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? And how might our society—our politics, our culture, our sense of justice and our narratives of ourselves—transform in response to the unfolding global ecological crisis?

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. In doing so, we’ll develop richer, more sensitive accounts of the interaction between nature and society. The course’s third unit considers the case example of Boston itself. In class, we’ll assess Climate Ready Boston’s reports together, analyzing how the city is preparing for “climate resilience.” With your peers, you’ll respond to these reports with a capstone presentation focused on a single neighborhood. On your own, you’ll write a research paper that fleshes out that presentation, drawing on our readings in ethics and political thought as well as your own research discoveries. In the process, you’ll survey climate scientists’ projections, delve into the history of Boston, and even walk the shoreline of the city. The goal is to develop and articulate your own vision for a just and livable future for New England.

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:


Other texts will be available as PDFs on our course website. Please bring readings to class for discussion! Please print the readings, which will make annotation and reference easy. I’ll indicate when long readings don’t need to be printed, in which case you should bring them to class on laptops or tablets (not phones).

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**

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<th>Assignment</th>
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<td>Essay 1</td>
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<td>Essay 2</td>
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<td>Essay 3</td>
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<td>Capstone presentation</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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The participation grade includes active participation in class discussion, response papers, drafts, cover letters, workshop letters, and reading presentations. If you don’t turn in otherwise ungraded written work, you won’t receive any points toward participation.

But talking matters too! Come to class prepared to speak, having done the reading, and be prepared to listen and engage with the views of others. Always treat your colleagues’ questions and comments with respect. 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.
Capstone Project and Site Visits
This course involves a final capstone presentation, which you will produce collaboratively with four other students, in addition to a solo-authored research paper. As part of the research process, you will visit a neighborhood in Boston and take notes from the field. Your roundtrip travel on the T will be covered by course funds.

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:
Monday, Sept. 17: A snag and two analytical questions.
Monday, Sept. 24: A draft introduction.
Friday, Sept. 28: First draft (5-6 pages) due.
Week of Oct. 8: 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 from a range of genres – an essay in ethics, history, sociology, and 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)
           Cronon, from Changes in the Land (1984)
           Bullard, from Dumping in Dixie (1990)
           Klein, from This Changes Everything (2014)

           Friday, Oct. 19: Response paper 2.2. Introduction and full outline.
           Friday, Oct. 26: First draft (6-8 pages) due.
           Week of Nov. 5: Revisions due on a rolling basis.

Essay 3 – Research
The third unit turns to Boston and its plans for climate resiliency. In class, we’ll read the comprehensive Climate Ready Boston report together. Working from the report, we’ll build a vocabulary of climate-resilience planning, become familiar with the challenges greater Boston faces, and identify the promise and pitfalls of the official plans as they stand today.

Meanwhile, in small groups, you’ll take on a specific neighborhood in Boston. With your group, you’ll visit the neighborhood and prepare a short capstone presentation extending the official report’s findings. Meanwhile, on your own, you’ll prepare a research paper on the neighborhood, grounding your argument in your research into the history and sociology of the neighborhood and Boston; assessments of climate change effects in the Northeast; and histories of Boston’s infrastructure and its relationship to the harbor, to storms, and to extreme heat.

Your goal is to produce an argument that supports and defends your capstone presentation, while reflecting your own research. You will arrange and intervene in a critical conversation – across scholarly sources, historical documents, and in-person observation – in order to support your claims.

           Group and individual research readings

Deadlines:  Friday, Nov. 9: Response paper 3.1. Report from the field and two research questions.
           Fri., Nov. 16: Response paper 3.2. Annotated bibliography, guiding question, and prospective outline.
           Tues., Nov. 20: In-class capstone presentations begin.
           Thurs., Nov. 22: Response paper 3.3. “Messy draft,” to be shared in peer review sessions.
           Tues., Nov. 27: First draft (8-10 pages) due.
           Weds., Dec. 5 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, consider your questions, and begin to think about revision strategies. You should take notes during our discussions. Because the schedule is tight, missed conferences may not be rescheduled. We will also have several informal conferences, 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.