

Segment 1: What Is Nature? (4 credits)

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE: This course approaches the question “what is nature?” from a social-historical perspective, recognizing that perceptions of nature are always viewed through cultural frames. The thought of “nature” has the power to put one into particular moods—calmness in the presence of benign energies, awe in response to the sublime, fear in the face of hostile forces, industriousness at seeing a great warehouse of resources, and carefulness due to an awareness of its fragility—and each of these moods has mythic and social histories. Concepts of nature involve interpretations of reality. We bring histories and cultural habits of thought to every encounter with the natural world. In this course, we seek to identify and understand these cultural frames—where they originated and how they shape our views of nature.

AIMS OF THE COURSE

To gain greater understanding of:

- the natural and environmental history of the Klamath-Siskiyou region
- four ways of imagining “nature” (Providential, Romantic, Utilitarian, Ecological) and how they have given rise to different land laws
- how the concept of the Anthropocene is impacting current environmental conversations and laws
- Romantic influences on our sense of the sublime in nature
- the interplay between resource extraction and American views of nature in the city/country dichotomy
- the alternate history of African American experiences of the “great outdoors”
- non-Western perspectives on social-ecological systems
- the impact of globalism as a social process on how we understand nature
- ethical and philosophical questions driving “green” cultural attitudes

Students are encouraged to connect reading of core texts and ideas to your own experiences as you explore our unique location inside the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, which has been set apart for its biodiversity. Farm chores, field trips, and opportunities to practice mountaineering and hiking skills should also be approached as occasions to reflect on our cultural frames for “nature.”

COURSE TEXTS

Richard Powers, *Overstory*

Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*

“Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?”

William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”

Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*

Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, & the Teachings of Plants*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Book notes (for every book)
- 2) One-Idea paper (1)
- 3) Dillard paper (1)
- 4) Memo (1)
- 5) Attendance at daily lectures
- 6) Full participation in daily small group discussion
- 7) Weekly faculty-student conferences
- 8) Backpacking trip

EXPLANATION OF REQUIREMENTS

1) **Book notes**

In lieu of taking exams on the reading, students will be asked to turn in daily book notes. Different models for this will be surveyed early in the course. The notes are expected to discuss major arguments or themes of texts, strengths and weaknesses in the quality of argument and uses of evidence in discursive texts, and image patterns or character development in fictional works. They should also include personal responses, such as relation to individual faith or life experiences. Notes may be collected on a daily basis by professors, so students must bring them to discussion every day.

2) **One-Idea paper (1)**

Isolate one major idea from the week's assigned readings, then write one page in which you describe and analyze the idea in your own words, while being as faithful as possible to the author's intent. Be prepared to read this to your Friday small group and handle questions and responses from the group.

3) **Dillard exercise (1)**

Following the model of Annie Dillard in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, settle into a spot and immerse yourself. Sit quietly and observe your surroundings for an hour. Record what your senses are telling you. Write about your area as if you are an explorer from another planet trying to understand an alien geography. Final product: a 250-400 word descriptive narrative. See handout.

4) **Memo (1)**

Memos are a more personal form of reflection. Write one page in which you share any important thoughts from the week's readings, lectures, and discussions. Be prepared to read this to your Friday small group and handle questions and responses from the group.

5) **Attendance at daily lectures.**

Absences must be excused.

6) **Full participation in daily small group discussion**

Absences must be excused. Come prepared with all reading completed and book notes in hand. Dive in.

7) **Weekly faculty-student conferences**

After lectures on Mondays, students will meet one-on-one with the discussion group leader to talk about note taking, participation in daily discussion, writing assignments, and ideas that are in the air.

8) **Culminating backpacking trip**

GRADING

Grades will be assessed in the following ways:

- Weekly faculty-student conferences reviewing the note-taking, writing, and discussion opportunities of the previous week.
- Documented completion of all reading and book notes on time.
- Self-evaluations, followed by faculty-student conferences, at the end of the segment.

Assessment will be performed according to the following guidelines:

Students who complete all the reading on time, participate in all discussions, attend all lectures, and submit book notes and required writing assignments on time will earn an A.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

See Segment 1 calendar.

COURSE CREDIT

Students will choose from among the following course offerings:

ENVS 395 – Environmental Studies of the Natural World
HIS 395 – Historical Perspectives on the Natural World
SOC 395 – Social Thought on the Natural World