

National Parks of the World

Fall 2026

Course Information

Title	Meeting Time	Meeting Location
National Parks of the World (3 Credits)	T/TH 0935-11:00 am	Morris room TBD

Instructor Information

Instructor	Email	Office Location & Hours
Charles Ruffner	ruffner@siu.edu	180 Morris

General Information

Course Description

National Parks have been a vital tool for nature conservation since the late nineteenth century, but their impact on society goes beyond their land protection status. This course explores the historical, ecological, social, and indigenous perspectives of the global national park system, emphasizing their role in biodiversity conservation, cultural preservation, sustainable development, and international relations. We will explore the origins and evolution of the national park concept, analyze their impacts on local communities and indigenous populations, evaluate land conservation strategies' effectiveness on plant and animal communities, and address challenges in 21st-century park management. We will also investigate how national parks have shaped our understanding of environmental change, study the interaction between ecological integrity and human presence in these protected areas, and consider the influence of indigenous perspectives on conservation and sustainable coexistence. This course reveals the multifaceted dynamics of national parks worldwide and underscores our collective responsibility to protect these vital ecosystems and cultural heritage sites.

Student Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Learning outcomes of this course are anchored on the key perspectives of global national parks that we will study: historical, ecological, social, and indigenous. For each theme, outcomes will be SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

For example, understanding the historical context of national parks will create the foundation for course discussions. Outcomes within this theme include:

1. Describe the origins and evolution of the national park concept.
2. Analyze the historical, cultural, and political factors that have influenced the establishment and management of national parks around the world.
3. Identify key figures and events that have shaped the development of national parks globally.

And in a SMART context,

1. **Specific:** Describe the origins and evolution of the national park concept, including key figures, events, and influencing factors.
2. **Measurable:** Successfully complete a timeline assignment outlining the major milestones in the development of national parks globally.
3. **Achievable:** Discussions, lectures, and assigned readings will provide the background for the assignment and learning outcome, and students will have access to relevant resources and guidance to complete the timeline assignment.
4. **Relevant:** Understanding the historical context is crucial for comprehending the current state of national parks and their role in society. Why were national parks developed? What role have they played in global biodiversity conservation?
5. **Time-bound:** Initial readings and assignments focused on the historical perspectives of national parks will have a designated timeframe, as specified in the course syllabus, schedule, and/or D2L.

Additional learning outcomes include:

Examine the social dimensions of national parks:

- Discuss the role of national parks in fostering cultural identity, heritage preservation, and community engagement.
- Analyze public perceptions and attitudes towards national parks.
- Evaluate the challenges and opportunities associated with balancing conservation goals with the needs of local communities in national park management.

Analyze the ecological significance of national parks:

- Explain the importance of national parks in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem protection, and wildlife management.
- Assess the ecological threats and challenges facing national parks, including overuse, climate change, and invasive species.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of conservation strategies and management practices in maintaining the ecological integrity of national parks.

Examine and acknowledge the ethical and indigenous dimensions of national park management:

- Recognize and analyze the ethical dilemmas and conflicts that arise in the management of national parks, particularly in relation to the rights and interests of indigenous communities.
- Evaluate the historical and ongoing impacts of national park establishment and management on indigenous communities, including displacement, loss of access to traditional lands and resources, and cultural disruption.
- Demonstrate an understanding of indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives on land management, conservation, and human-nature relationships.

Develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills:

- Critically evaluate different perspectives on the role and management of national parks.
- Analyze case studies of national park management successes and failures from around the world.
- Apply knowledge of historical, social, ecological, ethical, and indigenous factors to propose solutions to contemporary challenges facing national parks.

Course Schedule

Date	Week	University Calendar	Topic
8/18/2026	1		Assessment Quiz- Course introduction, syllabus, and expectations
8/20/26			Introduction to National Parks: Defining the concept, historical origins, and global context
8/25-27/26	2		Historical Context of National Parks: Exploring the evolution of national parks, key figures, and influencing factors
9/01-03/26	3		Social Dimensions of National Parks: Examining the role of national parks in cultural identity, heritage preservation, and community engagement
9/08-10/26	4	Labor Day (7-Sept)	Social Dimensions of National Parks: Analyzing the social and economic impacts of national parks on local communities and indigenous populations
9/15-17/26	5		Ethical and Indigenous Dimensions of National Park Management: Examining the impacts of national parks on indigenous rights, livelihoods, and cultural practices
9/22-24/26	6		Midterm Review and Exam
9/29-10/01	7		Ecological Significance of National Parks: Understanding the importance of national parks in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem protection, and wildlife management
10/6-8/26	8		Ecological Significance of National Parks: Assessing the ecological threats and challenges facing national parks
10/13-15	9		Human Dimensions of Natural Resources: Exploring public perceptions and attitudes towards national parks
10/20-22	10		Human Dimensions of Natural Resources: Examining sustainable resource use and conflict resolution strategies in national parks
10/27-29	11		Human Dimensions of Natural Resources: Exploring the role of environmental education and outreach in national park management
11/3-5/26	12		Global National Park differences
11/10-12	13	Veteran's Day (11-Nov)	Case Studies in National Park Management: Analyzing successes and failures from around the world (Student Presentations)
11/17-19	14		Case Studies in National Park Management: Analyzing successes and failures from around the world (Student Presentations)
11/24-26	15		Thanksgiving Week
12/1-3/26	16		Review for Final Assessment
12/7-11	17		Finals- Date TBD

Texts and Readings

The course discussions will draw on several readings from edited textbooks and peer-reviewed literature. Examples include:

Texts

Howkins, A., Orsi, J., & Fiege, M. (Eds.). (2016). *National parks beyond the nation: Global perspectives on "America's best idea"*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Wilshusen, P. R., Brechin, S. R., Fortwangler, C. L., & West, P. C. (Eds.). (2002). *Contested nature: Promoting international biodiversity with social justice in the twenty-first century*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Quinn, M. S., Jones, M., & Lockwood, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Parks, peace, and partnership: Global initiatives in transboundary conservation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sellers, R. W. (1997). *Preserving nature in the national parks: A history*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Llewellyn, G. (2005). *National parks: Conservation or cosmetics?*. Aberystwyth: Cambrian Printers.

Stevens, S. (2014). *Indigenous peoples, national parks, and protected areas: A new paradigm linking conservation, culture, and rights*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Peer-reviewed literature

He, G., Chen, X., Bearer, S., An, L., Liu, J., & Linderman, M. (2018). Navigating the tensions between conservation and development in China's Giant Panda National Parks: A case study of Wolong National Nature Reserve. *Conservation Letters*, 11(4), e12454.

Garnett, S. T., Burgess, N. D., Fa, J. E., Fernández-Llamazares, Á., Molnár, Z., Robinson, C. J., ... & Venter, O. (2018). A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation. *Nature Sustainability*, 1(7), 369-374.

West, P., Igoe, J., & Brockington, D. (2006). Parks and peoples: The social impact of protected areas. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35, 251-277.

Floyd, M. F. (2001). Managing national parks in a multicultural society: Searching for common ground. In *The George Wright Forum* (Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 41-51). George Wright Society.

Muhumuza, M., & Balkwill, K. (2013). Factors affecting the success of conserving biodiversity in national parks: A review of case studies from Africa. *International Journal of Biodiversity*, 2013.

Zhou, D. Q., & Grumbine, R. E. (2011). National parks in China: Experiments with protecting nature and human livelihoods in Yunnan province, Peoples' Republic of China (PRC). *Biological Conservation*, 144(5), 1314-1321.

King, B. (2010). Conservation geographies in Sub-Saharan Africa: The politics of national parks, community conservation and peace parks. *Geography Compass*, 4(1), 14-27.

Davis, C. R., & Hansen, A. J. (2011). Trajectories in land use change around US National Parks and challenges and opportunities for management. *Ecological Applications*, 21(8), 3299-3316.

Wang, G., Innes, J. L., Wu, S. W., Krzyzanowski, J., Yin, Y., Dai, S., ... & Liu, S. (2012). National park development in China: conservation or commercialization?. *Ambio*, 41, 247-261.

Bath, D. A. J., & Enck, J. W. (2003). Wildlife-human interactions in national parks in Canada and the USA. *US Government Documents (Utah Regional Depository)*, 424.

Reindrawati, D. Y., Sos, S., & Ulis Fajar Choirotun, H. (2022). Threats to Sustainable Tourism in National Parks: Case Studies from Indonesia and South Africa. *Journal African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 11(3), 919-937.

Learning experiences, projects, and nature of assignments

Learning assessments in this course are designed to strengthen students' understanding of the content discussed during meetings or of assigned readings. Planned activities include:

- **In-class discussions** of readings and materials presented during meetings. Students will have opportunities to lead discussions on a topic of their choice.
- **In-class debates** on ethical considerations, roles and responsibilities of national parks, and how to manage human-nature conflicts (e.g., overuse and/or degradation of resources within parks).
- **Evaluate case studies** of park management issues around the globe. For example, we will study the decision to conserve or continue development in and around China's Giant Pandas National Park.
- **Individual and Group Projects** assessing students' ability to synthesize information, collaborate effectively, consider multiple perspectives, and present findings in a clear and organized manner. Projects may include assessing challenges and threats facing specific national parks or synthesizing a park's ecological significance, conservation challenges, and management practices.
- **Field Trip to Ste. Genevieve NP** to understand the development and maintenance issues of a local French colonial settlement
- **Traditional Exams** to assess and summarize how students are comprehending course content.

Unique Educational Experience for Honors students

This course provides a multi-disciplinary, holistic view of global landscapes of ecological, social, and historical significance, offering a unique educational experience not typically found in a traditional university catalog. Its interdisciplinary nature, drawing from various degree programs, aligns well with the University Honors program, as it goes beyond the boundaries of single degree programs and fosters a comprehensive understanding of national parks. The global perspective of the course will provide insights into the diverse challenges of national park management, showcasing how local issues call for varied management approaches. Additionally, the course aims to challenge students' critical thinking and comprehension skills through nontraditional learning assessments and seminar-style discussions, tailored to the intellectual curiosity of SIU's Honors students. The course will encourage students to engage with conflicting viewpoints, analyze diverse perspectives, and develop well-reasoned arguments.

Course Communication

The course will use D2L for hosting course material and assignments. Course updates will be sent via email as needed. Students are encouraged to contact the instructor directly with course concerns or personal issues.

Contacting Me

I try to be available throughout the semester via several forms of communication. For minor issues or quick questions/notes, feel free to chat with me after class; before class I usually do not have extra time as I am preparing for the day's lecture. For other issues, email is the best way to get

ahold of me. I can usually respond to emails within 24 hours; the exception is weekends, illness, or during travel. Additionally, I (almost always) will not respond to emails during the evenings or weekends, and I will try not to send messages outside of traditional working hours.

You are also welcome to stop by my office for quick questions/issues, but I may not always be able to chat. While I realize we have constant contact and communication through our phones, please maintain professional communication in email.

Course Prerequisites

None.

Grades

Grading will follow the University's guidelines on issuing grades (<https://gradschool.siu.edu/current-students/registration/grades.php>).

Percent	Grade
100 - 93	A
92 - 90	A-
89 - 88	B+
87 - 83	B
82 - 80	B-
79 - 78	C+
77 - 73	C
72 - 70	C-
69 - 68	D+
67 - 63	D
62 - 60	D-
59 - 0	F

For additional SIU policies that apply to this and all other SIU classes, please see the following:

[syllabus-attachment-fall-2026](#)