

**The Ohio State University  
First-Year Seminar Program  
Course Proposal**

**Course Information**

1. Attach a sample syllabus that includes the following. (Sample syllabi can be found at <http://firstyearseminars.osu.edu>).

- the course goals
- a brief description of the content
- the distribution of meeting times
- a weekly topical outline
- a listing of assignments
- grade assessment information (A-E or S/U)
- required textbooks and/or reading list
- the academic misconduct and disability services statements (sample statements can be found at <http://ascas.osu.edu/curriculum/asc-syllabus-elements>)

2. Attach a brief biographical paragraph that includes the current research interests, teaching awards and honors, and undergraduate courses taught by the participating instructor(s). The paragraph will be included in materials for first-year students.

Jacob Risinger (English)

Proposer's Name and Primary Academic Unit (please print)

Imagining the Earth: Nature Writing in a Moment of Crisis

Proposer's Title

risinger.13@osu.edu

Proposer's e-mail Address

(617) 901 - 9236

Contact Phone Number

February 28, 2018

Submission Date

Approval of Department Chair of Academic Unit (please print)

**This form and any attachments should be mailed to First-Year Seminar Program, 100 Denney Hall, 164 Annie & John Glenn Avenue, ATTN: Todd Bitters or e-mailed to [bitters.4@osu.edu](mailto:bitters.4@osu.edu).**



**Imagining the Earth  
Nature Writing in a Moment of Crisis**

**Freshman Seminar ARTSSCI 1138.xx**

Date and Location TBD

Professor Jacob Risinger ([risinger.13@osu.edu](mailto:risinger.13@osu.edu))

Office Hours: Tues and Thurs TBD and by appointment (Denney 561)

**Description**

It's tempting to imagine nature as the antithesis of the human—"the world out there," a self-obvious blank slate best approached scientifically and empirically. In this course we'll confront a messier reality by thinking about the many ways in which literature has shaped our sense of nature and the natural. We'll start with a crash course on Henry David Thoreau, that much-misunderstood prophet of environmentalism who blended scientific study with spiritual seeking. In the weeks that follow, we'll traverse many different landscapes as we explore some touchstones in the nature writing tradition. We'll meet a Beat poet with a penchant for Buddhism; a marine biologist whose writing ultimately led to the formation of the EPA; an immigrant whose writing and wandering has led many to describe him as the "father of the national parks"; and America's best-selling poet, a woman who once happened to be a freshman at Ohio State.

While reading about other landscapes, this seminar will also give you the chance to explore your own new environment. In a series of short expeditions, we'll visit and write about some of the dynamic natural spaces in and around the Ohio State campus. These excursions will give us a hands-on prompt for thinking about one of the paradoxes of nature writing, the fact that our collective planetary survival and flourishing depends on the observations and commitment of single, localized individuals. We'll also weigh the stakes and future of nature writing at a moment of acute environmental crisis.

## Texts

*American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau* (Library of America, ed. Bill McKibben)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Beacon Press)

Assorted Readings on Carmen

## Requirements

- Active, conversational participation. Each week, we'll work together to tackle our readings from a variety of angles. Your perspective and participation is essential. To that end, you should arrive in class with two or three pre-formulated questions and/or provocations each week.
- A weekly, hybrid journal. Over the course of the semester, you will keep a hybrid journal with *at least* one entry per week. This journal can be a space to track your own take on the readings that we discuss in seminar, and it can be a space for reflecting on the various excursions we'll make together. But it can also be a creative venue for your own nature writing: as you settle into life in this new environment, what do you notice about the world and landscape around you? How does human and natural ecology intersect? How does the landscape around the Oval differ from your own home environment? In *Walden*, Thoreau meditates on his attempt to live deliberately—not exactly an easy task. My hope is that your journal will be a prompt for deliberation, as well as a record of the way in which our readings and discussion inflect your own insights. You'll have (optional) opportunities to share excerpts from your journal with other members of the seminar throughout the semester, and I'll read/respond to your journal at several points throughout the term.
- Field Notes Report. At one point over the course of the semester, you'll be responsible for a brief in-class field report in which you share your personal reconnaissance on either a) your own independent visit to one of Columbus's twenty Metro Parks or b) your own independent reading of a piece in the *American Earth* anthology that we won't have a chance to cover as a class.

## Course Objectives

- To survey the diversity and range of the American nature writing tradition, while also thinking critically about how that tradition shapes contemporary attitudes toward nature and the environment.
- To help first-year students acclimate to life at Ohio State by learning about and exploring natural spaces in and around campus.
- To give students a new sense of the cross-currents that connect literature and science.
- To foster critical and reflective writing skills, as well as a new appreciation for and sense of ease in collective conversation and dialogue.

## Grading

- Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory  
Class Participation: 50%  
Field Notes Presentation : 10%  
Weekly Hybrid Journal: 40%

## Schedule

Week One	<u>“Pay attention. Be astonished.”</u>  Mary Oliver, “Breakage” John Burroughs, “Nature Near Home” and “The Art of Seeing Things”
Week Two	<u>Poetic Origins</u>  Virgil, Eclogue I William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey” Walt Whitman, from <i>Leaves of Grass</i>
Week Three	<u>HDT, Part I: Where I Lived, and What I Lived For</u>  Thoreau, guided readings in <i>Walden</i> (pp. 1-104)
Week Four	<u>HDT, Part II: From the Village to the Pond</u>  Thoreau, guided readings in <i>Walden</i> (pp. 105-196)
Week Five	<b><u>Excursion to Waterman Agricultural and Natural Resources Laboratory</u></b>
Week Six	<u>HDT Part III: Pond Scum?</u>  Thoreau, guided readings in <i>Walden</i> (pp. 197-312)
Week Seven	<u>A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf</u>  John Muir, from <i>A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf</i> and “A Wind-Storm in the Forests”
Week Eight	<u>The Land Ethic</u>  Aldo Leopold, from <i>A Sand County Almanac</i>

Week Nine	<u><b>Excursion to the Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park</b></u>
Week Ten	<u>The Luxury of Wonder, the Urgency of Devastation</u> Rachel Carson, from <i>Silent Spring</i> and <i>The Sense of Wonder</i>
Week Eleven	<u>The Beat Generation Does Nature Writing</u> Gary Snyder, from <i>Turtle Island</i> and <i>The Wilderness Ethic</i>
Week Twelve	<u><b>Excursion to Chadwick Arboretum</b></u>
Week Thirteen	<u>Pilgrimages</u> Annie Dillard, from <i>A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i>
Week Fourteen	<u>The End of Nature; Prospects?</u> Selections from <i>Urban Nature: Poems About Wildlife in the City</i> William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”

### **Course Policies:**

**ATTENDANCE:** Our weekly conversations—and your participation in those conversations—are essential to your experience of the course. To that end, attendance is mandatory, and I take it every session. If you know you have to miss a class, please let me know in advance. I will grant excused absences for documented medical and family emergencies.

**Statement on Academic Misconduct:** It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

**DISABILITY SERVICES:** Students with disabilities (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions) that have been certified by the Office of Student Life Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker

Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue; telephone 614- 292- 3307, [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu);  
[slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu).

**OFFICE HOURS:** You should think of office hours as an important extension of our time in the classroom. I encourage each of you to drop by my office hours, or schedule an appointment via email. I'm always happy to discuss your journals or any questions you have about our shared readings. If you are struggling or confused at any point in the semester, please be in touch.

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Biographical Statement

A native Midwesterner, I've been teaching at Ohio State for the past four years. As a professor in English Department, I spend probably too much time thinking and writing about nineteenth-century literature. I'm currently finishing a book on the strange conjunction of Romantic poetry and Stoic philosophy. I am always excited to share my 19<sup>th</sup> century fixation with my 21<sup>st</sup> century students, so I was especially honored to be named Undergraduate Professor of the Year by the English Department in 2017. When I'm not teaching or in the library, I like to spend as much time as possible outside. In this sense, some of the thought behind this course arises out of frequent rambles in the various places I've called home over the years: Indiana, Michigan, Vermont, England, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Ohio.