
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
COLLEGE OF ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN

FALL SEMESTER 2011
EDES 6530 — IDEAS OF NATURE

SYLLABUS

(2 HOURS CREDIT)

THURSDAYS, 2:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

EDES 6530 explores the idea of nature as a cultural construct that is continually subject to reappraisal and revision with critical implications for the environmental sciences, the design arts, and humanistic studies.

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand cultural dimensions of nature, and appreciate “nature” as a multitude of connected, contested, and evolving concepts.
2. Practice techniques and skills for expressing abstract ideas in words, images, and/or three- or four-dimensional forms.
3. Practice techniques and skills for exploring abstract concepts in the context of the physical environment.
4. Participate in scholarly and professional dialog about the role of nature in environmental planning and design practice.
5. Appreciate the ecological or non-human effects of environmental planning and design and the ways in which the design professions may promote positive interaction between human and non-human communities.

OVERVIEW

What is “nature”? Does nature really exist outside of us—in the world “out there” beyond human experience—or is nature merely a cultural construct, an interesting idea that humans have invented, for better or worse, to help us understand, navigate, and manipulate the physical world? If nature really does exist “out there,” then how are we to apprehend and understand it? Does nature have a purpose and will of its own? Are the actions of nature orderly, stochastic, or random? Are the elements of nature static, dynamic, or somehow in “balance”? Is nature inherently good, evil, or morally neutral? With respect to human aspirations, is nature benevolent, malevolent, or impartial? Or, if you believe that there really is no such thing as “nature”—if you believe that nature itself is a purely human invention—then what alternatives might exist to help us humans make sense of our surroundings and guide our interactions with our environment? How are we to imagine our place in the world, and how are we to make choices about how to act and behave in it? Inevitably, how you answer such questions will affect your practice of environmental planning and design. Consequently, the environments that *you* design will affect how *other humans* think, act, and behave in “nature”—or, the world “out there.”

EDES 6530 is an opportunity for you to explore ideas of nature, and reflect upon what, if anything, “nature” has to do with your life and your work.

FORMAT AND LOGIC OF THE COURSE

In EDES 6530 we will explore some of the ideas that are central to the practice of environmental planning and design. The central theme of the course (“Nature”) spans a vast scholarly area, and in recent decades a number of scholarly disciplines have focused attention on both the complexity and consequences of Western and non-Western “Ideas of nature.” There is no way to fully survey the breadth and richness of this field of inquiry in one semester, and any effort to parse the distinctions between the diverse brands of scholarship and professional practice involved in this effort will be at least somewhat idiosyncratic. For the purposes of this course, we will focus on a few essential themes, and we will engage some of the key authors and texts that are either prominent in the area or representative of a particular approach. When you have completed the course, you should have a sense of how environmental planning and design practices relate to conceptions of nature (and human culture!), and if you are interested in pursuing future work in this area, you should have a solid foundation in place.

EDES 6530 will entail learning about the historical and cultural contexts that have shaped ideas about nature. We will trace various historical attitudes about nature, discuss current developments in various areas of theory and criticism, and speculate about what these may portend for the future of the environmental planning and design professions. Within the context of two semester-long creative projects, we will also reflect upon the ideas that we discuss in class. You should think of this course as a *laboratory for generating your own ideas of nature within the context of environmental planning and design.*

The course will be structured as a graduate seminar and creative workshop with a significant fieldwork component. The core idea of a seminar is that all participants (especially students!) take an active part in developing and conducting the course. In other words, the success of the course (*i.e.*, the attainment of individual learning objectives) is entirely a product of the commitment and effort that participants invest in it. Classroom activities will entail a combination of presentations, readings, discussions, field trips,, and both written and graphic communication. Readings will be assigned for most class sessions, and you will be expected to read them prior to class and share your reactions in discussions. Active participation in these discussions will be part of your grade for the course. We also will take several field trips during the course of the semester. While our discussion sessions will emphasize some of the major themes or issues related to “ideas of nature,” the field trips will offer you opportunities to contemplate these ideas outside of the classroom, and to consider how theory relates to experience and practice.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES, READINGS AND TEXTS

e-Learning Commons

Electronic versions of the course syllabus, handouts, and supplementary readings will be available from the UGA e-Learning Commons (eLC).

Required Texts

There is no required textbook. However, a variety of readings—including a selection of journal articles, book chapters, and unpublished research and planning reports—will be assigned as a basis for seminar discussions. For each discussion topic I will assign one or a number of required readings. Readings are extensive but not difficult; as much as possible, they have been chosen to be fun and provocative as well as informative. For most themes, I also will provide a list of optional, supplementary references. These lists of suggested readings are not comprehensive, but they will provide places for you to begin deeper exploration. Supplementary readings will be placed on reserve for EDES 6530 in the College of Environment and Design’s Owens Library, G14 Caldwell Hall. These materials will be available for you to use in the library, however you also may make copies of these items for your own personal use. Other readings, particularly electronic resources, will be made available through e-Learning Commons.

A Note on Reading and Writing

This is a reading-intensive course. I encourage you to take a minute or two to browse through the supplementary reading materials. Try to take an hour every week or two simply to wander through these texts, following topics as they catch your eye, and using the texts in this way in conjunction with other course readings. Part of being an effective designer is being willing to follow your curiosity, and learning how to find answers to questions you didn’t even realize you had when you started. This is part of the research process we want to practice in the course. Wandering through the core texts—and then using their references to move on the other sources—is much more akin to what designers, planners, and preservation professionals actually do than is reading a textbook narrative.

In addition to reading, you may be expected to do a fair amount of writing as well. Like it or not, effectively communicating ideas through text, images, and verbal presentations is an important part of nearly every type of environmental design and planning practice. ***The clarity and persuasiveness of your prose will be a factor in your grade.*** I encourage all who are interested in improving their prose to read William Strunk and E. B. White's *The Elements of Style*, ideally early in the semester. You should refer to it regularly: the book is thin but worth its weight in gold, and I recommend that you own a copy.

REQUIREMENTS

Seminar Session

One of your assignments for the course will be to organize and lead a discussion based on a general theme and corresponding reading assignments. You will work in teams to develop a strategy for engaging the issues and ideas presented in the readings. More detailed instructions will be provided during the second week of class.

Ideas of Nature Journal

Your main assignment for the course will be the development of a journal, which will serve as an ongoing record of your personal thoughts and musings about nature. Our class activities and fieldtrips will be oriented toward exploring the relationship between “ideas of nature” and environmental practices, and your journal will be a medium for you to take this exploration in a direction that is of particular interest to you. I am not looking for a day-by-day diary of what was said or done in class. What I do hope to see is clear evidence that you have been thinking about ideas drawn from class activities (*i.e.*, readings, discussions and field trips) and that you are reflecting on how those ideas affect your attitudes about design and other environmental practices. Journal entries may take many forms: short essays, poems, narratives, videos, photographs or sketches. At the end of the term, you should collect these and submit your journal as a single, well-organized and attractively designed document or artifact. If you choose, you may create your journal as a “virtual” document/artifact—*e.g.*, an online blog. From time to time, during our classroom discussions and fieldtrips, I will provide you with a structured exercise that is intended to inspire reflection or encourage exploration. You may use these exercises as a basis for composing your journal entries. More specific guidelines for the journal assignment will be distributed in class.

Ideas of Nature Glossary

Throughout the term, you will create your own personal “glossary” of ideas of nature. Each week, I will provide you with a short list of terms, or “keywords”, for you to consider in light of the scheduled readings, discussions or fieldtrips. From these, you should select at last three terms that particularly intrigue you. In addition, you should generate at least one relevant “keyword” of your own. For each term, your task is to compose a very brief mini-essay that captures, for you, that term’s essential meaning. At the end of the semester, you should append the glossary to your Ideas of Nature Journal. For this assignment, we will draw inspiration from two key works: Raymond Williams’s classic *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (rev. ed., 1983), and the more recent *Home Ground*:

Language for an American Landscape (2006), edited by Barry Lopez. More specific instructions will be distributed during the second week of the course.

Seminar Attendance and Participation

We cannot learn from what we never read, never hear or never experience. Advance preparation, attendance, and active participation in our seminar meetings are essential to the success of the class, and obvious requirements for this course. Attendance at our classroom sessions will be one measure of your participation in the course. However, participation includes not only showing up for class, but also playing an active role in furthering discussion, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the assigned readings, and positively contributing to the accomplishment of the class goals and objectives. Everyone's active participation will assure a very interesting semester for us all.

Field Trip Participation

Four afternoon field trips have been planned for the semester, and they are critical components of the course. If possible, I encourage you to participate in all four trips; I am confident they will be fun and rewarding experiences. We will visit some spectacular places, and we will be accompanied by some wonderful guides. I understand, however, that participating in all four of the trips may be logistically challenging for some people. Therefore, *I request that you arrange your schedule to participate in at least two of the four scheduled trips*. In an attempt to compensate you for the "extra" non-classroom time that you will devote to the field trips, I have cancelled two of our regular class meeting times (September 8 and October 20).

SIDE PROJECTS

This year's Ideas of Nature course will entertain a couple of "side projects." These are intended merely to inspire further reflection and creativity in our ongoing exploration of "ideas of nature." Participation in these activities is not mandatory, and they will not be factored into your final grade for the course. The side projects are:

Virtual Wunderkammer

Somewhere in cyberspace—probably in a DropBox or SkyDrive—we will construct our own Wunderkammer. This is a space for you to store and share "wonders" and "curiosities"—that is, (virtual) objects to inspire wonder, and stimulate the curiosity of your classmates. I'll create compartments for each of our seminar themes, and probably contribute one or a few curiosities of my own. I'm hoping, however, that each of you will freely contribute to our collection of wonders. I'm curious to see what might be out there for us all to wonder at ...

Farmers' and Foragers' Feast

Eating—and the process of procuring food, of which eating is the hoped for result!—is one of the most fundamental ways in which humans (and all organisms?) participate in "nature." So, what *is* "food"? Where does food come from? How much (or how little) of the natural world is *edible*? And what is really entailed in the process of getting food, eating it, and attending to all of the contingencies and consequences of getting food ... and

eating it? The Farmers’ and Foragers’ Feast is an experiment inspired, in part, by Steven Rinella’s wonderful book, *The Scavenger’s Guide to Haute Cuisine* (New York: Hyperion, 2005). The idea behind the experiment is fairly simple: at the end of the term, we will have a feast that will feature foods we have grown, hunted, gathered, or scavenged ourselves. In the semester-long process of preparing our feast, we’ll have plenty of opportunities to consider (and perhaps reconsider) ideas of nature ...

GRADING AND GRADE ALLOCATIONS

Grades

All class work will be graded using the standard University of Georgia system, A – F.

Grade Allocations

Assignment	Points toward Final Grade
Seminar	100
Journal	400
Glossary	300
Classroom Participation	100
Fieldtrip Participation (2)	100
Total	1000

Point totals for the course will be rounded up to the nearest whole number and converted to letter grades as follows:

1000 - 920 points..... A	799 - 780 points C+
919 - 900 points A-	779 - 720 points..... C
899 - 880 points B+	719 - 700 points C-
879 - 820 points..... B	699 - 600 points D
819 - 800 points B-	599 - 0 points..... F

Grading Standards

Excellent A	Work that demonstrates superior logical and analytical ability, and superior written and/or graphic communication quality. Changes or revisions, if any, would be minimal.
Good B	Work that demonstrates a good understanding of processes, concepts and theory, which must be slightly reworked to improve communication clarity. Changes or revisions would be minor.
Fair C	Work that indicates a satisfactory understanding and execution of the assignment, but which needs moderate revisions to fully communicate and thoroughly demonstrate the ideas in graphics and/or text.
Poor D	Work that exhibits significant technical problems and a poor or inconsistent resolution of the assigned project. Substantial revisions would be necessary to

satisfy the project requirements.

Unacceptable Work that is incomplete and shows a failure to implement or comprehend the
F subject matter.

LOGISTICS, DISCLAIMERS, AND OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Religious Holidays

If a scheduled assignment conflicts with a religious observance or practice, please contact me as soon as possible.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability that prevents your full participation in the course or affects your ability to demonstrate learned knowledge and skills, please contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss appropriate accommodations.

Attendance Policy

The success of the course depends on everyone's attendance and participation in our classrooms and other activities. Skipping class is inconsiderate and disrespectful of your fellow classmates and our invited guest speakers. Don't do it. Your absence will impact not only the quality of *your* learning experience, but *also that of your classmates*. Attendance and participation account for a portion of your final grade. If you miss class, it WILL affect your grade. If you must miss a scheduled class session, I request that you contact me as soon as possible so that we may arrange a way to cover what you missed.

Classroom Etiquette

Please be on time for class. If you do arrive late, please have your materials out and ready before entering the classroom to minimize the disruption.

Cell phones, games, iPods, and other portable electronic devices should be turned off during the class period. You may use a laptop computer to take notes, but ***please refrain from using your computer to surf the web, shop for shoes, play games, catch up with your friends on Facebook, or engage in other non-class related activities.*** Such behavior during class is distracting, and disrespectful of your fellow classmates and our guest speakers.

Special Request: since this is a relatively small, seminar-format class, and since we are mainly concerned with exploring "ideas of nature," I request that we minimize the use of laptops, iPads, and other electronic devices in the classroom. Let's see what it's like to disconnect from the virtual information-universe and engage in old-fashioned (more "natural"?) dialog with just the people sitting in the room with us. And when we are on field trips, I request that we turn our cell phones and iPods off! Let the field trips be experiments in using your human eyes, ears, nose, and skin to connect with the very specific place-and-time in which our bodies exist ...unmediated by the electronic gadgets that connect our bodies to other times and other places ...

Policy on Late Work

Late work will not be greeted enthusiastically. Late projects will be marked down by *at least one letter grade for each day that they are late*, unless you have made other arrangements well in advance of the due date. No course work will be accepted after the final week of the semester without a medical excuse. Only in documented circumstances of personal illness or special emergency, will this policy be altered. It is the student's responsibility to bring documentation of any such emergency to the instructor's attention as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to uphold the University of Georgia's academic honesty policy (<http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/>).

OVERVIEW OF THE SCHEDULE

In the spirit of a true seminar, during the first two weeks of the semester we will spend some time discussing the core themes and objectives for the course and aligning on the schedule. In general, however, we will strive to focus our classroom seminars two to four major themes or topics per week. A more detailed schedule will be issued after the second week of class. To get us started, however, the following is a preliminary outline of themes and fieldtrips:

Week	Date	Discussion Theme / Activity
1	18 August	Course Introduction: Welcome to (Ideas of) Nature!
2	25 August	Object • Word
3	01 September	Arrow • Circle
4	08 September	<i>No class.</i>
5	15 September	Field Trip: River (12:30 – 7:00 p.m.)
6	22 September	Tangle • Order

Week	Date	Discussion Theme / Activity
7	29 September	Wunderkammer • Laboratory
8	06 October	Field Trip: Rock (12:30 – 7:00 p.m.)
9	13 October	Organism • Machine
10	20 October	<i>No class.</i>
11	27 October	Monster • Marvel
12	03 November	Field Trip: Earth (12:30 – 6:00 p.m.)
13	10 November	Animal • Vegetable • Mineral
14	17 November	Sex • Life • Death
15	01 December	Field Trip: Feast (12:30 – 6:00 p.m.)
16	04 December	Farmers' and Foragers' Feast (date tentative, and participation optional)
	13 December	Review