



Course Outline

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

In grateful acknowledgement of the L'kwungen & WSÁNEĆ peoples upon whose territories we are able to live and learn.

Lecture: M/Thur 10:00-11:20 in Cornett Building (COR) A225

Office hours: M 15:00-17:00 in DTB B210

Contact: Cam Owens camo@uvic.ca

* Please review this courses outline and resources on [Brightspace](#) before reaching out. I receive a high volume of messages and am often not able to respond immediately. I will aim to reply within 24 hours (not including weekends). *Please do not leave important matters to the last minute.*

Course Description

This course explores systematic approaches to predicting, evaluating, and mitigating the adverse impacts of development during a time of significant socio-ecological precarity. Drawing on diverse disciplines—including geography, environmental studies, law, political science, and Indigenous studies—we critically examine environmental decision-making processes, unpack the complex political and cultural contexts within which these decisions occur, investigate current practices, and envision pathways for improvement, with a primary focus on the BC experience.

Instructor-led discussions of theory and engaging case studies—both historical and contemporary—are enriched by guest speakers offering a wide range of perspectives. Students will engage with scholarly literature, government reports, and documentary films. A key feature of this course is the opportunity for students to conduct research directly relevant to the BC government by drafting technical briefing notes or creating resources to support environmental education.

Amid pressing socio-ecological challenges, this course focuses on the practicalities of environmental decision-making while inspiring critical reflection and meaningful contributions. Students should find great value in its relevance to addressing complex environmental issues.

Brightspace

You will access the [Brightspace](#) site for important announcements, to submit assignments, and to access information handouts, instructor slides, readings, your grades, and other stuff. Guidance for navigating Brightspace is [available](#).

Course Text and Additional Resources

The cornerstone of our course is the textbook: **Noble, B. 2021. *Introduction to Environmental Assessment: A Guide to Principles & Practice, Fourth Edition*, Toronto: Oxford.**

This text, available in the bookstore or [online](#), is vital as it provides a comprehensive overview of the environmental assessment process. Reading is a more efficient method for learning these details compared to the passive absorption that often occurs during lecturing. Your understanding of the reading materials will be assessed periodically through online quizzes, and a comprehensive understanding of broader concepts will be tested in the final exam. This approach incentivizes thorough reading, which not only facilitates learning but also allows us to use lecture time for deep critical analysis and addressing your questions, rather than merely reiterating content that can be more effectively learned on your own. Invest time and effort consistently, and you will see the rewards.

In addition to our main textbook, you will have access to additional materials, including journal articles, book chapters, government documents and websites, and documentary videos. Active engagement with all these materials is essential. Simply reading passively does not facilitate the transfer of knowledge from short-term to long-term memory. Instead, get into the habit of marking up texts, taking detailed notes, raising questions, and making connections with other content. This active approach will enhance your understanding and retention of the course material.

Learning Outcomes

This course offers an opportunity to deepen your understanding of environmental management while cultivating essential skills and habits for professional and personal growth. Disciplined and focused students will complete this course with:

1. A thorough understanding of the historical, political, and cultural contexts in which formal environmental assessment has evolved, with a focus on its theory and practice in British Columbia and Canada.
2. A stronger grasp of the complexities involved in measuring and evaluating interconnected ecological and social phenomena.
3. A comprehensive understanding of how environmental impacts are assessed, the rationale behind existing practices, and opportunities for improvement. Students will also critically examine the limited scope of project-based environmental assessments and the importance of broader socio-environmental governance.
4. An appreciation of the central role of Indigenous peoples in environmental governance, particularly within the broader frameworks of reconciliation and resurgence.
5. The ability to craft clear, concise, and effective professional communications, including briefing notes, adhering to industry standards.
6. Greater discipline, focus, intentionality, organization, and consistency, alongside the development of confidence, courage, conscientiousness, empathy, and dedication to thoughtful and ethical engagement in environmental management.

Geography Department Info

- Geography Department website: uvic.ca/socialsciences/geography/
- Geography Department Chair: geogchair@uvic.ca
- Geography Undergraduate Advising: geogadvising@uvic.ca

Evaluation

You will be evaluated on the following required elements all accessed through Brightspace.

Periodic Quizzes on Readings – (see schedule for due dates) 35%

Understanding the intricacies of Environmental Assessment (EA) is best achieved through detailed reading, which conveys facts and processes more effectively than lectures. Five quizzes offered throughout the course (see schedule) will incentivize you to keep up with the readings and build a solid foundation of knowledge. This ensures we can use lecture time more effectively for critical analysis, real-world applications, in-depth discussions, and addressing your questions—making the most of our time together.

Assignment: Briefing Note – 30%

For this assignment, you will undertake the highly practical activity of writing a briefing note—an essential skill for EA practitioners. Your briefing note will address an issue of actual relevance to the BC EA Office, with topics provided by an EA director. This assignment offers an opportunity to apply your knowledge to a real-world context, preparing you for professional roles in EA. As with Assignment 1, you have the option to work solo or collaborate with one classmate.

Final Exam – 35%

Scheduled by the registrar in April with more details to follow.

Grading System

As per the Academic Calendar:

Grade	Grade point value	Grade scale	Description
A+ A A-	9 8 7	90-100% 85-89% 80-84%	Exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. Normally achieved by a minority of students. These grades indicate a student who is self-initiating, exceeds expectation and has an insightful grasp of the subject matter.
B+ B B-	6 5 4	77-79% 73-76% 70-72%	Very good, good and solid performance. Normally achieved by the largest number of students. These grades indicate a good grasp of the subject matter or excellent grasp in one area balanced with satisfactory grasp in the other area.
C+ C	3 2	65-69% 60-64%	Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory. These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.
D	1	50-59%	Marginal Performance. A student receiving this grade demonstrated a superficial grasp of the subject matter.
F	0	0-49%	Unsatisfactory performance. Wrote final examination and completed course requirements; no supplemental.
N	0	0-49%	Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.

Tentative Schedule of Topics

(see Brightspace for a more complete, up to date schedule including readings)

Week	Date & Topic	Tasks
Unit I – Introduction & Context		
1	Jan 6 – Course intro & designing an Environmental Assessment (EA) process Jan 9 – Assessing Assessment	
2	Jan 13-17- Introducing EA	
3	Jan 20-23 – The context of EA	
4	Jan 27-30- Briefing Note Workshop with Sean Addie, BC Ministry of Forests	
Unit II – Environmental Assessment Process		
5	Feb 3 – Pre-project planning & determining the need for assessment Feb 6 – Public engagement	Quiz 1: Text Ch 3-4 (due before class on Feb 3)
6	Feb 10- Guest speaker Ashley-Ann Churchill (Secwepemc Nation member) Feb 13 - Indigenous engagement	Quiz 2: Text Ch 10 + readings (due before class on Feb 10)
7	Feb 17-21 Reading Break	
8	Feb 24 – Scoping & baseline assessment Feb 27 – Impact prediction & characterization	Quiz 3: Text Ch 5-6 (due before class on Feb 24)
9	Mar 3 – Guest speaker (TBA) Mar 6 – Managing project impacts & determining significance	Quiz 4: Text Ch 7-9 (due before class on Mar 3)
10	Mar 10 – Follow up and Monitoring Mar 13 – Chris Parks (BC EAO) on compliance & enforcement	
Unit III – Emerging Practice: Beyond Conventional EA		
11	Mar 17 – Emerging practice intro Mar 20 – Guest speaker (TBA)	Quiz 5: TBD (due before class on Mar 17)
12	Mar 24 – Guest speaker (TBA) Mar 27 – Guest speaker (TBA)	
13	Mar 31- Debrief Apr 3 – Course wind down	Briefing Note Assignment (due Apr 3)

Additional Course Information and Policies

Academic Integrity

It is every student's responsibility to be aware of the university's policies on [academic integrity](#), including policies on cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized use of an editor, multiple submission, and aiding others to cheat. If you have any questions or doubts, talk to me, your course instructor. For other resources on writing see the [Centre for Academic Communication](#).

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a documented disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Centre for Accessible Learning](#) (CAL) as soon as possible. The RCSD staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Artificial Intelligence Usage

Understanding AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to systems designed to mimic human intelligence, such as natural language processing or problem-solving. Tools like ChatGPT can generate human-like responses, assist with editing, or provide ideas and outlines based on prompts. While these tools are effective at synthesizing information and generating content quickly, they have significant limitations. AI can produce articulate but factually incorrect or misleading responses, lacks critical thinking and contextual understanding, and cannot replace rigorous research or original thought. Additionally, AI tools often rely on pre-existing data, which means they may fail to provide up-to-date, accurate, or nuanced insights, especially on complex topics.

Using AI Effectively and Ethically

In this course, you are encouraged to explore AI as a learning tool or assistant, but you must do so responsibly and ethically. Here's how you may use AI:

- **Effective Uses:** Structuring outlines, brainstorming ideas, drafting initial thoughts, and receiving editing suggestions for clarity and grammar.
- **Ineffective Uses:** Solely relying on AI for research, using it to generate final submissions, or accepting its outputs without verification, as AI cannot replace academic rigor or provide the depth required for this course.

Guidelines for Using AI

1. **Academic Integrity:** All AI-assisted work must be your own. You must review, revise, and critically engage with any material AI helps you produce. Directly passing off AI-generated work as your own is a violation of academic integrity and will result in consequences as outlined by the university's policies.
2. **Citing AI Use:** If you use AI tools, you must clearly document their contributions. For example, if you used AI to draft an outline or edit a draft, include a brief note or citation explaining how you used it.
3. **Critical Evaluation:** AI can produce convincing but incorrect or incomplete responses. It is your responsibility to verify all information, cross-check with credible sources, and ensure the accuracy and reliability of your work.

Course Experience Survey

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience (CES). The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. The survey is accessed via MyPage and can be done on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. I will remind you and provide you with more detailed information nearer the time but please be thinking about this important activity during the course.

Expectations of Behaviour

I will do everything I can to create an effective, engaging learning environment. I invite you to be part of something special. Please be punctual, respectful, compassionate, and attentive.

Intellectual Property

According to the university's Intellectual Property Policy (GV0215), professors and instructors are the authors of their original course materials, lecture notes, and lecture presentations. Accordingly, they own the copyright in these materials. A lecture constitutes an instructor's intellectual property. A student must get permission to record the lecture from their instructor. Any material for the course (e.g., lecture notes, PowerPoints, syllabus, including a recording of a lecture) is made solely for the use of the student registered in the course for research and private study only. These materials must not be posted online or shared with other students without the instructor's permission. In some cases, a student with a perceptual disability will be eligible for an academic accommodation to record a lecture. Please visit the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) website for more information. You should be aware that there are policies and legislation regarding academic accommodation. Should you have any questions, please contact the Copyright Office.

International Students

The University of Victoria offers a number of resources to support international students as they pursue their studies. UVic's [International Centre for Students](#) is the primary office supporting international students on campus at the university-wide level and provides various supportive program through the [UVic Global Community Initiative](#), including a Mentorship Program and Conversation Partner Program. For academic advising-related questions, students in the Geography Department are also encouraged to meet with the Geography Undergraduate Advisor (geogadvising@uvic.ca) as well as an academic advisor in the [Academic Advising Centre](#) early in their studies to help map out a plan to declare a major and complete university program requirements. Other resources include the [Centre for Academic Communication](#) and the [Math and Stats Assistance Centre](#). International students are also encouraged to contact the International Student Liaison in Geography (Prof. CindyAnn Rose-Redwood, cindyann@uvic.ca), who can assist in making connections with other international and domestic students in the Geography Department and share opportunities for getting involved in departmental activities more broadly.

Positivity & Safety

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive and safe learning and working environment for all its members.

Self-Care

A note to remind you to take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone.

Counselling Services - *Counselling Services can help you make the most of your university experience. They offer free professional, confidential, inclusive support to currently registered UVic students.* uvic.ca/services/counselling/

Health Services - *University Health Services (UHS) provides a full service primary health clinic for students, and coordinates healthy student and campus initiatives.* uvic.ca/services/health/

Centre for Accessible Learning - *The CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations* uvic.ca/services/cal/. *The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.*

Elders' Voices - *The Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE) has the privilege of assembling a group of Elders from local communities to guide students, staff, faculty and administration in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.* uvic.ca/services/indigenous/students/programming/elders/index.php

Sexualized Violence Prevention & Response

UVic takes sexualized violence seriously, and has raised the bar for what is considered acceptable behaviour. We encourage students to learn more about how the university defines sexualized violence and its overall approach by visiting uvic.ca/svp. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support please contact the sexualized violence resource office in Equity and Human Rights (EQHR). Whether or not you have been directly impacted, if you want to take part in the important prevention work taking place on campus, you can also reach out:

Where: Sexualized violence resource office in EQHR; Sedgewick C119

Phone: 250.721.8021

Email: svpcoordinator@uvic.ca Web: uvic.ca/svp

Study / Learning Tips

1. **Leverage Self-Testing:** The latest research strongly indicates that the most crucial aspect of effective studying is testing yourself soon after encountering new material (see Huberman Lab podcast link below). Self-directed test-taking right after learning can significantly enhance your ability to learn, apply, and retain new knowledge. Simply reviewing notes without self-testing is far less effective.
2. **Limit Distractions:** Create a study environment with minimal distractions. Turn off notifications, set a specific study time, and use tools like noise-canceling headphones to maintain focus.
3. **Use Active Learning Techniques:** Engage with the material actively by summarizing concepts in your own words, teaching them to someone else, or discussing them in study groups.
4. **Chunk Study Sessions:** Study in focused, manageable chunks of time (e.g., 25–30 minutes) followed by short breaks. This approach, often called the Pomodoro Technique, helps maintain concentration and prevents burnout.
5. **Set Clear Goals:** Break down your study sessions into specific, achievable goals. Knowing what you aim to accomplish helps keep you on track and provides a sense of progress.
6. **Use Multi-Sensory Learning:** Engage multiple senses while studying. For example, read aloud, create diagrams, or use flashcards. Combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic inputs can enhance memory retention.
7. **Apply the Material:** Find ways to apply what you're learning to real-life scenarios or problems. This contextualizes the information and makes it more memorable.
8. **Prioritize Sleep:** Ensure you get sufficient sleep, as it's vital for memory consolidation and cognitive function. Aim for 7–9 hours of quality sleep per night to support learning.
9. **Stay Hydrated:** Keep yourself hydrated throughout the day. Dehydration can impair cognitive function, so make water a constant companion during study sessions.
10. **Practice Mindfulness Meditation:** Incorporating short mindfulness meditation sessions can help improve concentration, reduce stress, and enhance memory. Even just 5–10 minutes of focused breathing can be beneficial.

Reference: For more on these study strategies, see the Huberman Lab Podcast episode: [“Optimal Protocols for Studying & Learning”](#).