Proposal for the Gen Ed Course Competition: Philosophy and the Environment

1. <u>Principal Investigator</u>: Mitchell Green, Professor, Department of Philosophy
2. <u>e-mail address</u>: Mitchell.green@uconn.edu
3. <u>New course?</u> This is a new course.
4. <u>Course title and number</u>: Philosophy 110X: Philosophy and the Environment.
5. <u>Project description and learning objectives</u>: The course's objective will be to prepare students from any UConn school or department to engage critically with some of the most urgent problems of our time such as climate change, mass extinction, and the disproportianate burden of environmental hazards on the world's poor and disenfranchised. Because such issues as these rarely admit of straightforward and uncontroversial solutions, critical engagement with such issues will require students to articulate and support their proposed solutions while showing sensitivity to ways in which they might reasonably be challenged.

   During the grant period (summer 2020), the PI will first select appropriate readings for each week of the semester. After doing so he will then develop study questions relating to each reading or topic addressed in the course, as well as associated in-class discussion prompts, notes, and slides for class meetings associated with those topics. Where available he will also review and select computer simulations (such as that developed for Yantai, China[1]) that will help students appreciate the difficult choices that confront those working to promote economic development while respecting environmental concerns. During this period the PI will also produce drafts of writing and other summative assignments, bearing in mind that these may change as he learns about student interests and needs.

   PI plans to offer this as a 30-person course in AY 2020-1, and then if the course is successful and there is sufficient student demand, in later years to increase its enrollment to a lecture-style course aided by Teaching Assistants. Additionally, once the course is established in the Philosophy curriculum, it will be available to be taught by other instructors at Storrs as well as at regional campuses.[2] PI will make all the materials developed for this course available to other UConn instructors (including ECE high school teachers—see #10 below) wishing to offer it at Storrs and other campuses.

6. <u>Learning outcomes and assessment tools</u>: Students will be assessed on the extent to which they can articulate and cogently defend well-informed solutions, in the form of both written assignments and in-class presentations, to some of our most pressing environmental challenges. The course will in turn be evaluated for its efficacy in light of the extent to which students succeed in this assessment.

7. <u>Serving the broad goals of UConn's General Education program</u>: This course will serve these broad goals by enabling students to appreciate diverse human perspectives concerning our relation to the natural world, as well as preparing them for responsible citizenship by helping them to become mindful of how their choices as consumers, voters, potential future parents, and leaders will impact their environment.

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[1] E. Ginters, *et al*, 'Economic Development Assessment Simulator Based on Yantai Use Case,' *Procedia Computer Science*, vol. 77 (2015), pp. 22-32.

[2] PI's colleague, Dr. Emma Bjorngard-Basayne, Academic Advisor in the School of Business at the Stamford campus, reports that in light of her experience advising students in recent months she feels confident that there will be strong interest at that campus in the proposed course.

8. <u>Requirements fulfilled</u>: This course will fulfill CA1 as well as the Environmental Literacy (EL) requirements. It will achieve the former by being designed and taught by an experienced philosopher who will emphasize ethical, aesthetic, and metaphysical aspects of our relation to our environment, while requiring students to engage with these issues at a high level through writing assignments. It will fulfill the EL requirement by enabling students to understand and articulate perspectives on many of the challenges, and particularly the ethical dimensions, of environmental stewardship.

9. <u>Adding to or enhancing existing course offerings</u>: To the best of PI's knowledge, UConn currently offers no course equivalent to the one proposed here. The closest is Phil 3216 (Environmental Ethics) which in addition to being restricted to ethical issues concerning the environment is normally open only to students with prior coursework in Philosophy. Also, the proposed course will enhance offerings in the Literacy area, and because students will be encouraged to use Portfolium to display the class presentations they prepare for the course, it will also allow them to showcase for potential employers some of the skills they develop over the semester.

10. <u>Model to assist others:</u> PI hopes that this course will serve as a model for others, and for two reasons. One is that he hopes to build on a strong record of developing courses that connect abstract philosophical questions to issues that are immediately relevant to students. (An example is *Know Thyself* (Phil 2410) course, which PI developed with support from the Honors Program in 2014, and which is now being taught by another instructor.) Another reason is that as mentioned above, PI intends to make his course materials available to other instructors wishing to offer *Philosophy and the Environment* themselves. This includes not just the Storrs and regional campuses, but also Connecticut high school teachers under the auspices of Early College Experience. (PI is the Philosophy liaison for ECE, and would expect many high school teachers to be interested in offering this course at their schools.)

11. <u>Is proposal linked to other proposals?</u> Professor Tom Bontly (Philosophy) intends to submit a linked proposal to develop a 3000-level course in climate ethics and climate science. Professor Bontly and PI plan to collaborate over summer 2020 to ensure that his course will be a natural continuation of the course proposed here, serving students aiming to explore at a more intensive level issues in ethics and the philosophy of science that arise in philosophical inquiry into the environment. If both courses are offered in AY 2020-21, Bontly and PI will also confer during summer 2021 to consider any adjustments needed to make the two courses better aligned. There is currently no expectations that the 1000-level course will be a prerequisite for the more advanced course.

12. <u>Previous submission?</u> No.

13. <u>Previous funding by this grant?</u> No.

14. <u>Funding from other sources?</u> No.

15. n/a

16. Budget Form attached

17. Don Baxter, Professor and Head of Philosophy, will write a letter of support under separate cover.

18. Please find draft syllabus below.

Philosophy 110X: Philosophy and the Environment   Instructor: Mitchell Green

This course will investigate aspects of humanity's relation to both animate and inanimate aspects of the natural world. The bulk of our questions will be normative, including ethical, aesthetic and practical issues, but we will also consider some "metaphysical" questions about what it is for something to be natural, and correspondingly the distinctions among the natural, the synthetic, and the artificial. Our discussion will revolve around the question why one ought to care about the environment. If it is wrong to pollute a lake, is that because of the effect that such pollution has on people, on all living creatures, on the lake itself, or on something else? Answers to these questions include human-centered, animal-centered, and nature-centered approaches as well as the most prominent critiques of such approaches. To help us understand these approaches and their limitations, we will apply such frameworks to issues such as biodiversity, preservation of wilderness, corporate responsibility, human use of animals, environmental racism, toxic dumping, sustainable development, and consumption.

Students who succeed in this course will cultivate an ability to think, speak, read, and write circumspectly and critically about some of the most pressing issues currently facing our planet and the species inhabiting it. Course requirements and their weights in grading are (i) active participation in discussion (20%), (ii) an in-class presentation (10%), (iii) a midterm examination (10%), (iv) two brief (2-3 page) essays (30%), (v) a final examination (10%), and (vi) a final (3-5 page) paper (20%). Students will be expected to make regular use of Husky Ct as well as Portfolium, which will enable them to showcase their class presentations for possible review by potential employers, admissions officers, etc.

Week 1 Introduction
Week 2 Moral Theories and Environmental Ethics
Week 3 Animal Ethics
Week 4 Bio- & Ecocentrism
Week 5 Intrinsic Value & Environmental Pragmatism
Week 6 Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and Social Ecology
Week 7 Wilderness & Wildness
Week 8 Environmental Justice
Week 9 Climate Ethics
Week 10 Climate Ethics, cont.
Week 11 Ethics & Activism
Week 12 Monkeywrenching & Ecosabotage
Week 13 Northern Spotted Owls vs. Barred Owls
Week 14 Ethics & Wildfire