

**SOSC3540 Environmental Psychology**  
**Fall 2023**  
**Course Outline**

**Aim**

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**

On completion of this course, you are expected to 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 your own experience and everyday encounters regarding physical environments; and (4) understand, explain, and evaluate research studies that examine human-environment relationships.

**Important elements**

- *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, movement, and taste as your learning tools. We will give you a number of 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 assignments ideas together. We aim 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 a strong believer 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 exit this course by working on a reflective writing with our guidance.
- *Learning support:* We understand that you need support for your learning. Please be assured that you will receive plenty of support from us through our guidelines, seminars, consultation etc.

**Teaching team**

Kevin Tam, [kevintam@ust.hk](mailto:kevintam@ust.hk) (Instructor)

Vivien Pong, [vivienpong@ust.hk](mailto:vivienpong@ust.hk) (TA)

\* Emails will be responded to during working days 10 am to 6 pm Hong Kong Time. When contacting us by email, always prefix the subject line of your message with the course code (e.g., "sosc3540 | project"). Use your university email account only. Do not send messages via Canvas.

**Class schedule**

12:00 – 13:20, Monday and Wednesday, Rm 2304

## Learning activities

(Detailed guidelines regarding the assessed activities will be released in due course.)

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 a certain aspect of the interactions between humans and physical environments.  
\*\* Lectures will NOT be recorded.
2. *Readings*. For each topic, a reading list will be provided. These readings are optional; they complement the lectures and are recommended for students who want to explore a specific topic of interest.  
\*\* All readings can be found on Canvas.
3. *Investigative Projects 1 to 3 (20% + 20% + 20%)*. The three investigative projects present an opportunity for you to develop the ability to address real-world problems through self-directed investigations. Each project starts with some assigned learning materials and guiding questions. You will have a chance to share and discuss your ideas with your peers and receive comments from the teaching team before submitting your final report.  
\*\* Submission deadlines: 17:00, 3 Oct (Project 1); 27 Oct (Project 2); 24 Nov (Project 3)
4. *Learning reflection (10%)*. Near the end of the course, you will be guided to reflect on how your learning experience has transformed your knowledge and yourself as a person.  
\*Your reflection will be graded on a pass/fail basis; for failed cases, you will receive comments and have a chance to rewrite and resubmit with a 2-point deduction.  
\*\* Submission deadline: 17:00, 1 Dec
5. *Exam (30%)*. The exam assesses your conceptual understanding with multiple-choice questions and short essay questions. It covers all materials discussed in the lectures.  
\*\* The exam date will be announced by the university some time during the semester. Please refrain from scheduling any flights, job interviews, or other activities until its schedule is known.
6. *Other activities*. There will be many other learning activities that are aimed at engaging you in more active, experiential, and multisensory learning.

## 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. UK: John Wiley & Sons. (online access via library)

## Points to note

1. *Learning attitude*. Your active participation not only helps you learn more 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 from us to understand how much and how well you have learned and how you can improve.
2. *Academic integrity*. We will investigate every suspect case of cheating, plagiarism, and irresponsible use of AI assistance. We will heavily penalize confirmed cases and report them to the Head of the Division of Social Science for further review or action. Read <https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/regulations-student-conduct-and-academic-integrity>. Make sure you understand what constitutes academic honesty.

3. *Lecture slides.* A condensed version of the lecture slides will be available on Canvas before each lecture. Note that some contents (mainly examples and activities) will be removed from this 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.
4. *Submission policy.* We have a grace period policy that allows for submissions to be accepted up to 5 hours late without penalty. Penalties apply to submissions late for more than 5 hours.
5. *Make-up exam.* There is no make-up exam in this course; the only exception is for absentees with medical reasons. Please refrain from scheduling any flights, job interviews, or other activities until the schedule for the exam is known. If you have to miss an exam due to medical circumstances, you must contact us within a week after the missed exam to arrange a make-up exam, otherwise your entitlement to it will be forfeited. The make-up exam will consist of essay questions only.

## **Class calendar**

(subject to minor changes)

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

4 Sep	Overview
6 Sep	Research methods

### Module 1: Humans and Nature

11 Sep	Nature and health I
13 Sep	Nature and health II
18 Sep	Human-nature relationship
20 Sep	Nature and culture

### Module 2: Humans and Cities

25 Sep	Urban design
27 Sep	Seminar (Investigative Project 1)
2 Oct	Holiday
4 Oct	Urban health
9 Oct	Urban living and social behavior

### Module 3: Humans and Places

11 Oct	Sense of place
16 Oct	Human agency
18 Oct	Seminar (Investigative Project 2)

### Module 4: Humans and Climate Change

23 Oct	Holiday
25 Oct	Impacts of environmental change
30 Oct	Public understanding of climate change
1 Nov	Pro-environmental behavior I
6 Nov	Pro-environmental behavior II
8 Nov	Behavioral interventions I
13 Nov	Behavioral interventions II
15 Nov	Seminar (Investigative Project 3)
20 Nov	Activism and Policy Support
22 Nov	Technology
27 Nov	Wrap-up

29 Nov      No lecture

TBD: Exam

**<End of Course Outline>**