

**SOSC3540 Environmental Psychology**  
**Fall 2026**  
**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.

**How you will learn in this course**

- *Learning through action:* We don't just talk about ideas—we put them into practice. Expect to dive into activities that spark curiosity and creativity: watching videos, listening to music, joining seminars, conducting interviews, and even heading outdoors for real-world observations.
- *Place-based learning:* Learning happens best when it's rooted in context. You'll be encouraged to explore diverse environments—forests, seafronts, shopping malls, busy streets—and make sense of them through direct experience. Using all your senses—sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and movement—you'll discover new ways of interpreting the world around you.
- *Collaborative learning:* Knowledge grows when shared. This course is designed to be non-competitive, fostering a supportive atmosphere where you and your peers can exchange ideas, challenge perspectives, and co-create understanding. Together, we'll build a community of learners.
- *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 know that meaningful learning requires encouragement and guidance. Throughout the course, you'll have access to ample support—whether it's clarifying concepts, navigating challenges, or finding inspiration—to help you succeed and thrive.

**Own your learning: Use AI as a tool, not a shortcut**

- In a course focused on environment and behavior, we encourage you to spend time visiting different places (e.g., parks, shopping malls, your campus) and making observations. These experiences cannot be assisted or replaced by AI. Use your own senses.
- For this reason, for all learning activities in this course, we recommend that you do not use any AI tools. However, their use is not strictly prohibited. If you believe that you must use AI in any part of your work, you are required to explicitly acknowledge this with a clear declaration.
- Remember: You are responsible for your own learning. Make a clear distinction between lazy use and responsible use of AI. Ask yourself: Am I simply offloading my learning to AI so I can spend time on something irrelevant to learning? Or am I using it in a way that genuinely supports and deepens my learning?

**Teaching team**

Instructor: Kim-Pong Tam, [kevintam@ust.hk](mailto:kevintam@ust.hk)

TAs: Gewei Chen, [gchenbr@connect.ust.hk](mailto:gchenbr@connect.ust.hk); Vivien Pong, [vivienpong@ust.hk](mailto: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 three working days by the assignment’s submission deadline; we will not respond to any late questions or requests.

### Recommended reference books

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

### Learning activities

Assessment will be made using criterion-referencing; scores and grades will NOT be assigned on a curve.

#### Lectures (ILOs #1 to 4)

- As the foundation of your learning in this course, the lectures introduce the essential theoretical and methodological tools that psychologists use to understand interactions between humans and their physical environments.
- Lectures will NOT be recorded.
- Lecture slides will be available on Canvas before each lecture. Even with the slides provided, you are encouraged to take your own notes and generate your own examples. Research shows that personal note-taking and example generation enhance learning and improve course performance.

#### Readings (ILOs #1 to 4)

- These optional readings complement the lectures and are recommended for students who wish to further explore topics of interest.
- The readings will be shared on Canvas along with the lecture slides for each topic.

#### Class participation (15%) (ILOs #1 to 4)

- Active class participation enhances learning for both you and your peers. Each class includes multiple learning activities, guided with handouts, Mentimeter surveys, or other instructions, and your participation in these activities is expected.
- Your participation will be recorded based on your submission during each class. To receive a participation credit for a class, you must be physically present and complete your submission properly.
- Participation credits can be earned from 16 Sep (Class #5) to 20 Nov (Class #24) (except 9 Oct (Class #12)), with a total of 19 credits available.
- Your final class participation point will be computed based on the number of participation credits you have accumulated, using the following scale:  
15 to 19 credits = 15 points (equating to 15% of your course grade)  
12 to 14 credits = 12 points  
9 to 11 credits = 9 points  
6 to 8 credits = 6 points  
3 to 5 credits = 3 points  
0 to 2 credits = 0 point
- Due to the built-in buffer in the scale that allows for some missed classes while still achieving the full 15 points, we will not accept requests for make-up participation. The only exception will be for students with medical illnesses. If you miss a class due to an acute medical situation, you must contact us within two days after it and provide medical documentation; otherwise, you will forfeit your entitlement to a make-up participation. Please note that the make-up participation will consist of a short piece of writing.

- Random attendance checks will be conducted in some classes. Students who are not present but have submission recorded will be considered as cheating. If caught, these students will automatically receive 0 points for class participation and will be reported to the division head for further disciplinary action.

*Individual investigation (20%) (ILOs #1 to 4)*

- You will explore the theme of urbanites' nature experience through interviews with your peers and close others. During a seminar, you will interview three classmates, share your own responses, and ask follow-up questions as needed. Individually, you will do the same with two friends or family members. You will record the raw responses, distill the key insights, and then connect your discoveries to the assigned readings in a short individual report afterwards.
- This activity invites you to examine different perspectives on people's interactions with nature—its frequency, forms, opportunities, barriers, underlying factors, and consequences. By the end, you will create a rich mosaic of ideas that deepens your understanding of how urbanites connect with and interpret the natural world.
- Detailed guidelines will be released in due course.
- Seminar: 25 Sep (Class #8)
- Submission deadline: 17:00, 2 Oct
- Debriefing: 14 Oct (Class #13)

*Jigsaw teaching (20%) (ILOs #1 to 4)*

- In this activity, the class will be divided into jigsaw groups, with each group responsible for teaching the others about one type of behavioral intervention designed to promote pro-environmental behavior. Drawing on assigned readings and additional sources, your group will prepare to explain the intervention by addressing key questions: What is it? What psychological mechanisms does it rely on? What evidence supports it? How can it be illustrated through a real-world example or use case? What important points should users of this intervention bear in mind?
- During class, each group will present their intervention to the others, fostering peer-to-peer learning. Both the teaching team and another group will provide evaluations of your presentation. By the conclusion of this activity, the collective teaching will present a “big picture” overview of the diverse behavioral interventions available.
- Detailed guidelines will be released in due course.
- Seminar: 13 Nov (Class #22)
- Teaching dates: 25 Nov (Class #25) / 27 Nov (Class #26)

*Exams (20% + 20%) (ILOs #1 to 4)*

- The exams assess your conceptual understanding with multiple-choice questions and essay questions. Exam 1 covers Modules 1 and 2. Exam 2 covers Modules 3 and 4.
- Please refrain from scheduling any trips, job interviews, or other activities on the exam dates, as no make-up exam will be arranged. The only exception is for students with medical illnesses. If you miss an exam due to an acute medical situation, you must contact us within two days after it and provide medical documentation; otherwise, you will forfeit your entitlement to a make-up exam. Please note that the make-up exam will consist of essay questions only.
- Detailed guidelines will be released in due course.
- Exam 1: 9 Oct (Class #12)
- Exam 2: to be announced by the university

*Learning reflection (2.5% + 2.5%) (ILOs #1 to 3)*

- For Modules 1 plus 2, and for Modules 3 plus 4, you will be guided to reflect on how your learning experience has transformed both your knowledge and your personal development. The exercise will be embedded into the two exams. Submissions will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

**Communication and feedback**

Scores and comments for assessed activities will be communicated via Canvas within two 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 score, you may contact the teaching assistants to set up an appointment for a discussion. If after the discussion you wish to pursue a formal 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 score assigned by the instructor will be final (it could be higher than, the same as, or lower than your original score).

### Final grade descriptors

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

### 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.

### Late submission policy

The grace period policy allows for assignment submissions to be accepted up to five hours late without penalty. Penalties apply to submissions late for more than five hours.

## Class calendar

The following is subject to minor changes. Meeting time and venue: 13:30 – 14:50, every Wednesday and Friday, Room 5402

| Class no. | Date   | Contents                              |
|-----------|--------|---------------------------------------|
| #1        | 2 Sep  | Introduction                          |
| #2        | 4 Sep  | Introduction                          |
| #3        | 9 Sep  | Module 1                              |
| #4        | 11 Sep | Module 1                              |
| #5        | 16 Sep | Module 1                              |
| #6        | 18 Sep | Module 1                              |
| #7        | 23 Sep | Module 1                              |
| #8        | 25 Sep | Individual investigation (Seminar)    |
| #9        | 30 Sep | Module 2                              |
| #10       | 2 Oct  | Module 2                              |
| #11       | 7 Oct  | Module 2                              |
| #12       | 9 Oct  | Exam 1                                |
| #13       | 14 Oct | Individual investigation (Debriefing) |
| #14       | 16 Oct | Module 3                              |
| #15       | 21 Oct | Module 3                              |
| #16       | 23 Oct | Module 4                              |
| #17       | 28 Oct | Module 4                              |
| #18       | 30 Oct | Module 4                              |
| #19       | 4 Nov  | Module 4                              |
| #20       | 6 Nov  | Module 4                              |
| #21       | 11 Nov | Module 4                              |
| #22       | 13 Nov | Jigsaw teaching (Seminar)             |
| #23       | 18 Nov | Module 4                              |
| #24       | 20 Nov | Synthesis                             |
| #25       | 25 Nov | Jigsaw teaching (Session 1)           |
| #26       | 27 Nov | Jigsaw teaching (Session 2)           |

### Topics:

Introduction: scoping of environmental psychology; research methods

Module 1 (humans and nature): nature and health; nature experience; nature connectedness; nature and culture

Module 2 (humans and cities): urban health; urbanization; urban design

Module 3 (humans and places): place attachment; human agency

Module 4 (humans and climate change): climate change impacts; climate change opinions; risk perception; climate action; behavioral interventions; policy support; technology acceptance; adaptation and resilience

<End of Course Outline>