



# EcoArt | Syllabus

AVT 385 | George Mason University  
Term: Summer 2020. Session 1  
Class Days - MTW, 1:30 - 4:10

Professor: Mark Cooley  
Office hours: By online appointment  
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## Course Description

EcoArt brings together ideas, tools, and methods from across a spectrum of arts, sciences, progressive agriculture, and folk traditions with an ultimate interest in forming sustainable and creative relationships with the earth's life support systems. The course assumes that the environmental problems we face are largely the product of culture, and as such, require cultural responses. EcoArt explores current discourses on art, ecology, and environmentalism, while challenging students to conceptualize and make engaging, creative, and ecologically informed responses to their world.

## Goals

EcoArt brings together students with diverse experiences, interests, and skills, from a broad spectrum of academic programs, in the interest of developing creative projects that explore the interdependence of our cultural and biological systems. The course serves as an introduction to EcoArt by creating a context for course members to:

- Examine the history of ecologically informed art practice and the core ideas and issues that have motivated it;
- Develop vocabulary, knowledge, and skills useful in making creative and ecologically informed decisions in art and life;
- Create projects that respond to the interdependence of cultural and biological systems;
- Evaluate cultural works in relation to their direct and indirect impacts on the material world.

## Text & Resources

- Gaia's Garden, Second Edition: A Guide To Home-Scale Permaculture by Toby Hemenway
- Optional Text: [Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies](#) by Sue Spaid
- Optional Text: To Life! EcoArt in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet by [Linda Weintraub](#)
- Optional Text: [Green Acres: Artists Farming Fields, Greenhouses and Abandoned Lots](#) by Sue Spaid
- Additional texts and media provided in the course outline
- The Green Studio: EcoArt studio and featured Eco-Art from GMU
- [Green Studio Site](#) | [Green Studio FB](#)
- [The Green Museum](#)

### **Facilities: The Green Studio (CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE)**

Founded by Mark Cooley and Mason students in 2010, and located on the grounds of George Mason University's Art and Design Campus, The Green Studio offers students a living studio in which to creatively explore the interdependence of biological and cultural systems. The Green Studio exists, as any working art studio does, in constant flux, and develops organically through the relationship artists form with the ecology of the site. The concept of an externalized art studio challenges conventional approaches to landscape as master-planned perpetually finished products. The Green Studio also challenges the notion of the art studio as a place where artists retreat from the world and repositions the artist within the contingencies of a living space with its art materials embedded in an ecosystem. The goal of work in The Green Studio is not to create *in spite* of the world, but rather *in relation* to it. In this sense, modernist aesthetics of creating autonomous abstract formal relationships (whether on the canvas or in the landscape) are abandoned in an attempt to find the knowledge and tools to build creative and sustainable relationships with the life support systems of the world.

The Green Studio online @ [Green Studio](#) | [Green Studio FB](#)

### **Projects**

This course requires the completion of several individual and/or collaborative projects. All projects include both research and practice components. Though not all projects will involve every step in this process, the following outline offers a useful, though generalized, guide for successful project development. Please see project pages and course outline for specific project requirements and due dates.

#### **1. Research**

1. Identify and read key research.
2. Identify and analyze existing artworks.
3. Identify Issue, Approach, Art Genre, and Strategy to use.
  - A. Examples of Issues: Energy, Waste, Climate Change, Technology (e waste, Biotech, Nanotech, Nuclear, etc), Environmental Degradation (Habitat loss, Eutrophication, etc), Sustainability, Resources, Systems, Reforms,

Environmental Health, War & the Environment, Environmental Law, Land Use, Pollution, Agriculture, Soil, Toxicants...

- B. Examples of Approaches: Conservation, Novel Ecosystems, Preservation, Social Ecology, Deep Ecology, Restoration Ecology, Urban Ecology, Industrial Ecology, Human Ecology, Ecosystem Ecology, Sustainable Development, Permaculture...
- C. Examples of Art genre: Paint & Print, Sculpture, Performance / Event, Photo, Film/Video, Bio Art, Generative Art, Social Practice, Installation, Public Art, Tactical Media, Gardening, Permaculture Design, Product Design, Graphic Design...
- D. Examples of Strategies: Educate, Intervene, Visualize, Metaphorize, Activate, Celebrate, Dramatize, Satirize, Investigate...

## **2. Design**

- 1. Brainstorming & mind mapping.
- 2. Project Proposal: Concept statement (including issue, approach, art genre, strategy), and mock-up in appropriate media.

## **3. Make**

- 1. Prep: Identify appropriate tools, techniques, and collaborators.
- 2. Prep: Seek instruction, guidance, and tutorials.
- 3. Make.

## **4. Present**

- 1. Document Artwork: The need for meticulous and finely crafted project documentation is essential. Keep in mind that In many cases, documentation may be the only way others get to experience the work. Do not ignore technical proficiency in your chosen method of documentation.
- 2. Write Project Summary: Include relevant research, concept, description of work, findings, and reflections. Where appropriate, you may Include preparatory work brainstorming, sketches, failed attempts, stages of development, etc.
- 3. Submit Artwork Documentation and Project Summary to the professor via email attachment(s) with the exception of files over 10 MB, which must be sent via email link to a file sharing service of the student's choice. All email submissions must include, in the subject line, the student's first and last name and the assignment.

## **6. Critique**

Critical discussion of artworks in an attempt to:

1. Identify, practice, and question various approaches to criticism in the arts in relation to EcoArt practices;
2. Learn how research & methods apply to EcoArt practices;
3. Develop a language that incorporates social and biological function into aesthetic discourse and criticism;
4. Encourage and empower people to make their works better, and
5. Discuss what “better” means in the context of specific project goals.

## **7. Maintain**

Attend to necessary future maintenance needs of projects.

## **Attendance & Participation**

Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory and participation is critical to the success of both the individual and class as a whole. In short, WE NEED YOU. In the event of illness or emergency please notify the professor. Students are allowed two absences during the semester. Each additional unexcused absence results in a reduction of five points from final grades. Excused absences are only given in extraordinary cases. Students are expected to participate in all classroom discussions and activities and contribute fairly to the development of collaborative projects. Arriving late or leaving early more than twice results in an absence. Students spending class time on social media, video games, and other distractions are counted absent. Students should not seek (and will likely not receive) repetitions of course content missed because of inattentiveness or unexcused absence.

## **Assessment**

Successful students prepare, work hard, and participate. Students receive a letter grade by email for each project completed in the course. All project grades are averaged at the end of the semester to obtain a final course grade. All projects, except those that have been handed in late, may be reworked and resubmitted as many times as necessary for grade reconsiderations. Grades roughly reflect the following values, with allowances for the differing abilities of students:

- Research: depth, quality = 20%
- Concept: generation, rigor, revision = 30%
- Implementation / Execution: knowledge and skills developed and demonstrated = 40%
- Participation and attendance: consistent work, attention, and quality contributions to classroom dialogue = 10%

Letter Grades:

- A) Work that is creative, exceptionally researched, conceptualized and applied.
- B) Work that is creative, well researched, conceptualized and applied.
- C) Work that is satisfactorily researched, conceptualized and applied.
- D) Work that is incomplete, and/or unsatisfactorily researched, conceptualized, or applied.
- F) Work that does not fulfill basic project requirements.

### **Mason Arts Core**

This class fulfills a Mason Core requirement for the Arts.

Arts goal – to achieve a majority of the following learning outcomes:

students will be able to identify and analyze the formal elements of a particular art form using vocabulary appropriate to that form;

demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between artistic technique and the expression of a work's underlying concept; analyze cultural productions using standards appropriate to the form and cultural context;

analyze and interpret material or performance culture in its social, historical, and personal contexts;

and engage in the artistic process, including conception, creation, and ongoing critical analysis.

### **General Education Synthesis Requirements**

This course fulfills a Mason requirement for Synthesis. The purpose of the synthesis course is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills and values gained from the general education curriculum. Synthesis courses strive to expand students' ability to master new content, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills across the disciplines. While it is not feasible to design courses that cover "all" areas of general education, synthesis courses should function as a careful alignment of disciplinary goals with a range of general education learning outcomes.

Learning Outcomes:

A general education synthesis course must address outcomes 1 and 2, and at least one outcome under 3. Upon completing a synthesis course, students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g., audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.)

2. Using perspectives from two or more disciplines, connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community or societal concerns
3. Apply critical thinking skills to:
  - Evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources, OR,
  - Judge the quality or value of an idea, work, or principle based on appropriate analytics and standards.

### **University and School of Art Policies**

In accordance with George Mason University policy, turn off all beepers, cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class. The instructor of the class will keep his/her cell phone active to assure receipt of any Mason Alerts in a timely fashion; or in the event that the instructor does not have a cell phone, he/she will designate one student to keep a cell phone active to receive such alerts.

### **Commitment to Diversity**

This class will be conducted as an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

### **Statement on Ethics in Teaching and Practicing Art and Design**

As professionals responsible for the education of undergraduate and graduate art and design students, the faculty of the School of Art adheres to the ethical standards and practices incorporated in the professional Code of Ethics of our national accreditation organization, The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

### **Academic Calendar**

Description	12 Week Session	Session A: 5 Week	Session B: 8 Week	Session C: 5 Week	Session D: 10 Week
Schedule of Classes Available in Patriot Web	Mon. Feb 10	Mon. Feb 10	Mon. Feb 10	Mon. Feb 10	Mon. Feb 10
Memorial Day (university closed)	Mon. May 25	Mon. May 25	Mon. May 25	N/A	Mon. May 25
First day of classes	<i>Mon. Jun 1</i>	<i>Mon. Jun 1</i>	Mon. Jun 1	<i>Mon. Jul 6</i>	<i>Mon. Jun 1</i>
Last Day to Add/Drop (census)	<i>Tue. Jun 9</i>	<i>Wed. Jun 3</i>	Thu. Jun 4	<i>Wed. Jul 8</i>	<i>Fri. Jun 5</i>
Unrestricted Withdrawal Period	<i>Wed. Jun 10 – Tue. Jun 30</i>	<i>Thu. Jun 4 – Mon. Jun 15</i>	Fri. Jun 5 – Thu. Jun 18	<i>Thu. Jul 9 – Mon. Jul 20</i>	<i>Sat. Jun 6 – Tue. Jun 23</i>
Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduates only)	<i>Wed. Jul 1 – Thur. Jul 23</i>	<i>Tue. Jun 16 – Tues. Jun 23</i>	Fri. Jun 19 – Tue. Jul 7	<i>Tue. Jul 21 – Tue. Jul 28</i>	<i>Wed. Jun 24 – Tue. Jul 7</i>
Independence Day Observance	Fri. Jul 3 – Sat. Jul 4	N/A	Fri. Jul 3 – Sat. Jul 4	Fri. Jul 3 – Sat. Jul 4	Fri. Jul 3 – Sat. Jul 4
Dissertation/Thesis Deadline	<i>Fri. Aug 14</i>	<i>Fri. Aug 14</i>	<i>Fri. Aug 14</i>	<i>Fri. Aug 14</i>	<i>Fri. Aug 14</i>
Last Day of Class	<i>Wed. Aug 19</i>	<i>Wed. Jul 1</i>	Tue. Jul 21	<i>Wed. Aug 5</i>	<i>Wed. Aug 5</i>
Examination Period	<i>Thu. Aug 20 – Sat. Aug 22</i>	<i>Thu. Jul 2 – Sat. Jul 4</i>	Thu. Jul 23 – Sat. Jul 25	<i>Thu. Aug 6 – Sat. Aug 8</i>	<i>Thu. Aug 6 – Sat. Aug 8</i>
Degree Conferral	Sat. Aug 22	Sat. Aug 22	Sat. Aug 22	Sat. Aug 22	Sat. Aug 22

Once the add and drop deadlines have passed, instructors do not have the authority to approve requests from students to add or drop/withdraw late. Requests for late adds (up until the last day of classes) must be made by the student in the SoA office (or the office of the department offering the course), and generally are only approved in the case of a documented university error (such as a problem with financial aid being processed), LATE ADD fee will apply. Requests for non-selective withdrawals and retroactive adds (adds after the last day of classes) must be approved by the academic dean of the college in which the student's major is located. For AVT majors, that is the CVPA Office of Academic Affairs, Performing Arts Building A407.

### Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences

If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Disabilities Resource Center (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474). You must provide me with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the DRC.

## **Official Communications via Mason E-Mail**

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

## **Attendance Policies**

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

## **Honor Code**

Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Catalog. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual be the product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. (This does not prohibit collaborative work when it is approved by your instructor.) As a faculty member, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously. No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences that will follow you for the rest of your life. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or to a member of the GMU Counseling Center staff.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is plagiarism, a very serious Honor Code offense. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format. (For assistance with documentation, I recommend Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*.) The exception to this rule is information termed general knowledge—information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so the wise course is, "When in doubt, cite."

Be especially careful when using the Internet for research. Not all Internet sources are equally reliable; some are just plain wrong. Also, since you can download text, it becomes very easy to inadvertently plagiarize. If you use an Internet source, you must cite the exact URL in your paper and include with it the last date that you successfully accessed the site.



## **Writing Center**

Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

**The Collaborative Learning Hub** Located in Johnson Center 311 (703-993-3141), the lab offers in-person one-on-one support for the Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Blackboard, and a variety of other software. Dual monitor PCs make the lab ideal for collaborating on group projects, Macs are also available; as well as a digital recording space, collaborative tables, and a SMART Board. Free workshops are also available (Adobe and Microsoft) through Training and Certification; visit [ittraining.gmu.edu](http://ittraining.gmu.edu) to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.