Course Description

In the nineteenth century, field biology was explicitly an aesthetic practice as well as a scientific one. Serious naturalists and vacationing amateurs cominged, collecting and commenting on natural objects of great beauty: feathers, fossils, stones. In the early twentieth century, field biology, and indeed most academic disciplines, underwent a period of professionalization. Field biologists moved towards the writing conventions of the Royal Society of London, which had described adjectives as “in open defiance against Reason,” poetry as “this vicious abundance of
Phrase, this trick of Metaphors, this volubility of Tongue.” Scientists were no longer expected to be essayists, and scientific writing and nature writing split.

In this first-year writing seminar we will read historical and contemporary scientific articles, essays, short stories, and poems that deal with field biology. We will challenge the popular view that environmental science involves the recitation of facts, rather than the study of competing interpretations, while writing is “subjective” and without rules. We will think about how writers seek meaning in the field. Through readings and course assignments, students will expand the possibilities of their own writing. This course is a good fit for students interested in ecology, natural resources management, environmental history, or science & technology studies.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this semester students will submit a portfolio containing selections of work for this class in both first-draft and revised forms. The portfolio will demonstrate:

- writing that appropriately uses argument, evidence, structure, and diction to engage its occasion and its genre
- writing that is based on careful analytical reading
- appropriate citation of primary and secondary sources
- effective development through drafting, revising, and responding to critique

Classroom Participation

Participation in classroom discussion is required. In addition, each student will lead one or more discussions. All work for this class should be considered public. We will frequently read aloud from each other’s work and exchange work for peer review. The instructor may also share a student’s work (anonymously) with future students.

Grading

In my experience, thinking and talking about grades detracts from learning. My focus is on delivering to students the most useful encouragement and critique. Consequently, the final portfolio is the only graded writing assignment. The final portfolio counts for 80% of the course grade, and classroom participation (including quizzes) counts for 20%.

Feedback and Conferences

For each assignment, I will identify the most significant areas of strength and weakness in a student’s writing. I will always be happy to clarify or expand my comments in office hours. In addition, we will discuss and workshop selections of student work during class.
To pass this course, students must meet with me twice during the semester to discuss writing one-on-one.

**University Policies and Regulations**

This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to students with disabilities; plagiarism and academic integrity; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

Students are expected to abide by the *Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity*, available at: http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html.

**The Writing Walk-In Service**

The Writing Walk-In Service (http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/walkin/ walkin.htm) provides support for individuals at any stage of the writing process. It is a free resource available for nearly any kind of writing project: applications, presentations, lab reports, essays. During the academic year, the WWIS is open Sunday through Thursday from 3:30–5:30 P.M. and from 7:00–10:00 P.M. Students can schedule appointments or they can drop in at a convenient time.

**Other Resources**

While these texts are not required, we will refer to them often:

- *The Chicago Manual of Style*
- Citation Management: https://www.library.cornell.edu/research/citation
## Calendar of Readings and Assignments

### WEEK 1: Introduction

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>8/26</td>
<td>No required reading</td>
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### WEEK 2: The History of Field Biology

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• Alexander von Humboldt, “Chapter 16,” in *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equatorial Regions of America, 1799-1804* (1804), 10 pgs.  
| DUE: ESSAY 1 |

### WEEK 3: The History of Field Biology

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<td>Class meets in Mann Library’s STONE CLASSROOM for library orientation</td>
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WEEK 4: Field Observations

Guest Speaker: Professor Anurag Agrawal, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

DUE: ESSAY 2


WEEK 5: Biologists in the Field


9/25 NO CLASS – ROSH HASHANAH

WEEK 6: Biologists in the Field

9/30 • Harry W. Greene, “Venomous Serpents” and “Field Biology as Art,” in Tracks and Shadows: Field Biology as Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 146-166, 220-240.
Guest Speaker: Catherine Sun, Graduate Student, Natural Resources

DUE: ESSAY 3

### WEEK 7: Scientific Journal Articles


### WEEK 8: Artists in the Field

| 10/14 | NO CLASS – FALL BREAK |

DUE: ESSAY 1 SECOND DRAFT  
DUE: Annotated Bibliography

### WEEK 9: Artists in the Field

  Guest speaker: Professor Clifford Kraft, Natural Resources |

### WEEK 10: Studying Field Biologists


DUE: ESSAY 4 FIRST DRAFT
### WEEK 11: Journeys

**11/4**

*Guest Speaker: Taza Schaming, Graduate Student, Natural Resources*

**11/6**

### WEEK 12: Alternative Fields

**11/11**

*DUE: PEER REVIEW NOTES*

**11/13**

### WEEK 13: Fictional Fields

**11/18**

**11/20**

*DUE: ESSAY 5 FIRST DRAFT*
### WEEK 14: Gardens

| 11/27 | NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK |

### WEEK 15: Concluding Thoughts

CONFERENCES 2 |
| 12/4 | LAST CLASS  
No required reading |

### WEEK 16

| 12/10 | Final Portfolio Due |