

MAPPING ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES EDUCATION IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

**Bringing Research in Green
Humanities into Teaching
(BRIGHT) network**

A network of



Why this report?

The Environmental Humanities, an interdisciplinary field of scholarly inquiry which examines the junction of humans and nature through humanistic research approaches, has emerged as a major element in environmental-themed research in the Nordic Countries. Environmental Humanities (EnvHum) encompasses work done in environmental history, ecocriticism, environmental literature studies, posthuman studies, animal studies, environmental philosophy, and more. These are joined together in their common quest to understand the relationship between humans and the non-human world and the shaping of that relationship by culture, action, and thought. Our age is facing imminent environmental threats, including global climate change, escalating biodiversity loss, rapid natural resource extraction, and unjust distribution of environmental damage and pollution. EnvHum asks how we understand what it means to be human in these challenging times as well as how humanities can contribute to our understanding of the challenges.

The Bringing Research in Green Humanities into Teaching (BRIGHT) network was established to build capacity in EnvHum humanities in the Nordic and Baltic countries by collaboratively exploring methods of integrating Environmental Humanities research into first (Bachelors) and second (Masters) level university teaching and building new cooperative regional teaching programs in environmental. BRIGHT was founded in 2018 as a Nordplus-funded network coordinated by Professor Dolly Jørgensen, University of Stavanger.

Because environmental issues are a priority contemporary concern, we need green humanities research to be coupled to teaching. The network will create synergies and connections between the dispersed environmental humanities groups across the region and strengthen the integration of environmental humanities research into Nordic education.

This report summarises the current state of EnvHum educational offerings at the first and second level in Nordic region universities, as well as offering visions for future environmental humanities approaches at those levels in order to bring the experience of our strong EnvHum research into teaching. It is the first output of the BRIGHT network.

About Us

The network is a collaboration of existing established Environmental Humanities research groups and centres in the Nordic and Baltic region:

- The Greenhouse, University of Stavanger, Norway (coordinating institution)
- Oslo School of Environmental Humanities, University of Oslo, Norway
- Eco-Humanities Hub, Mid-Sweden University, Sweden
- Environmental Humanities group, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Environmental Humanities Lab, KTH, Sweden
- Environmental Humanities Network, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
- SeedBox, Linköping University, Sweden
- Centre for Environmental Humanities, Aarhus University, Denmark
- KAJAK, Tallinn University, Estonia
- Centre for Environmental Humanities, Oulu University, Finland

Each of these groups was represented at the BRIGHT meeting on 1-2 October 2018, which generated the material for this report. In addition, a representative from NTNU Environmental Humanities, Norwegian University of Science and Technology participated in our 2018 meeting.

The report itself was authored by Dolly Jørgensen and Finn Arne Jørgensen of University of Stavanger.

Current first and second level EnvHum education

ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES AS A NAMED FIELD OF STUDY

EnvHum is a rapidly expanding radically transdisciplinary endeavour that complements environmental science and public policy by focusing on the cultural, historical, artistic and ethical dimensions of environmental issues. It has emerged in the last decade as a new paradigm of humanistic research in environmental issues. Rather than being a discipline, EnvHum has been characterized as a “global intellectual movement” (Emmett and Nye 2017) and a “new interdisciplinary matrix” (Heise 2016). Although EnvHum as a field grows out of individual humanities disciplines working on environmental issues, it is not an umbrella term that simply collects existing disciplinary-based research; rather, EnvHum combines humanistic perspectives and fields to create shared points of reference (Heise 2016).

In spite of a growing interest in EnvHum on the research front in the Nordic countries, with numerous centers, research groups, and collaborative associations using the term as evidenced by the list of participants in BRIGHT, there are no degrees currently awarded in EnvHum. The University of Oulu, however, has offered a minor subject in EnvHum at the bachelor’s level since 2002, making it one of the very earliest adopters of EnvHum in Europe.

A survey was sent to the BRIGHT participants to gather data about their courses organized either as environmental humanities courses or under specific environmental disciplines such as environmental history, ecocriticism, ecomedia studies, etc. The results of this survey are given in Appendix A. The responses showed that there are a few courses at the first and second level that use the label “environmental humanities”:

- “Introduction to Environmental Humanities,” BA level, 10 points, Aarhus University
- “Introduction to Environmental Humanities,” BA level, 5 points, University of Oulu
- “Environmental Humanities,” MA level, 10 points, University of Oslo
- “Ajalooline keskkonnahumanitaaria (Historical environmental humanities),” MA level, 6 points, Tallinn University

ENVHUM CONTENT THROUGH ENVIRONMENT-SPECIFIC DEGREES

Five of the participating universities offer Master-level degrees that either focus on or have a major component in environmental issues from a humanistic perspective, even though they are not specifically transdisciplinary EnvHum:

- Aarhus University, Masters in Human Security; Masters in Sustainable Heritage Management
- KTH, Masters in History of Science, Technology and Environment
- Linköping University, Masters in Sustainable Development
- University of Oslo, Masters in Sustainable Development
- University of Stavanger, Masters in Energy, Environment, and Society

ENVHUM CONTENT THROUGH DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC COURSES

Although there are very few courses offered in the Nordic and Baltic countries that use the label “environmental humanities,” many more courses are offered within more traditional disciplinary frameworks such as anthropology, history, and literature. Most of these are optional courses that can be taken toward a disciplinary degree. Appendix A contains a complete listing of the courses identified by the participating universities.

The most common courses are in ecocriticism (offered at 5 partners), environmental history (offered at 5 partners), and environmental politics (offered at 4 partners). Environmental philosophy and religion and environment are rather poorly represented in the courses offered in the Nordic countries. The paucity of environmental philosophy courses is somewhat surprising given the high profile of Scandinavia in the field with figures like Arne Næss.

Thematically the environmentally themed courses cover a broad range of subjects including sustainability, gender, indigenous peoples, and energy, often matching the research specialties of the teacher. The Anthropocene, a term which has risen to prominence within EnvHum discourse in the last 3 years, appears in the title of two courses. There are some common themes, such as several different courses offered in environmental speculative/science fiction, and two on sensory experiences of landscapes, which could probably benefit from collaboration across institutional boundaries.

At the Bachelor’s level, most of the courses are taught in Nordic languages; the main exceptions are courses taught within English literature programs and at Aarhus University and KTH which use English almost exclusively. At the Master’s level, most of the courses are taught in English. Student exchanges within an EnvHum framework would need to take the language of coursework into account, so Master’s level exchanges might be the most viable based on the current offerings.

EnvHum teachers also have the potential to expose students to EnvHum through courses not specifically on EnvHum, thereby establishing the legitimacy of EnvHum topics and peaking interest in EnvHum for those students.

ENVHUM STUDENT LEARNERS

EnvHum courses currently reach students with a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds both within the humanities and from other fields. The implication is that we cannot make assumptions about what our entry-level students know about the environment or the humanities. For example, at Stockholm University, business majors regularly take the EcoPoetics course which poses certain challenges in the course design. As another example, the teaching at KTH targets engineering students who may be taking their only humanities-based courses. Students will come into our EnvHum courses with various strengths and ambitions, so students must be met where they are when they enter the course. These diverse backgrounds can be turned into a benefit through student groupwork and learning from each other.

Future topics for EnvHum education

At the BRIGHT meeting, we discussed the idea of there being a canon of literature in EnvHum education. The problem with establishing such a canon is that we come to EnvHum from varied disciplinary backgrounds, each with their own methodologies. Yet EnvHum is committed to critical and creative analysis of the relationalities involved between human and environment.

We jointly agreed that such a canon was not as needed as a list of ideas or concepts that would provide a common base and shared vocabulary across the environmental humanities. Rather than trying to implement a coverage model with EnvHum, we need to provide entrances and perspectives on topics. In a brainstorming session, the attendees developed a list of concepts which they considered key environmental humanities ideas. We have not attempted to categorize these key concepts, and instead, present them alphabetically below. This list is not exhaustive; rather it should be considered as a pool of concepts that environmental humanities courses and programs could engage with.

Activism	Culture	More-than-human
Agency	Cyborg	Multiplicity
Animal	Deep time	Multispecies
Anthropocene	Degrowth	Natura/naturans
Anthropocentric	Entanglement	Nature
Becoming	Environment	Non-human
Biocentric	Environmental Justice	Posthuman
Biophilia	Ethics	Precarity
Citizenship	Extinction	Relationality
Class	Gender	Slow violence
Climate Change	Ghosts	Stewardship
Co-constitution	Grief	Storytelling
Co-production	Harm	Technology
Commons	Haunting	Umwelt
Conservation	Hope	Utopia/Dystopia
Contamination	Memory	Wilderness
Corporeality	Monsters	

One way that a common ground with these terms could be established across the Nordic countries would be through an “environmental humanities reader” book. Such a book would collect articles or essays dealing with one or more of these topics in one place. The editor of such a volume would need to tackle the issue of language if it is to be appropriate for use across the greatest number of the participating institutions. Because English would likely be the choice for such a collection, there should be a concerted effort to avoid presenting EnvHum as a Anglo-centric concern.

Moving strong EnvHum research into teaching

EnvHum as a subject is research-intensive and outwardly-focused, with researchers commonly engaging with the public on pressing environmental issues. One of the key concerns then is how to get students active in these research environments which have a strong presence in the Nordic region.

The participants noted that simply inviting a string of teachers to come into courses for one-off lectures about their research specialty is not a good approach to integrating research into teaching. Because of the lack of holistic planning in such a course, it does not provide continuity or sustained engagement with the research topic.

The approach should be rather one that encourages students to engage deeply with ongoing EnvHum research. One possibility is to create courses that include research-based assignments or examinations. For example, students can be asked to attend research seminars/conferences/workshops being organized through the EnvHum research group and then report back on what they learned. Students can also learn research skills through involvement in ongoing research projects, such as creating a new museum exhibit or transcribing historical data for use by researchers or the public through online tools. Problem-centered student assignments, such as ones involving field work in a specific landscape, also introduce students to EnvHum research methodologies.

Teaching students about research is more than the technical side of research—it is also about the professional practice of being a researcher. This requires training in reading academic research texts (not just summary-level student literature), writing academic texts (to the same standards as journal publications), and speaking in academic settings (such as giving a conference paper). These are research skills which should be integrated into humanities classrooms.

Fundamental to all these approaches is that they are based on student active learning.

Conclusion

With the rapid growth of EnvHum research initiatives in the Nordic countries, the time is right for systematically expanding education initiatives in EnvHum. We have a strong research base from which to build individual and cooperative educational initiatives. There are already a few courses at all of our partner institutions that in some way deal with EnvHum topics and even some courses which use EnvHum as an organizing principle.

There is a need for capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and coordination in order to establish EnvHum as a major taught subject in the Nordic region. The BRIGHT program will hold a meeting in spring 2019 to continue these developments. In addition, the membership in BRIGHT needs to be expanded in the future to integrate EnvHum research centers and groups that were recently founded, such as those at University of Bergen and NTNU, Norway and University of Helsinki, Finland.

References

- Emmett, Robert S. and David E. Nye. 2017. *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction*. MIT Press.
- Heise, Ursula. 2016. “Plant, species, justice—and the stories we tell about them.” In Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Routledge.

Appendix A

Current humanities courses offered with environmental themes

The BRIGHT participants were asked to complete a survey about their courses at the Bachelors (1st cycle) and Masters (2nd cycle) level that are environmentally themed. The answers returned from the participants are given in tabular form below.

It should be noted that the coordinators of the research groups involved as partners in BRIGHT were responsible for completing the table, so it is possible that some courses were not captured on this list because they were not known to the coordinator. The report authors have not verified all of these course listings, although they did add some courses that they identified as relevant after the meeting. There are also other environmentally themed courses at other Nordic universities that were not partners in BRIGHT.

Aarhus University

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
	Introduction to Environmental Humanities	BA	English	10
	Global Environmental Change (within Anthropology)	BA	English	10
	Multispecies Anthropology	BA	Danish	10
	Reading Animals: Nonhuman Life, Death, and Identity after 1900	BA	English	10
	Environmental Fiction	BA	English	10
	Environmental Themes in Speculative Fiction and Film	BA	English	10
	Environmental Fiction since the 1970s	MA	English	10
	Keywords in Green Cultural Studies	MA	English	10
	Anthropology of/in the Anthropocene	MA	English	10

KTH Stockholm

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
AK1205	Science Goes Fiction: Science Fiction	BA/MA	English	7.5
AK2202	Gender and Technology	BA/MA	English	7.5
AK1204	Environmental History	BA/MA	English	7.5
AK3124	Political Ecology	BA/MA	English	7.5
AK2211	Ways of Walking: Knowing and Sensing Urban Landscapes	MA	English	3.5

Mid-Sweden University

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
LI041G	Ekokritik (Eco-criticism)	BA	Swedish	7,5
EN012G	Literature and the Environment	BA	English	7,5
LI012A	Nature, Progress, Destruction. On Adorno's Concept of Nature	MA	Swedish/ English	7,5

Linköping University

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
721G24/721A50	Globalisation and Global Justice	BA	English	7,5
721G13/721A53	Environmental and Animal Ethics	BA/MA	English	7,5
757A33	Feminist Environmental Humanities	MA	English	7,5

Stockholm University

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
IH5230	The Boundaries of Humanity	MA	Swedish/ English	7,5
EngMio, EN20H7	Ecopoetics	BA	English	7,5

Tallinn University

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
AIG6343.HT	Keskkonna ja tehnoloogia ajalugu (History of environment and technology)	BA	Estonian	6
AIG6344.HT	Mineviku visuaalsed ja aistilised keskkonnad (Sensory Landscapes of the Past)	BA	Estonian	6
HIA6323.HT	Keskkonnaantropoloogia - Nüüdisaegsed antropoloogilised ideed (Environmental anthropology)	BA/MA	English	6
AIG7213.HT	Ajalooline keskkonnahumanitaaria (Historical environmental humanities)	MA	Estonian	6

University of Gothenburg

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
IL1105	Environmental history and ecocriticism	BA	Swedish	15
IL1103	History of Ideas, Continuation Course, part II: Problems of Anthropocentrism	BA	Swedish	15

LV2162	Advanced Studies in Ecocriticism: The Good Life	MA	Swedish	7,5
LV2220-50	Specialization in Comparative Literature – (Theme: Ecocriticism)	MA	Swedish or English	4 x 7,5
IL2106	Advanced Studies in History of Ideas 1	MA	Swedish	7,5
IL2027	Advanced Studies in History of Ideas 2	MA	Swedish	7,5

University of Oulu + University of Lapland

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
687810P	Introduction to environmental humanities (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
687363	Humans and the environment (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
687811P	Environmental values and environmental ethics (Oulu)	BA	Finnish	5
790161A	Tourism, sustainability and environment (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
687804P	History of environmental sciences (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
687814P	The environment and the indigenous peoples of the Arctic (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
687815P	Environmental communication (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
687813P	Energy and the environment (Oulu)	BA	Finnish and English	5
YYMP0101	Environmental social science (UL)	BA	Finnish	5
YYMP0102	Ecology and environmental conservation (UL)	BA	Finnish and English	5
YYMP0103	Society and Environment (UL)	BA	Finnish and English	5
YYMP0106/0204	Environmental Philosophy (UL)	BA	Finnish and English	10
TKTA 1211	Environmental Economics (UL)	BA	Finnish	5
YYMP0115	Environmental Movements (UL)	BA	Finnish	5
YYMP0111	Northern Environmental Questions (UL)	BA	Finnish	5
YYMP0201	Current trends of environmental studies (UL)	BA	Finnish	5
YYMP0202	Nature and culture (UL)	BA	Finnish and English	5
YYMP0212	Environmental politics and governance (UL)	BA	Finnish and English	5

YYMP0216	Environment, consumption and everyday life (UL)	BA	Finnish and English	5
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University of Oslo

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
FIL2390/4390	Miljøfilosofi	BA/MA	Norwegian	10
STV2250	Internasjonal miljø- og ressurspolitikk	BA	Norwegian	10
ENG2532/4532	The Green American Tradition	BA/MA	English	10
SUM4030	Environmental Humanities	MA	English	10
SUM4019	Consumption, Sustainability and Social Change	MA	English	10

University of Stavanger

Course number	Name	Level	Language	Study points
MHI335	Miljø- og vannhistorie	MA	Norwegian	15
MEE100_1	Societal transition and transformation - Energy and climate change	MA	English	10
MEE120_1	Energy and environmental politics and policy in a comparative perspective	MA	English	10
MEE200_1	The geopolitics of energy and environmental policy	MA	English	10
GEN550_1	A posthuman era? New theoretical reflections on the human and its relations	MA	English	10
(new)	Religion and climate change	MA	English	5

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