



# VIU Graduate Seminar

## Defining the Human in Environmental Humanities

Venice International  
University

June 6-10, 2022

Scientific Coordinator:

Elizabeth Kowaleski  
Wallace  
Boston College

This program is a VIU  
Global Challenges  
Initiative

Who is the “human” at the heart of environmental humanities? By definition, environmental humanists seek to explore the bond between humans and nature, and they dedicate themselves to promoting environmental policies and practices that are both socially just and robust. Yet, with the blurring boundaries between nature and culture, humans and non-humans in the Anthropocene, it is also an appropriate moment for environmental humanists to define what it means to be human and to recognize how the human transforms in light of new trends in the medical, scientific, technological, and philosophical fields. At the same time, urgent social trends—including migration spurred by climate change and environmental degradation—can significantly complicate a progressive agenda by raising the question of what we are willing to share with whom. How do we preserve a flexible and capacious understanding of the human, one that is capable of addressing all terrestrial beings?

This Graduate Seminar will be led by:

- Boston College, USA
- Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy
- Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Germany

The Graduate Seminar is divided into a three-day training session followed by participation in a two-day conference which is open to a broader audience of experts.

This seminar, together with the conference, have two main purposes. First, they will provide the opportunity to review recent redefinitions of the human, especially as they manifest themselves in an array of current work in the flourishing field of the Environmental Humanities. Second, the seminar will explore questions of political import, such as “how do we work towards environmental policies that address the broadest possible definition of the human and that mitigate the unequal distribution of terrestrial resources?”

## Faculty

Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, Boston College  
Shaul Bassi, Ca' Foscari University of Venice  
Helmuth Trischler, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität

## Methodology

For the first three days, graduate students will attend the seminar, during which the time will be divided between morning lectures and afternoon student-centered workshops where work-in-progress will be shared and discussed. During the seminar, Venice itself will be presented as a laboratory in which key environmental issues—and the attendant social concerns—are experienced daily. A place-based tour of the lagoon and surrounding areas will initiate broader discussion among participants concerning the extent to which they see similar or different issues in relation to natural resources in their own communities. At the same time, a visit to the Biennale will explore how artists have responded creatively to environmental concerns, especially where they too acknowledge new definitions of the human.

The second part of the week will consist of a **3-days conference** centered on the same themes as the seminar, which will culminate in a keynote by **Serenella Iovino, professor of Italian Studies and Environmental Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.**

The conference will be open to a broader audience of experts and collect fees from those giving academic papers.

## Learning outcomes for participants

1. To obtain a clearer sense of what it is we do as environmental humanists and how we transform our understandings into specific practices.
2. To receive constructive commentary on work in progress and to respond to key concepts and issues that currently manifest themselves in environmental studies work.
3. To co-organize place-based academic events as conceptual tools for both

interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research.

4. To develop both academic work and political practices that are fully self-aware and responsive to the particular humanistic challenges that are brought on by global climate change.

## Who can apply?

This Graduate Seminar is offered to advanced Master and early PhD students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Environmental Sciences. Open to candidates from all the VIU Member Institutions; applications from excellent candidates from non-member institutions will be also considered and evaluated.

## Fees & Grant Support

Students from the VIU member institutions will pay no participation fees. Grant support is also available to support, partially or fully, the costs of international travel and accommodation. The participation fee for students of non-member institutions is Euro 1.250 VAT incl. The fee is inclusive of tuition, course materials, accommodation, lunches, social events and taxes. Students from non-member institutions are not eligible for VIU grant support. VIU Alumni are eligible for a reduced fee.

## Credits

Participation in the Graduate Seminar is considered equivalent to 2 ECTS.

## The final program will be available on the VIU website

## Applications

**December 1, 2021 – February 15, 2022**  
via the VIU website

Applicants must submit the application form, a letter of motivation – which should include a brief description of the candidate's research interests, a curriculum vitae and a photo. Optionally, they can submit a paper abstract: a group of selected students will have the opportunity to present their papers during the conference at the end of the seminar. Those interested in doing so should submit a 250 word

abstract along with their applications, with the understanding that, if selected to present, a full paper will be due by May 15th.

### **VIU Graduate Seminars**

These are thematic intensive seminars given in a concentrated period on subjects of universal interest, open to a broad spectrum of disciplines. They are suited to both Master's and PhD students and are open to candidates from all the VIU member institutions. The young researchers will receive support in defining their research proposal. Significant cooperation among departments in the member institutions is expected.

**Venice International University** is a consortium of 20 universities, representing 14 countries throughout the world.

The mission of VIU is to foster cooperation among VIU member institutions while facilitating the exchange of knowledge and ideas, by developing, promoting and organizing joint academic, research and training/capacity-building program. Students from non-member institutions may participate in selected academic programs. The academic programs at VIU are distinguished by a markedly interdisciplinary approach to the topics, and by the international perspectives that the participants contribute to the discussions. The VIU campus is on the island of San Servolo in Venice, Italy.

*As the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, VIU will continue to monitor the situation, and in the event that it is not possible to confirm the program on the VIU campus as scheduled, other practicable solutions will be evaluated. Applicants and confirmed participants will be informed of any changes.*

### **Location**



### **Venice International University**

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