates discussion and introspection

3. Discussion Leader (10%)

Most Thursdays, 2-3 students will lead the discussion. As the discussion leaders, you are expected to give an overview of the readings from the week and how they relate to the bigger picture of the interaction between humans and the natural environment. Your goal as a discussion leader is to foster thoughtful exchange among students in our class. Your best resource will be the material contributed by classmates in their discussion posts. You are responsible for organizing everyone's contributions into a few themes and calling on people to pose their question or discuss their response in more detail during class. As the

discussion leader you must, of course, read the material ahead of time so that you have thought about it on your own as well. Try to be creative in how you choose to lead the discussion! You may use handouts, interactive activities (going outside is a perk), videos, additional texts, demonstrations, etc. It is often helpful and interesting to find videos or articles online that provide new perspectives on the topic you are presenting on. You will be graded on your ability to facilitate discussion and engage with the class.

4. Participation and Presentation on the Field Trip (25%)

As part of the course, we will be going on a 5-day camping trip to Sand Island Campground near Bluff, UT. If you are unable to come on the trip, you might consider taking this course a different semester when you are able to come. The dates of the trip are **Wednesday, October 4th – Sunday, October 8th, 2023**. No camping experience is necessary! I will arrange all the logistics (campsite reservations, meals, hikes). The trip will cost \$70.00/student to cover the cost of food and campsites. In addition, you will split the cost of gas to and from Bluff with all members of your vehicle. We will carpool as best we can.

On the trip, you will be required to give a **10-minute presentation** on any topic of your choice. These presentations will be storytelling style and will take place around the campfire each night. In the past, topics have ranged from native Utah plants, to green burials, to how to make a fire with sticks and rocks, to songs written about the course material. This is a chance to add a more creative element to learning.

5. Final Research Proposal (25%)

I would like you to be thinking critically throughout the semester as to how you would measure the “nature effect” in relation to one of the Sustainable Development Goals discussed throughout the course (Goal 3: *Good Health & Well-being*, Goal 10: *Reduced Inequalities*, Goal 13: *Climate Action*, Topic Area 4: *Nature & Culture*). By the end of the semester, you will develop a research proposal for an experiment of your own design. Your final paper will include an Introduction, a Methods section, and an Expected Results section. The paper will be 6-8 pages (not including references), double spaced, 1-inch margins, and will cite at least four peer-reviewed articles in APA style. A rubric and example research proposal will be available on Canvas. **Due at 11:59pm on Friday, December 8, 2023.**

6. Research Proposal Draft (10%)

To ensure that you are on track with the Final Research Proposal, you will submit a shortened version in the middle of the semester. This will include approximately 1-2 paragraphs of an introduction of the research proposal, a detailed research question, a hypothesis, and 2 paragraphs of methods (how you would measure this research question). The paper should be 2-3 pages, double spaced, 1-inch margins, and must have at least two peer-reviewed articles cited in APA style. I will provide detailed feedback on the research proposal draft, and it will be a useful starting point for your final paper. A rubric and example draft will be available on Canvas. **Due at 11:59pm on Friday, October 20, 2023.**

7. Research Presentation (5%)

In the last two weeks of class, you will give a 10-minute presentation of your research proposal with 2 minutes of questions. You will give a very brief overview of your introduction, methods, and expected results. You may use PowerPoint for this presentation but must be limited to 1 or 2 slides.

Extra Credit

You will have an opportunity to get extra credit by participating in environmental psychology research on campus. Please email appliedcognitionlabeeg@gmail.com to hear about the studies that are available and schedule your appointments. By participating in research, you can receive 1

percentage point of extra credit. For example, if you have an 89% in the class at the end of the semester, participating in this research can raise your grade to a 90%. I strongly encourage you to participate in research, as a large part of this course is learning the implementation of the scientific method. Participation in research on campus will help achieve Learning Outcomes #2 and #5.

Important University Dates

Friday, September 1st: Last day to add or drop classes
Friday, October 20th: Last day to withdraw from classes
Monday-Friday, October 9th-13th: Fall Break
Thursday, December 7th: Classes end
Monday-Friday, December 11th-15th: Final exam period

Grading

This course will be graded using the associated letter grades and averages, which will be strictly enforced.

<i>University of Utah Grading Scale</i>		
	<i>Score</i>	<i>GPA</i>
A	: 93-100	4.0
A-	: 90-92	3.7
B+	: 87-89	3.3
B	: 83-86	3.0
B-	: 80-82	2.7
C+	: 77-79	2.3
C	: 73-76	2.0
C-	: 70-72	1.7
D+	: 67-69	1.3
D	: 63-66	1.0
D-	: 60-62	0.7
E	: 0-59	0.0

Late Assignments

Late discussion posts will not be accepted. Keep in mind that you can miss two discussion posts without penalty to your final grade. If you need to move a due date for the research proposal draft or the final paper, please let me know at least a week ahead of time and we can arrange for a new due date that will not affect your grade. If any of the assignments are late without a pre-approval, 5% of the grade will be deducted for that assignment for every day that it is late.

Academic Misconduct

It is expected that students adhere to University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code (<https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-410.php>) and the Psychology department's policies (https://psych.utah.edu/undergraduate/files/acad_misconduct_policy.pdf).

I encourage students to refrain from utilizing AI language models, such as ChatGPT, in their writing assignments. The primary goal of this course is to nurture your individual intellectual growth, critical thinking, and scientific writing skills. Embracing the challenge of formulating your own thoughts and arguments will enhance your learning experience and deepen your understanding of the subject matter. Instead, rely on your insights, research, and creativity to craft well-structured and original pieces of writing. Engaging in this process will not only foster academic integrity but also empower you to express your unique perspectives effectively.

Behavioral Misconduct

I strive for our classroom to be a welcoming environment for all—no matter your gender identity, race, orientation, or beliefs. If a student is being disrespectful to the instructor or another student, they will be asked to leave the classroom and may be subject to further disciplinary action within the university.

Per university policy, no drugs or alcohol are allowed on the field trip.

Course Schedule and Readings

Week	Topic	Assigned Readings
Week 1: August 22 nd & 24 th	T: Course Overview TH: Theoretical Approaches	For TH: Kaplan (1995) Ulrich et al. (1991)
Week 2: August 29 th & 31 st	T: The Scientific Method TH: Nature and Behavior	<i>The Nature Fix</i> , Intro & Chapter 1 Nadkarni et al. (2017)
Week 3: September 5 th & 7 th	T: Nature and Affect/Well-being TH: Discussion	<i>The Nature Fix</i> , Chapter 9 Berman et al. (2012)
Week 4: September 12 th & 14 th	T: Nature and the Brain I TH: Discussion	<i>The Nature Fix</i> , Chapter 2 Bratman et al. (2015) Sudimac et al. (2022)
Week 5: September 19 th & 21 st	T: Nature and the Brain II TH: Discussion	<i>The Nature Fix</i> , Chapter 8 LoTempio et al. (2020) McDonnell et al. (under review)
Week 6: September 26 th & 28 th	T: Nature and Stress Physiology TH: Discussion	Park et al. (2009) Scott et al. (2021)
Week 7: October 3 rd & 5 th	T: Trip Preparation	Trip leaves at 8am on Wednesday, October 4th and returns afternoon Sunday, October 8th
Week 8: October 10 th & 12 th	FALL BREAK	
Week 9: October 17 th & 19 th	T: Diversity in the Outdoors I <i>Guest:</i> Myra Gerst TH: Discussion	Walker et al. (2021) LoTempio et al. (2023) Research Proposal Draft due Friday, October 20th at 11:59pm
Week 10: October 24 th & 26 th	T: Nature as a Clinical Intervention TH: Discussion	<i>The Nature Fix</i> , Chapter 10 & 11 Russell (2001)
Week 11: Oct 31 st & Nov 2 nd	T: Visual Properties of Nature <i>Guest:</i> Dr. Jeanine Stefanucci TH: Discussion	<i>The Nature Fix</i> , Chapter 5 Schertz & Berman (2019) <i>Desert Solitaire</i> , pg. xi-38
Week 12: November 7 th & 9 th	T: Climate Action I <i>Guest:</i> Ken Sanders TH: Discussion	<i>Desert Solitaire</i> , pg. 39-81
Week 13: November 14 th & 16 th	NO CLASS	<i>Desert Solitaire</i> , pg. 82-127
Week 14: November 21 st & 23 rd	T: Climate Action II <i>Guest:</i> Jess Johnson [ZOOM] TH: No Class (Thanksgiving)	<i>Desert Solitaire</i> , pg. 128-195 The Wilderness Letter
Week 15: November 28 th & 30 th	T: Discussion TH: Research Presentations	<i>Desert Solitaire</i> , pg. 196-216
Week 16: December 5 th & 7 th	Research Presentations	Fill out Course Feedback Final Research Proposal due Friday December 8th at 11:59pm

Student Resources

Student Names and Personal Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to me with each student's legal name as well as a "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account, which managed can be managed at any time). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class or on assignments. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun are respected. If you need any assistance or support, please reach out to the LGBT Resource Center.

https://lgbt.utah.edu/campus/faculty_resources.php

Diversity/Inclusion Statement

I stand in support of compassion, dignity, value-of-life, equity, inclusion and justice for all individuals regardless of color, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, language, socioeconomic status, ability, gender, gender identity or expression, immigration status, or any type of marginalization. I stand in support of making our society more inclusive, just, and equitable for all individuals. I stand against individual and systemic racism in all its various forms.

Undocumented Student Support Statement

Immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. If your immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific course criteria, confidential arrangements may be requested from the Dream Center. Arrangements with the Dream Center will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence. The Dream Center offers a wide range of resources to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) as well as students from mixed-status families. To learn more, please contact the Dream Center at 801.213.3697 or visit

<https://dream.utah.edu>

Americans with Disabilities Act Policy

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability & Access, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020, <https://disability.utah.edu/>. CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability & Access.

Student Mental Health Resources

Rates of burnout, anxiety, depression, isolation, and loneliness have noticeably increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. If you need help, campus mental health resources are available, including counseling, trainings and other support: <https://studentaffairs.utah.edu/mental-health-resources/index.php>

Accommodations

Per Section Q of the University's Accommodation Policy (<https://tinyurl.com/4c5xftk2>), I will accommodate University activities as well as values-based obligations that conflict with course activities. E-mail me the dates and nature of expected absences no later than 2 weeks prior to the anticipated absence so that alternatives can be worked out. There will be no content accommodations. Some of the material in this course may conflict with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus and topics carefully and make sure you are able to engage in all of the topics. In line with University policy, students are still responsible for following all ethical academic practices.

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/>.

Addressing Sexual Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

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 Oplin 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.

LGBTQ+ Resource Center

The University of Utah has an LGBTQ+ Resource Center on campus, located in Room 409 in the Oplin Union Building. Hours: M-F, 8-5 p.m. For more information about the support they offer, a list of events and links to additional resources: <https://lgbt.utah.edu/>.