

SCIENCE, SEA, AND SOCIETY

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Office Hours: Friday, 14-15:30 by appointment

Course Description

In recent years, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have begun speaking of an “oceanic turn.” This shift asks us to reconsider the ocean not only as a resource that has sustained human life, trade, and imagination, but also as a space shaped and damaged by human activity. Long treated as distant and adventurous, the ocean is, for many coastal and island communities, an everyday reality marked by increasing pollution, extraction, and warming. Thinking with the multitude of marine life inhabiting these environments raises urgent questions about sustainability and ocean governance. This course examines how the sea has been seen, studied, measured, and conceptualized in the history of science, while also engaging recent conversations in literature and media studies gathered under the name “Blue Humanities.”

Interdisciplinary in scope, the course places modern scientific knowledge alongside other ways of knowing the ocean, attending to both Western and non-Western contexts. Bringing together work from history, anthropology, literature, Science and Technology Studies, and philosophy, the course invites students to reflect on their own relationships (or lack thereof) with the sea. It asks us to move beyond viewing the ocean simply as a site of leisure toward a more engaged perspective on ocean environments and their histories.

Requirements

Active participation in class and group discussions is essential. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings, engage critically and creatively with the study materials, and contribute diverse perspectives and examples to class discussions. The assignment will be submitted in two parts. The first part (2,500 words) should present the student's essay on a relevant issue related to the course. The second part (2,500 words) should engage in depth with one or more core texts from the course reading list in connection to the first essay. The assignment will be developed in consultation with the instructor throughout the semester. Students are encouraged to present their work incorporating a self-reflexive component during the final weeks of the course.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

The assessment for this course will be based on writing, reading, speaking, thinking and active engagements in the class activities. The final assignment (Parts 1 and 2 combined) will constitute 60% of the final grade. The remaining 40% will be allocated

as follows: 30% for regular class participation and engagement, and 10% for the final presentation of the essay.

Assignments

The assignment will be submitted in two parts. The first part (2,500 words), due on 16 October 2026, should be an original essay on a specific issue of the student's interest (e.g., ocean pollution, sea-level rise, fishers' rights, marine policy, conservation, design interventions, oceanic fiction, tourism, or leisure practices). Students are encouraged to draw on empirical case studies, archival research, field-based material, or other relevant examples. The second part (2,500 words), due on 27 November 2026, should develop the first essay through sustained engagement with one or more key readings from the course (e.g., on hydrocolonialism, Anthropocene, blue-green capitalism etc). Students are encouraged to provide a close reading of the selected text(s) while developing their own critical perspectives. The final essay should also include a bibliography and footnotes. The final presentation of the essay on 11 December 2026 should also include a reflexive component that reflects on the student's positionality in relation to their topic and analysis. Students are welcome to consult the instructor throughout the development of their assignment and are encouraged to submit a 250 word abstract outlining their proposed topic the latest by the end of September.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Assignment Part 1- 30 %
Assignment Part 2- 30 %
Class Participation- 30%
Final presentation- 10%

Schedule

31 August 2026- Introduction

- Steinberg, Philip E. *The Social Construction of the Ocean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. (Chapter 1, p.8-38)-

4 September 2026- History of Oceans

- Rozwadowski, Helen M. "Introduction." *Isis* 105, no. 2 (2014): 335–37. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676570>.
- Reidy, Michael S., and Helen M. Rozwadowski. "The Spaces In Between: Science, Ocean, Empire." *Isis* 105, no. 2 (2014): 338–51. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676571>.

11 September 2026- Science, Sea and Governance

- Oreskes, Naomi. *Science on a Mission: How Military Funding Shaped What We Do and Don't Know about the Ocean*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. (Conclusion, p.480-516)

18 September 2026- Blue-Green Capitalism

- Helmreich, Stefan. *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*. University of California press, 2009. (Chapter 3, p.106-144)

25 September 2026- Blue Media

- Jue, Melody. *Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. (Chapter 1, p.34-70)
- (Optional) Alaimo, Stacy. *The Abyss Stares Back: Encounters with Deep-Sea Life*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2025. (Introduction)

2 October 2026: Can Oceans Think?

- Godfrey-Smith, Peter. *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*. New York: Macmillan USA, 2017.(Chapter 3)
- (Film) *My Octopus Teacher*, directed by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed (Los Angeles, CA: Netflix, 2020).

9 October 2026- Poetics

- Mentz, Steve. *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*. London: Routledge, 2024. (Chapter 1)
- (Poem) Walcott, Derek. "The Sea is History." Poets.org. Academy of American Poets, 2007.
- (Optional) DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. "Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene." *Comparative Literature* 69, no.1 (2017): 32-44.

16 October 2026- Indigenous Ocean

- Hau'ofa, Epeli. "Our Sea of Islands." *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–61.
- (Documentary) Deep Sea Mining Campaign, "Blue Peril," <https://dsm-campaign.org/blue-peril/>

23 October 2026- Break

30 October 2026- Fishing for Capital

- Probyn, Elspeth. *Eating the Ocean*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. (Chapter 3, 77-100).
- (Cookbook) Medrano, Anthony D., ed. *Lala-Land: Singapore's Seafood Heritage*. Singapore: Epigram Books, 2024.

6 November 2026- Hydrocolonialism

- Hofmeyr, Isabel. *Dockside Reading: Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022. (Introduction, p.1-26)
- (Optional) Fernando, Tamara. "Seeing Like the Sea: A Multispecies History of the Ceylon Pearl Fishery 1800–1925." *Past & Present* 254, no. 1 (2022): 127–60.

13 November 2026- Pollution Problem

- Müller, Simone M., and Paul S. Sutter. *The Toxic Ship: The Voyage of the Khian Sea and the Global Waste Trade*. Washington: University of Washington Press, 2023. (Chapter 1, 11-33).

20 November 2026- Disasters and Resilience

- Takahashi, Satsuki. *Fukushima Futures: Survival Stories in a Repeatedly Ruined Seascape*. Washington: University of Washington Press, 2023. (Chapter 6, 105-120).
- (Optional) Visit to the Ocean Futures Special Exhibition at Futurium in Berlin.

27 November 2026- Art in the Anthropocene

- Helmreich, Stefan. "Hokusai's Great Wave Enters the Anthropocene." *Environmental Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2016): 203–17.
- Chitra, V. *Drawing Coastlines: Climate Anxieties and the Visual Reinvention of Mumbai's Shore*. Expertise. Cornell University Press, 2024. (Discussion of Graphics)
- (Artwork) Katsushika Hokusai, *Under a Wave at Kanagawa*, c. 1829, woodblock print.

04 December 2026- Ethnography of Sea I

- Bubandt, Nils. "Tidalectic Ethnography: Snorkeling the Coral Reefs of the Anthropocene." In *Rubber Boots Methods for the Anthropocene: Doing Fieldwork in Multispecies Worlds*, edited by Rachel Cypher, Nils Bubandt, and Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen, 171–199. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023.
- Dua, Jatin. "Anthropology at Sea: Displacement as Ethnographic Praxis." *American Ethnologist* 51, no. 1 (2024): 40–46.

11 December 2026- Ethnography of Sea 2

- Palsson, Gisli. "Enskilment at Sea." *Man* 29, no. 4 (1994): 901.
- Helmreich, Stefan. "Nature/Culture/Seawater." *American Anthropologist* 113, no. 1 (2011): 132–44.
- Final presentations and discussions

18 December 2026- Make up classes and Wrap-Up

Essay Deadlines

16 October 2026- Assignment (Part 1)

27 November 2026- Assignment (Part 2)
11 December 2026- Final presentations

Grades Submission
18 December 2026

Library and Book Purchase Policies

The instructor will provide digital copies of the assigned readings in advance. Where possible, core texts will be available in the library.