

Special Topics: Writing Urban Nature **Course Overview and Policies**

Welcome to Professor Mike Bryson's Summer 2015 SUST 390 Writing Urban Nature course which focuses on explorations and representations of urban and suburban environments. This document provides a brief overview of the course's theme, goals, format, activities, and basic requirements. More detailed information will be posted on the course Bb site and my faculty blog. SUST 390 is an upper-level course in the Sustainability Studies major, and may be taken for elective credit by students in other programs. Pre-req: ENG 102

Cross-listed with [ENG 340 Writing Urban Nature](#) and [PLS 371 Seminar in Humanities II](#)

Exploring Chicago's Urban Nature

Writing Urban Nature is an environmental literature and writing special topics course distinguished by in-the-field explorations of various natural and urban environments. The class provides a unique immersive experience in "nature close at hand" at sites of ecological and cultural significance in the Chicago region. Strong emphasis is placed on closely observing place and people; walking and exploring landscapes and neighborhoods; reflecting on / discussing compelling ideas, stories, and images of urban nature, broadly defined; and working on the craft of writing creatively and descriptively.

Daily activities will consist of field excursions to sites of interest in Chicago's urban landscape, where we will hike through and observe the landscape; discuss assigned readings for the day; engage in writing exercises designed to challenge you and generate ideas; and enjoy quiet time for personal reflection, journal writing, and photography. Your writing notebook and photo archive will provide material for a personal "urban nature" essay (due one week after the class ends) that incorporates text and image, critically engages selections from the course reading list, and reflects on your individual experiences and observations during our class explorations. Collectively, we will produce an online project ("Chicago's Urban Nature") as part of the [SUST at RU Blog](#) that features our creative/reflective writing.

Assigned readings will include selections from contemporary and past urban nature writers as well as other relevant texts, and will draw freely from several blogs/websites of note, including [City Creatures](#), [The Nature of Cities](#), [Orion](#), and [Terrain](#) -- all of which serve as models for the website we will produce as a class. Readings will be distributed in advance of our first session on May 18th, and you will have an opportunity to suggest one or more readings for the class (see schedule below).

Learning Objectives and Course Goals

- Explore and experience different urban and suburban environments first-hand, with an emphasis on close observation of and analytic reflection on one's surroundings
- Discover and critically analyze the diversity and value of nature in Chicago and its suburbs
- Develop an appreciation and knowledge of the interactions between built and natural elements of the urban environment
- Explore the relationship between nature and culture in urban ecosystems

- Develop your writing and photographic skills in the context of reflecting upon your experiences with urban nature
- Understand the potentials and limitations of written and visual representations of nature in an urban context
- Connect the practice of nature writing to the study of urban sustainability

Tentative Schedule (subject to change before May 18)

Date	Place	Activities & Sites of Interest	Assignment Due
May 6	Introduction to course (Gage 218)	Overview, introductions, logistics	RU Travel Waiver
May 13	N/A		Reading(s) Recommendations
May 18	Chicago's Lakefront (Gage Lobby)	Millennium, Maggie Daley, and Grant Parks; The Wooded Island in Jackson Park	Writing exercises, photography, & discussion in the field
May 19	The Chicago River (WB Lobby)	Canal Origins Park; Canoe Trip on Bubbly Creek; Ping Tom Park	Writing exercises, photography, & discussion in the field
May 20	North Side Parklands & Neighborhoods (WB Lobby)	Lincoln Park Zoo; Notebaert Nature Museum grounds; Montrose Point	Writing exercises, photography, & discussion in the field
May 21	Suburban Nature (RU Schaumburg Campus Lobby)	RU's Schaumburg Campus; Busse Forest Nature Preserve; Spring Valley Conservation Area & Nature Center; Volkening Heritage Farm	Writing exercises, photography, & discussion in the field
May 22	Industrial Reclamations (Joliet IL)	Joliet Iron Works Historic Site; Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie	Writing exercises, photography, & discussion in the field
May 29	N/A		Urban Nature Essay

Seminar Format and Logistics

This class is a participation-intensive seminar which places a premium on active engagement, writing, discussion, critical thinking, and risk-taking creativity. Our small size and hands-on learning approach mean that **each of you will play a vital role in the class as scholar, writer, and active participant.** Consequently, my expectations are high for engaged, thoughtful, and regular participation.

Please note these important guidelines:

- Attend every class session. Allow plenty of time to get to our appointed meeting place, starting May 18th.
- Dress to be outside in the weather; be prepared to get dirty, wet, cold, or hot. (This is part of the fun!) Wear good walking shoes.
- Come to each session prepared to discuss our assigned readings.
- Bring your gear (notebook, pen, sack lunch, water, sunscreen, camera, binoculars, field guides, etc.) in a comfortable bag.
- Check our Bb site and your RU student email account nightly for important updates/announcements.

Requirements and Key Assignments

Because this is a one-week intensive field-based class, the basic requirements and assignments are relatively simple.

- Class participation: attendance, discussion, writing exercises (20 points/day, 100 points total)
- Urban nature essay (100 points)

Contact Information

Email (mbryson@roosevelt.edu) is the best way to get in touch with me; cellphone is next best. I will not keep office hours during our class, since we will be together in the field the entire week.

Mike Bryson, PhD

Professor & Director of Sustainability Studies

mbryson@roosevelt.edu | 312.281.3148 (office) | 815.557.3153 (cell)

<http://blogs.roosevelt.edu/mbryson> (faculty website)

Accommodation of Persons with Disabilities

"The University will provide reasonable accommodations to students or applicants with documented disabilities in compliance with all local, state and federal laws and University policies and procedures.

"Students with documented disabilities who wish to receive accommodations and/or services should notify the University as soon as possible. Students should contact the Office of Disability Services, at (312) 341-3810 for the Chicago Campus or (847) 619-8846 for the Schaumburg Campus, and provide documentation of their disabilities and their requests for accommodations/services to this office. Reasonable accommodations will be determined on a case-by-case basis."

(RU Student Handbook, p. 113).

Accommodation of Students for Religious Holidays

"Roosevelt University respects the rights of students to observe major religious holidays and will make accommodations, upon request, for such observances. Students who wish to observe religious holidays must inform their instructors in writing within the first two weeks of each semester of their intent to observe the holiday so that alternative arrangements convenient to both students and faculty can be made at the earliest opportunity. Students who make such arrangements by the deadline will not be required to attend classes or take examinations on the designated days, and faculty must provide reasonable opportunities for such students to make up missed work and examinations. However, all work missed for such absences, including papers and examinations, must be made up. Students who do not arrange for excused absences by the deadline are not entitled to such accommodations."

(RU Student Handbook, p. 112).

Updated 12 May 2015