

SOSC3540 Environmental Psychology
Fall 2025
Course Outline

Course description

This course examines the interactions between humans and physical environments from a psychological perspective. It discusses how human behavior is affected by, and affects, their natural and built surroundings. It also explores the human dimension of environmental issues.

Intended learning outcomes (ILOs)

On successful completion of the course, you will be able to

- (1) recognize the interactions between humans and physical environments and explain them with reference to theories in psychology and other social sciences;
- (2) analyze the human dimension of environmental issues from psychological and behavioral perspectives;
- (3) analyze their own experience and everyday encounters regarding physical environments;
- (4) understand, explain, and evaluate research studies that examine human-environment relationships.

Emphases

- *Place-based learning:* We encourage you to spend time in the real world and make observations and interpretations in relevant locales (e.g., forests, seafronts, shopping malls, busy streets). We also encourage you to use any combination of the senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and movement as your learning tools. We will give you opportunities to achieve these throughout the course.
- *Collaborative learning:* We believe that the process of teaching and learning takes place not only between a teacher and students but also among students themselves. You may share the learning resources you have found with each other, or you may discuss assignment ideas together. We want to create a non-competitive learning environment in this course, wherein you will enjoy a lot of opportunities for you to learn from each other.
- *Learning reflection:* We are strong believers in the importance of self-reflection in learning. It is insufficient to just have an experience (e.g., taking a class, completing an assignment) to learn; students must reflect on the experience itself, or else the experience will be quickly forgotten, and its full learning potential will not realize. You will work on multiple reflective writings with guidance.
- *Learning support:* We understand that you need support for your learning. Please be assured that you will receive plenty of support from us.

Teaching team

Instructor: Kim-Pong Tam, kevintam@ust.hk

TAs: Gewei Chen, gchenbr@connect.ust.hk; Vivien Pong, vivienpong@ust.hk

* Emails will be responded to on working days only.

* When contacting us by email, always prefix the subject line of your message with the course code (e.g., "SOSC3540 | exam"). Use your university email account only. Tell us who you are in the email; emails with no identity revealed will not be responded to. Do not send messages via Canvas.

* When you ask questions about an assignment, make sure you explain your difficulties clearly and ask specific questions. Do not send a draft to us and ask for comments; we will not answer such request. Make sure your questions or requests for consultation reach us at least 3 working days by the assignment's submission deadline; we will not respond to any late questions or requests.

Learning activities

- * Detailed information regarding the assessed activities can be found in separate documents.
- * Assessment will be made using criterion-referencing; scores and grades will NOT be assigned on a curve.

1. *Lectures*. As the foundation of your learning in this course, the lectures introduce the essential theoretical and methodological tools that psychologists use to understand the interactions between humans and their physical environments. (ILOs #1 to 4)
 - * Lectures will NOT be recorded.
2. *Readings*. For each topic, a reading list is provided. These readings are optional; they complement the lectures and are recommended for students who want to further explore a topic. (ILOs #1 to 4)
 - * All readings can be found on Canvas.
3. *Participation* ($4 \times 2.5\% = 10\%$). Active participation in class enhances learning for both you and your peers. Each lecture will include multiple activities that require your participation. For a random selection of lectures (which will not be announced in advance), you will need to submit the results of your participation. Depending on the quality of your submission, each one will contribute either 0% or 2.5% to your overall course grade. There will be a total of five submission opportunities, but only your best four submissions will be counted. If you need to miss a submission opportunity for medical or non-medical reasons, or if you do not earn any points for a previous submission, please take advantage of the additional opportunity provided.
4. *Investigative Project 1* (20%). This investigative project presents an opportunity for you to develop the ability to understand a real-world phenomenon or address a real-world problem through self-directed investigation. The project starts with some assigned learning materials and guiding questions. You will work as a team and have a chance to share and discuss your ideas with other teams and receive comments from the teaching team. In the end, you will submit a video report. (ILOs #1 and #3)
 - * Seminar date: 9 Oct
 - * Submission deadline: 17:00, 23 Oct
5. *Investigative Project 2* (20%). The aim of this project is similar to that of Investigative Project 1, but this project will be individual work, and you will produce a written report instead. (ILOs #1 and #3)
 - * Seminar date: 11 Nov
 - * Submission deadline: 17:00, 25 Nov
6. *Learning Reflection* ($3 \times 5\% = 15\%$). For Module 1, as well as Modules 2 plus 3, and Module 4, you will be guided to reflect on how your learning experience has transformed both your knowledge and your personal development. Depending on the quality of your submission, each reflection will contribute either 0%, 2.5%, or 5% to your overall course grade. (ILOs #2 and #4)
 - * Submission deadlines: 17:00, 23 Sep; 27 Oct; 25 Nov
7. *Exam* (35%). The exam assesses your conceptual understanding with multiple-choice questions and short essay questions. (ILOs #1 to #4)
 - * Date, time and venue to be announced by the university. Please refrain from scheduling any trips, job interviews, or other activities until the schedule for the exam is known. No make-up exam will be arranged in these cases. A make-up exam will only be arranged for medical reasons. If you have to miss an exam due to an acute medical situation, you must contact us within three days after the exam and present medical proof; otherwise, your entitlement will be forfeited. The make-up exam will consist of essay questions only.

Communication and feedback

Scores and comments for assessed activities will be communicated via Canvas within two to four weeks of submission. Feedback will include strengths and areas for improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback should consult us within five working days after the feedback is received. If you have any question about your grade, you may contact the teaching assistants to set up an appointment for a discussion. If after the discussion you wish to pursue an official grade review, you have to submit an application within three days (please ask the teaching assistants for the form). On the application form, you must provide a justification for your request, and agree that the instructor will review your submission, and the grade assigned by the instructor will be final (it could be higher than, the same as, or lower than your original grade).

Final grade descriptors

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration
A	Excellent Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrates comprehensive grasp of course materials• exhibits a high capacity for scholarship, going beyond requirements• shows originality in works submitted• shows an extraordinary level of motivation to learn• displays eagerness to apply materials learned and collaborate with others
B	Good Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrates good understanding of course materials• exhibits a good capacity for scholarship within course requirements• shows a high level of motivation to learn• displays interest to apply materials learned and collaborate with others
C	Satisfactory Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrates adequate understanding of course materials• exhibits some ability to think critically and analytically• fulfils all course requirements satisfactorily• displays moderate motivation to learn, apply materials learned, and work with others
D	Marginal Pass	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrates poor understanding of course materials• fails to think critically and analytically• barely fulfils all course requirements• displays weak motivation to learn, apply materials learned, and work with others
F	Fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• fails to adequately understand course materials• fails to fulfil all course requirements• shows minimal motivation to learn, apply materials learned, and work with others

Policies

- *Learning attitude.* Your active participation not only helps you and your peers learn more effectively but also enables us to teach better. Think about what you want to learn and how you are going to learn it. Use grades, scores, and comments to understand how much and how well you have learned and how you can improve.
- *Academic integrity.* Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.
- *Lecture slides.* The lecture slides will be available on Canvas before each lecture. Note that some contents (mainly examples and activities) might be removed from the shared version. You are encouraged to take your own notes and generate your own examples. Research has shown that personal notetaking and example generation improve learning and course performance.

- *Submission policy.* The grace period policy allows for submissions to be accepted up to five hours late without penalty. Penalties apply to submissions late for more than five hours.
- *AI policy.* The use of generative AI to assist your own learning is permitted under the conditions that proper acknowledgement is provided, and the use does not replace your own work.

Modules and topics

Introduction: Why and how do psychologists study human-environment interactions

Overview

Research methods

Module 1: Humans and Nature

Nature and health

Human-nature relationship

Nature and culture

Module 2: Humans and Cities

Urban health

Urban design

Urban living and social behavior

Module 3: Humans and Places

Sense of place

Human agency

Module 4: Humans and Climate Change

Impacts of climate change

Public understanding of climate change

Pro-environmental behavior

Behavioral interventions

Climate activism

Climate policy support

Climate technology

Climate adaptation

Class calendar

* Subject to minor changes

* Meeting time and venue: 10:30 – 11:50, every Tuesday and Thursday, Room 4502

2 Sep	Introduction
4 Sep	Introduction
9 Sep	Module 1
11 Sep	Module 1
16 Sep	Module 1
18 Sep	Module 1
23 Sep	Module 2
25 Sep	Module 2
30 Sep	Module 2
2 Oct	Mid-term wrap up
7 Oct	(holiday; no lecture)
9 Oct	Seminar for Investigative Project 1
14 Oct	Module 3
16 Oct	Module 3

21 Oct	Module 4
23 Oct	Module 4
28 Oct	Module 4
30 Oct	Module 4
4 Nov	Module 4
6 Nov	Module 4
11 Nov	Seminar for Investigative Project 2
13 Nov	Module 4
18 Nov	Module 4
20 Nov	Module 4
25 Nov	Special topic
27 Nov	Final wrap up
8-19 Dec	Exam (date, time, and venue to be announced by the university)

Recommended reference books

- Clayton, S., & Manning, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Psychology and climate change: Human perceptions, impacts, and responses*. London, UK: Academic Press. (online access via library)
- Gifford, R. (Ed.). (2016). *Research methods for environmental psychology*. UK: John Wiley & Sons. (online access via library)
- Kopec, D. (2018). *Environmental psychology for design*. Fairchild Books. (on library reserve)
- Steg, L., van den Berg, A. E., & de Groot, J. I. M. (Eds.). (2019). *Environmental psychology: An introduction (2nd Edition)*. UK: John Wiley & Sons. (online access via library)

<End of Course Outline>