Writing Urban Nature
Engaging the City Landscape
in the Field and Online

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Roosevelt University, Chicago IL
Wild Things Conference, 23 Feb 2019
Sustainability Studies @RooseveltU

Core Courses
SUST 210  Sustainable Future
SUST 220  Water
SUST 230  Food
SUST 240  Waste
SUST 250  Sustainable University

Advanced Courses
SUST 310  Energy & Climate Change
SUST 320  Sprawl, Transportation, & Planning
SUST 330  Biodiversity
SUST 340  Policy, Law, & Ethics

Special Courses
SUST 350  Service & Sustainability
**SUST 360**  Writing Urban Nature
SUST 361  Urban Ecology
SUST 390  Special Topics
SUST 395  Sustainability Internship
Writing Models: City Creatures (book & blog); The Nature of Cities; Terrain; SUST Blog; Schaumburg's Sustainable Future
Writing Urban Nature website launched Fall 2015: M. Bryson and T. Mucci-Heitman, eds.
Context: The Environmental Humanities

- **Interdisciplinary** method of humanistic inquiry informed by science, esp. ecology

- **Critical & creative** analysis of literature, landscapes, film, technology, science, and environmental discourse

- **One branch** of the multidisciplinary field of environmental studies

- **Rooted** in the engagement of the arts and humanities with ecological problems and environmental issues
City vs. Nature

Fosters the illusion of technology-mediated independence from the natural world as well as a profound yet often unfulfilled longing for contact with wildness within a polluted and biologically-impoverished cityscape.

City as Living Ecosystem

Recognizes that cities and suburbs comprise a complex urban ecosystem, a dynamic mosaic in which imperiled nature interacts with humans and their built environment, and where the idea of "natural" can be interrogated.
Context: Students' Diverse Perspectives

SUST 360 Writing Urban Nature: visiting the North Park Village Nature Center, Chicago IL, May 2017 (M. Bryson)
Goals of SUST 360 (Official)

Explore and experience different urban and suburban environments first-hand, with an emphasis on close observation of and analytic reflection.

Discover and critically analyze the diversity and value of nature in Chicago and its suburbs.

Develop appreciation and knowledge of the interactions between built and natural elements of the urban environment.

Build writing and photographic skills in the context of reflecting upon one's personal experiences within urban nature.

Connect the practice of nature study/writing to the study of sustainability.
Goals of SUST 360 (Unofficial)

Slowing down
Looking up
Listening
Observing
Taking note
Conversing
Reflecting
Connecting
Stretching out
Where To Go? A Panoply of Choices*

A Week in the Field: 21-25 May 2018

Monday – Lakefront Spaces & Places (Chicago's "front yard")

Tuesday – Chicago River & City Parklands (South Side)

Wednesday – Trails & Nature Preserves (North Side)

Thursday – Campus, Wood, & Farm (Schaumburg)

Friday – Industrial Reclamations & Restorations (Will County)
Sites of Exploration, 2015-18

Lakefront Spaces & Places
Art Institute gardens; Millennium Park and Lurie Garden; Lakefront Trail; Grant Park; Museum Campus; Northerly island

Chicago River & City Parklands
Canal Origins Park; Bubbly Creek and North Branch of the Chicago River (canoe trips); Ping Tom Park; Stearns Quarry Park

Trails & Nature Preserves
606 Trail; Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary; North Park Village Nature Center; Eden Place Nature Center & Farm

Campus, Wood, & Farm (Schaumburg area)
RU's Schaumburg Campus; Busse Forest Nature Preserve; Spring Valley Conservation Area; Volkening Heritage Farm

Industrial Reclamations & Restorations (Will County)
Joliet Iron Works Trail & Historic Site; Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
North Park Village Nature Center, May 2018 (M. Bryson)
North Side Trails & Parklands

Rest stop on the 606 Trail, May 2017 (M. Bryson)
Waterway Adventures

Paddling upstream on Bubbly Creek, South Side of Chicago, 2017 (R. Winterpacht)
South Side Oasis

Eden Place Nature Center, South Side of Chicago, 2017 (J. Merwin)
Detention Basin at Roosevelt University's Schaumburg Campus (M. Bryson)
Sound Walk

Hiking through Busse Forest, Ned Brown Forest Preserve, May 2015 (M. Bryson)
Down on the Farm

Volkening Heritage Farm, Schaumburg IL, May 2015 (M. Bryson)
Illinois Prairielands

Hiking at Midewin, Will County IL, May 2017 (M. Bryson)
Illinois Prairielands

Bison herd at Midewin, Will County IL, May 2018 (A. Fecker)
Emergent Themes in Students' Writing

"I had no idea *this* was here."

**Childhood immersion in nature vs. adult alienation from the urban environment**

Integration of the built and natural landscapes: what works, what doesn't

**From the Rockies to Chicago: comparing urban nature to rural/remote wilderness**

What counts as "nature"? How do we know it when we see it?

**Exploring urban landscapes as a means of personal discovery/healing**

Family history, ecological restoration, and a sense of place

WUN alumni/authors
Diana Zak (BA '18) and Tiffany Mucci-Heitman (BPS '16) @ Midewin NTP, May 2017
Where Else To Go? Your Suggestions Welcome!

Source: Atlas of Biodiversity, 2011)