

## Expos 20. Ecological Crisis: Witnessing and Planning in the Age of Climate Change

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### Course Description

In winter 2018, Boston and coastal Massachusetts experienced two “hundred-year floods” in quick succession. Coming hard on the heels of costlier disasters elsewhere, the impassable roads in the Seaport and icebergs in the streets of Scituate were widely understood as a sign of things to come. The changing shape of the New England coastline raises tough questions: how should governments and peoples prepare for, and adapt to, a changing climate? How do we stave off the worst-case scenarios, and how should we mete out responsibility for the damage that’s already been done? How might our society—our politics, our culture, our sense of justice and our narratives of ourselves—transform as climate change continues to unfold? And how can we mobilize people and governments to fight climate change?

While such questions are usually left to activists, engineers, and urban planners, this course will ask you to begin to answer these questions using the tools of the humanities. We’ll begin in unit 1 by exploring the way we talk about the world-to-come today, focusing on the writer Elizabeth Rush’s portraits of coastal communities confronting sea level rise and the loss it entails. In the second unit, we turn to questions of ethics and politics. We’ll weigh Aldo Leopold’s foundational “Land Ethic” – which calls for a society that respects an “ecological conscience” – against more recent work on the role that race and class play in exposure to environmental risks and the role of collective action in remedying them. In doing so, we’ll develop richer, more sensitive accounts of the interaction between nature and society. In our third unit, we’ll learn to speak to audiences outside the university. Working alongside local community organizations, we will develop fact-based educational materials addressing the sources of climate change and potential solutions.

### *Engaged Scholarship Requirements and Capstone Project*

This course is part of the Mindich Program in Engaged Scholarship. That means you’ll be asked to attend events outside of normal class meeting times, including a self-directed observation of a meeting of the Cambridge Community Development Department, 350 Cambridge, Green Cambridge, or another community organization or municipal department.

*These outside activities are part of the course content and are not optional.* See the accessibility note below, however, if you’re concerned about being able to participate.

It also means that you’ll complete a collaborative capstone project with your fellow students. The end product will be shared with our community partners in 350 Cambridge. That means you’ll get to experiment with communicating to the public about climate change. It also means that you’ll do even more research or writing than is standard in Expos classes.

## *About the Writing*

This course will teach you to pose analytical questions, develop complex arguments supported by evidence, and build research skills that will be applicable in your college writing and in your future career. The goal is continual development throughout the course and beyond. No matter how “good” a writer you are at the start, the aim is to end better: to write more clearly, persuasively, and confidently about complex and difficult topics. Keep these points in mind throughout the semester:

1. **Writing is a process.** In this class, you will take notes on your reading; write, revise, and discuss response papers; write drafts of essays; workshop those drafts; and revise them fully. This continued process of writing and revision is the main way your writing will grow stronger.
2. **Writing is thinking.** This class is designed to help you put your thoughts on the page. Writing response papers involves a relatively open-ended exploration of ideas. Writing and revising papers will involve testing those ideas against evidence, honing your thinking both on the page and in your head. Most important: write about what interests you and believe what you claim!
3. **Writing is a conversation.** When you write, you enter a conversation with your sources, your readers, and other writers. That means you need to learn to express yourself clearly and effectively, and give credit to others where it’s due, but it also means that your writing will evolve in response to feedback from me and from your classmates.

### **Required Texts**

The following book should be available at the Coop:

- Elizabeth Rush, *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore* (Milkweed Editions, 2018), ISBN: 978-1571313676.

Other texts will be available as PDFs on our course website. Please bring readings to class for discussion! **Please print and annotate the readings.**

In addition to the readings discussed above, we will regularly be reading selections of *your* writing, from response papers to revised essays. **All writing is assumed to be public in this class**, so if there is a particular piece of writing you *don’t* want shared, please let me know when you turn it in.

### **Grading**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Value</b>
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	30%
Essay 3	40%
Capstone project	5%
Participation	5%

The participation grade includes active participation in class discussion, response papers, drafts, cover letters, workshop letters, and reading presentations. Come to class prepared to speak, having done the reading, and be prepared to listen and engage with the views of others. NB: I understand that speaking in class can be daunting, but everyone benefits from hearing the widest range of voices possible. Come talk to me if you want to find other ways to participate.

## Synopsis of Units and Assignments

### Essay 1 – Close Reading *Rising*

In our first unit, we focus on Elizabeth Rush’s *Rising*, a book that sketches portraits of American coastal communities from New England to California, in each case mixing a frank account of vulnerability and inevitable loss with an optimistic vision of “an opportunity for transformation.”

*Rising* mixes journalism, argument, and memoir. In Essay 1, you will argue for your own interpretation of Rush’s book, grounding your claims in an analysis of her choice of evidence and detail, her mixture of modes, and her literary style. Your argument will explain something to your reader that isn’t immediately obvious from reading the text, and they should come away with a new understanding of it having read your paper.

The goal of this essay is to make a clear, persuasive, and interesting argument in a short space. You need not feel responsible for the entirety of the book: choose a manageable body of evidence, which may be as short as a paragraph or as long as a full essay.

*Reading:* Rush, *Rising* (2018)

*Deadlines:* Sun., Feb. 10: Response paper 1.1. A “snag” and two analytical questions.  
Tues., Feb. 19: Response paper 1.2. A draft introduction.  
Sun., Feb. 24: First draft (4-5 pages) due.  
Week of March 4: Revisions due on a rolling basis.

### Essay 2 – Comparative Analysis: Ecological Ethics and Social Transformation

The second unit turns from the present moment to the past. We’ll read a set of texts belonging to a range of genres – ethics, sociology, political polemic – that present different ways of understanding the ways that people and their environment interact. In class, we’ll try to sort out each writer’s thesis, how each makes their respective argument, and what kind of sources they draw upon.

In your second essay, your task will be to articulate your own thesis by putting two of these works into conversation. As with the first essay, your goal will be to produce an argument with clear stakes that will persuade a reader by means of your analysis of textual evidence. But in this case, you will be comparing and evaluating two different approaches to nature and society.

You might choose to defend one thesis against another, contrasting thesis; you might use one work to critique another; or you might develop your own thesis that mediates between two viewpoints. Your goal is to reveal something that we wouldn’t have understood by looking at one text alone. You want to show your readers the conflict or problem that lies between two texts, and explain to us not only *that* these works are different, but *how* they are different and *why it matters*.

*Readings:* Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (1949)  
Bullard, from *Dumping in Dixie* (1990)  
Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?” (2001)  
Klein, from *This Changes Everything* (2014)

<i>Deadlines:</i>	Fri., March 15:	Response paper 2.1. Comparative analysis of two arguments.
	Mon., March 25:	Response paper 2.2. Introduction and a <i>very</i> rough draft.
	Weds., March 27:	First draft (6-8 pages) due.
	April 4-10:	Revisions due on a rolling basis.

### Essay 3 – Research

After the second unit’s reconstruction of a history of environmental thought from the mid-twentieth century to the very recent past, our third unit returns to the present day. Specifically, we’ll begin to address a set of increasingly urgent questions. First, what steps do we need to take to mitigate climate change, and what plans should we make to adapt to its effects? Second, how do we make the case for those plans? Third, how can we improve the current public discourse about climate change?

In the third unit, you’ll carry out two major tasks. First, you’ll work with your peers on researching and writing a short public-oriented educational article on climate change and public policy. As with a research paper, the goal is to inform and persuade your readers; unlike in the research paper, you might think about how maps, images, infographics, and bullet points can communicate effectively in lieu of long unwieldy sentences like this one. Regardless, take this capstone seriously: our community partners are going to use it! (We’ll have some time in class to work on it.)

In your research paper, you will arrange and intervene in a scholarly conversation – across scholarly sources, historical documents, and potentially in-person observation – on a topic of your choice related to climate change. (It can be, but doesn’t *have to be*, related to the topic of your capstone project.) In the process, you’ll learn to conduct research independently and synthesize multiple sources into a single argument.

<i>Readings:</i>	Selections from IPCC SR15
	McKibben, “How Extreme Weather is Shrinking the Planet”
	Dunlap, “Climate Change Skepticism and Denial: An Introduction”

<i>Deadlines:</i>	<i>Rolling deadline:</i>	Response paper 3.1. Report from a meeting observation.
	Fri., April 12:	Submit capstone topic proposal.
	Weds., April 17:	Response paper 3.2. Annotated bibliography, guiding question, and prospective outline.
	Fri., April 19:	Submit capstone article draft.
	Weds., April 24:	Response paper 3.3. “Messy draft,” to be shared in peer review sessions.
	Sun., April 28:	First draft (8-10 pages) due.
	Weds., May 1:	Submit final capstone paper.
	May 6 on:	Revisions due on a rolling basis.

**Finally, please note:** All of the above is subject to change, depending on schedule constraints and the interests of the class. Any changes will be made abundantly clear in class. A number of shorter readings – newspaper articles, reports, and journal articles, as well as model essays and peer work – will be assigned throughout the semester.

## Course Policies

### Submission Policy

All papers should be in 12-point, double-spaced black Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins. Both pages and paragraphs should be numbered; make sure your name, the essay title, and the date are on the first page. In-text citations and the works cited page should be done in MLA style.

Unless otherwise noted, all major assignments should be turned in via Canvas. All material submitted electronically must be in Microsoft Word-compatible .doc or .docx format. It is your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay may be subject to a late penalty.

### Late Policy and Extensions

Because of the swift pace of this class, *all deadlines are firm*. However, everyone is entitled to *one 24-hour extension* on any one assignment during the semester (except for the Essay 3 revision). Please email me at least one day beforehand if you're intending to use that extension. Other extensions will only be granted in documented medical or family emergencies. Late papers will be docked one-third of a letter grade per day. See below for the official Writing Program policy on the completion of work.

### Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, 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. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

### Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

## Accessibility

This class is intended to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible. If you need academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability, I ask that you provide a Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (<http://aeo.fas.harvard.edu/>) by the second week of class. If there are other concerns you need to share, please let me know.

## Availability

- **Conferences:** We will have three formal draft conferences throughout the semester, in between the first draft and final version of each essay. These conferences are our chance to work closely on your writing and to focus your work in revision, and are most worthwhile when you are the one to guide them. Please come to each conference prepared: review your essay and my comments, consider your questions, and begin to think about revision strategies. You should take notes during our discussions. Because the schedule is tight, missed conferences cannot be rescheduled. We will also have several informal meetings, to be announced as the class goes on.
- **Office hours:** In weeks *without* mandatory conferences, I encourage you to come to office hours to discuss reading, writing, or any other questions you might have. If you can't make the set hours, email me to set up an appointment.
- **Email:** I'll do my best to answer all emails promptly: within 24 hours during the week, 48 during weekends. Don't expect quick responses to emails sent late at night. And **check your email!** I'll make important class-wide announcements over email, so please check it at least once a day.

## Writing Center

The Writing Center, located in the basement of the Barker Center, offers both hour-long appointments and drop-in sessions with trained tutors. This is a free service for all Harvard students, regardless of year or level, at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to revising. I strongly encourage making use of their services! Make an appointment on the website: <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/>

## Collaboration

Collaboration is part of how Expos works. The final unit of this course will involve a collaborative capstone presentation, and throughout the class we'll conduct peer reviews and workshops. It's a good idea to share a completed draft with a friend for proofreading or with a Writing Center tutor for discussion. 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.

*But all work submitted in this class must be your own.* 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 the use and citation of sources. *All the work that you submit for this course must be your own. That work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment; if they are part of the assignment, they must be properly cited and acknowledged.* 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.