I. COURSE OVERVIEW

Deforestation, overpopulation, pesticide use, toxic oceans, endangered species, global warming. How are we to make sense of the many environmental problems facing the Earth today? Although the sciences provide a factual account of environmental threats and ways of countering them, scientific facts seem not to be enough, since artists, writers, filmmakers, and even scientists find themselves turning again and again to their imaginations to respond to the environmental predicaments of industrial society. They may be doing what English Romantic poet Percy Shelley powerfully described 200 years ago as an essentially human and creative impulse: “to imagine that which we know.” How, then, have creative minds imagined – in essays, books, and movies – the very idea of nature, the place of humans in it, and their power to change the environment? In this course, we will consider both the possibilities and the problems that writers and filmmakers have imagined about human interactions with the natural world. We begin with the nineteenth century, when Romantic writers were urgently contemplating the meaning of nature in an age of increasing industrialization.

Unit #1 Essay Assignment (close analysis of a single text)

Speaking a Word for Nature:
Thoreau’s “Walking”

In Unit #1, we will read “Walking,” one of Thoreau’s seminal essays – seminal because it encapsulates the author’s complex philosophy of nature. We will also go for a walk at Walden Pond, visiting the state park on a class field trip. “Walking” touches on many of the themes (such as the dynamic relationship between humans and nature) of his
longer memoir, *Walden*, and introduces many of the ideas (such as the value of “wildness”) so central to the environmental movement today. As a literary essay, “Walking” is a highly-stylized piece of prose with a complex structure, full of literary allusions, metaphors, striking images, philosophical ideas, and spiritual longings. In Essay #1, you will argue for an interpretation of “Walking,” a work that begs for interpretation – it’s a complex and challenging text that is open to being read in many different ways. Your evidence for your interpretation will derive from both your reading of the essay as a whole as well as your more focused close reading of particular paragraphs and sections. Your final essay should be about 4-5 pages. What matters is that you find something that interests you in “Walking,” some aspect of the essay that allows you formulate a strong, coherent position you’re prepared to argue. The ideas you offer in Essay #1 should be your own, informed by your analysis and by questions we develop during discussion. No outside sources are required, and you should not consult any (especially the internet).

**Unit #2 Essay Assignment (comparative analysis of two texts)**

**Arguments over the Environment:  
Carson’s *Silent Spring* & Lovelock’s *The Revenge of Gaia***

In Unit #2, you will read selections from two urgently argued books by writers who are both scientists and environmentalists. The first, *Silent Spring* (1962), had a huge impact when it was published. It helped establish the modern environmental movement and is now regarded as a classic of environmental literature. Carson’s skills as a nature writer are at times strikingly manifest and her connections to Thoreau are several. (Carson, for instance, used to keep a copy of Thoreau’s *Walden* by her bedside.) The second, *The Revenge of Gaia* (2006), sees Lovelock return to his Gaia hypothesis (named after a primal ancient Greek deity, a feminine personification of the Earth, which he first put forward in the seventies) with increasing urgency given the threatened state of the Earth. Essay #2 asks you to engage in a comparative analysis: to compare the two books and develop an argument about how they relate to each other. With this essay, which should be 7 pages in length, you will continue the goals you had with Essay #1: to engage in close analysis of each text; develop and state a clear thesis with something at stake; and make an argument that you support with textual evidence. Added to those goals are counterargument, comparative analysis, and working with contextual sources.

**Unit #3 Essay Assignment (analyzing a film in context/researching and using multiple sources)**

**Documenting the Human Animal**
Having considered a literary essay in Unit #1 and two strongly argued books by scientists in Unit #2, we’ll now move from the medium of print to that of film in Unit #3 where the central text is a documentary movie. At the same time, we’ll broaden our arguments by including a vaster universe of sources: other scholars’ writings about the films, theoretical essays about film, essays that offer cultural context or disciplinary perspective, film reviews, and interviews with the directors etc. One of the challenges of this essay is to work with multiple sources, creating a context within which to write about the film you choose. Another challenge – and also a great opportunity – is that you’ll work more independently in this essay: choosing one of the two films (either *Grizzly Man* or *Blackfish*) settling on a topic and research question, finding sources on your own (then evaluating them, selecting them, integrating them into your own writing), setting up a scholarly “conversation” which you will enter in your own writing etc. You have the chance to take this essay in pretty much any direction that interests you (either within the broad themes of the course or within another context, allowing you to argue something of consequence about one of the films), shaped by your own intellectual inquiry. **Page length: about 10 pages.**

Some of our writing goals in this course will change unit by unit, as you take on the particular challenges of several important versions of the academic essay. Other goals will remain our focus throughout the whole of the course: developing your sense of what you do well and challenging yourself to grow as a writer; expanding your repertoire and practice of revision techniques; and increasing the complexity and originality of your analysis as well as the effectiveness and elegance of your prose. One of the most exciting things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops; you don’t "arrive" at being a good writer, but rather you continually become one. With these goals in mind, we begin with three important premises:

- **Good writing is a recursive process:** you will develop and write preliminary response papers and essays, which we will discuss in conference and for which you will receive feedback from your fellow writers; you will then revise those essays, giving your analysis time to evolve and grow more complex.

- **Your writing will improve most when you possess clear ideas about what you want to accomplish in each assignment:** what aspects of the writer's craft matter to you, and how you want to grow and improve. This class asks you to be thoughtful and self-reflective about your writing process: to question and evaluate your own work in each assignment (in your Cover Letters with each essay) and in the course as a whole (in your end-of-semester Writer’s Letter).

- **While inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned** – in other words, when you
have dedicated sustained effort to the process of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising.

II. HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Required Texts and Materials
Please note: the “texts” (including both books and movies) you need to purchase for the class are few in number, but you will be expected print out a great deal of pages for this class, so be sure that your printer cartridge or printing account is ready for the high volume. Moreover, as far as the books go, please purchase only the editions listed, so that we will all be on the same page during discussions in class.

- *Grizzly Man*, directed by Werner Herzog (available on Amazon for digital download or on DVD; possibly available on Netflix).
- *Blackfish*, directed by Gabriella Cowperthwaite (available on Amazon for digital download or on DVD; possibly available on Netflix).

If you don’t already have one, you need to own a reliable dictionary to use in this and other Harvard courses – it will serve you well; the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is one that I would recommend.

Communication
The course works best when we treat it as a semester-long conversation about your writing. To make that conversation possible, there are a few important things to remember:

- **Conferences**: In each unit of the course, you will submit response papers, a Draft essay, and a Revision essay. After you have submitted your Draft, we will meet to discuss my feedback. These conferences are our chance to work together closely on your writing and to focus your work toward the Revision of your essay, and they are most worthwhile when you are the one guiding them. My job during
conferences is to talk through your ideas and deliver feedback, and I’ll be in the best position to do this job when you come to our conference ready to contribute. My job during conference is not to give you a to-do list that will translate into an “A” on your Revision. Not only would that approach undermine the holistic nature of persuasive writing, it would also undermine one of the most important goals of Expos: to help you go from writing as a student for “the expert” to writing as the expert for your colleagues.

Experience has shown that the most effective conferences last about 20 minutes, so the slots for each conference will be 20 minutes long. Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, missed conferences may not be rescheduled.

Due to the jam-packed nature of the week between Drafts and Revisions, I will unfortunately not be able to provide feedback for "second Drafts" leading up to your final Revision; however, by the time you are revising your Drafts you will have received a number of stages of feedback and can by all means make appointments with the Writing Center if you would like to.

- **Office hours**: In addition to our formal conferences, you are of course free to come see me during office hours about your developing ideas, at any point in the semester.

- **Email**: Rather than take up our class time with announcements and administrative arrangements (and there will be many of them), I will try to use email to communicate much of that information. As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check your email daily. You are responsible for the information I send you. Likewise, I make sure to check my email once every weekday for questions from you. Please note, however, that unless prior arrangements have been made, you should not assume that I will check email later than 7:00pm. I can answer most questions within 24 hours, except over the weekend.

**Class Participation**

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in the class; you learn much more from formulating, articulating, and questioning your own thoughts than from simply listening to what others have to say. Our time together is largely devoted to discussion and small-group work. Therefore you are responsible for being in class, prepared, and on time, each time we meet. Being prepared for class means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assignments for our class, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussions about the rhetoric of the environment: that is, the complexity of our relationship with the natural world which is made all the more complex when it is mediated by language. With this in mind, I do hope that each of you is, over the next few
months, linguistically attuned to the ways in which these debates about the environment are being conducted in the media, popular culture, and everyday discourse.

III. WRITTEN WORK

Submitting Essays
Drafts and Revisions are to be submitted to the Canvas course website. For each essay that you submit – both for Drafts and Revisions - acknowledge your awareness of Harvard’s Honor Code; typically, you would write a sentence or two at the end of the Cover Letter, which you includewith all essay submissions. The file attachment for your essay must be in Microsoft Word format (and you can obtain Word for free with your College email address). If you use word processing software such as Pages, for example, please be sure to save your work in a Word format and make sure that no formatting errors occur in the process. This will help minimize potential compatibility issues when we are sharing our writing with one another. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you send is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent the essay will be subject to a late penalty. Note: Please do not email me your essays—that unfortunately creates a whole series of potential glitches in the feedback loop. If your essay is late, please submit it to the course website and then send me an email letting me know that it's been posted.

Revision
Because of the emphasis this course places on the process of revision, the schedule is designed to allow you as much revision time per essay as possible—at least a week after the Draft is due, and usually at least five days after your Draft conference. Since you’ll have a significant span of days in which to revise, the expectations for this aspect of your work in the course are high.

Completion of Work
Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, it is an official program-wide policy that you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you fail to submit at least a substantial Draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The letter will specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial Draft of the essay by this new date (unless you have documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.

Collaboration
The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, “Students need not
acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

**Academic Honesty**
Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. **All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment.** Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

**Writing Center**
At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing Drafts, approaching Revisions – you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's Web site at [http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/](http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/) to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.