

Special Topics: Writing Urban Nature Course Overview and Policies

Welcome to Professor Mike Bryson's Summer 2017 SUST 390 Writing Urban Nature course, which focuses on explorations and representations of urban and suburban environments here in the Chicago Region. 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 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, people, and wildlife; 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, descriptively, and insightfully.

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 contribute to the [Writing Urban Nature online project](#) hosted by the SUST at RU Blog, which provides a unique platform for our creative and reflective writing.

Assigned readings will come from the required book *City Creatures: Animal Encounters in the Chicago Wilderness* (eds. Van Horn and Aftandilian, U of Chgo P, 2015) as well as selected urban nature blogs/websites, including [City Creatures](#), [The Nature of Cities](#), [Orion](#), and [Terrain](#). Readings will be finalized during the week of May 15th, 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 updates before May 22nd)

Date	Place	Sites of Interest	Activities & Assignments
May 10	Required Pre-session (4-6pm, WB 1215 & via Zoom)	RU Chicago Campus	Overview, introductions, and logistics; RU & FCR travel waiver forms
May 17	390 Bb site		Post reading recommendations from our book to Bb
May 22	Lakefront Parklands (WB Lobby)	Millennium Park; Museum Campus; Burnham Wildlife Corridor	Hiking & nature observation; writing exercises, photography, & discussion
May 23	The Chicago River & South Side Parklands (WB Lobby)	Bubbly Creek & Canal Origins Park; Eden Place Nature Center; Stearns Quarry Park	Canoe trip with Friends of the Chicago River; hiking; writing exercises, photography, & discussion
May 24	North Side Trails & Parklands (WB Lobby)	606 Trail; North Park Village Nature Center	Hiking & nature observation; writing exercises, photography, & discussion
May 25	Suburban Landscapes (RU Schaumburg Campus Lobby)	RU's Schaumburg Campus; Busse Forest Nature Preserve; Spring Valley Conservation Area & Nature Center; Volkening Heritage Farm	Hiking & nature observation; writing exercises, photography, & discussion
May 26	Industrial Reclamations (Joliet IL)	Downtown Joliet; Des Plaines River; Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie	Hiking & nature observation; writing exercises, photography, & discussion
June 2	390 Bb site		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 each day, starting May 22nd.

- 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, pens/pencils, 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.

Backing Up Your Files

Avoid heartache and sadness from losing your brilliant prose and deep thoughts. Here's how:

- Save each version of a document under a separate name (e.g., Essay1 v1, Essay1 v2, etc.).
- Back up your files frequently by:
 - emailing them to your Roosevelt email account
 - saving them periodically to a flash drive and/or external hard drive

Requirements and Key Assignments

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

- Required attendance at pre-session and all scheduled class meetings: if you have to miss all or part of a daily session, for whatever reason, you need to notify me ASAP via email. Any absence will require make-up written work to be determined by the instructor.
- Field participation: attendance, discussion, writing exercises (20 points/day, 100 points total)
- Urban nature essay, 7-10pp (100 points)

How I Calculate Your Grade

There are 200 total possible points that can be earned in this class. Each assignment will be given a numerical score based on its potential point value (e.g., 18 out of 20 points, equivalent to 90%, or an A- for that assignment). Final grades are calculated simply by dividing your total earned points by 200, then multiplying by 100 to convert that to a percentage. Letter grades are assigned according to the following percentage scale:

A	93-100%	C+	77-79%
A-	90-92%	C	73-76%
		C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%		
B	83-86%	D+	67-69%
B-	80-82%	D	63-66%
		D-	60-62%
		F	0-59%

A Note on Academic Honesty -- Very Important!

All of your work in SUST 390 and every other college class must be your own. A full explanation of academic honesty is available in the document, [*Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students*](#), published by the Roosevelt University Provost's Office. You should read this document carefully and print a copy for your records.

- **Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and is unacceptable in any form.** Examples in academic writing assignments include putting your name on another person's writing and presenting it as your own work (an egregious case!); failing to properly cite information from another source (i.e., not giving credit where it's due); failing to put a direct quote in quotation marks (even if it's cited properly); or not adequately paraphrasing the language of an outside source (again, even if it's cited properly). The latter two examples are the most common forms of plagiarism, and even though in many cases they are unintentional mistakes, *they're still wrong -- and unethical.*
- **My policy on plagiarism:** An assignment that contains plagiarized passages, whether intentional or not, usually is returned without a grade. The author must schedule an appointment with me to discuss the assignment and then submit a thorough revision of the paper. If the revision does not correct the problem, the assignment will receive a failing grade. The objective of my policy is not to punish, but to help you gain critical skills and confidence in properly summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, and documenting sources within your writing. *In cases of egregious academic dishonesty*, however, I reserve the right to record a failing grade for the assignment without possibility of revision, a lowered course grade, or a failing course grade (per the *Roosevelt Student Handbook*).

How I Evaluate Writing Assignments

The following is a summary of the criteria I use to evaluate most kinds of writing assignments. Please bear in mind that no list is universal -- each assignment usually demands a few special categories of consideration, and I always make the appropriate adjustments depending on the assignment. For example: text contributions to an online discussion forum are read much more loosely in terms of grammar and spelling than are formal pieces of writing, such as a critical essay.

"A" paper: Excellent

- Fulfills and successfully pushes beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment in terms of thoroughness and level of detail
- Defines its purpose/thesis very clearly and addresses a defined audience
- Exemplifies a high level of sophistication in terms of content and style (i.e., goes beyond obvious points, shows originality of thought, tackles a difficult subject, flows logically and coherently, uses mature sentence structure and diction, etc.)
- Demonstrates evidence of careful and thoughtful revision
- Displays excellent overall organization and nearly flawless mechanics
- Makes effective and judicious use of other sources (if required), and documents them correctly
- Is readable, clear, and free from needless ambiguity

"B" paper: Good

- Fulfills the minimum requirements of the assignment, and attempts (not always successfully) to go further in terms of development
- Defines its purpose/thesis adequately and addresses a particular audience (with perhaps an occasional lapse)
- Displays coherent organization, with room for possible adjustment
- Demonstrates some degree of thoughtful revision
- Employs reasonably sound writing mechanics
- Uses and documents sources competently
- Is reasonably free from logical flaws and ambiguity (though minor lapses may occur)

"C" paper: Fair

- Fulfills the bare minimum of the assignment; makes no attempt to go beyond what's easy or obvious
- Defines an audience, but does not address it adequately or consistently
- Defines a purpose, but in an unclear or confusing manner -- thesis is ineffective and unclear
- Presents material in a somewhat unorganized fashion
- Demonstrates little thoughtful revision -- changes are made only on the surface (e.g., spelling and grammar)
- Documents sources and/or uses visuals, but not effectively
- Lacks clarity -- the thought process is obscured and the prose is difficult to read
- Contains a number of stylistic and mechanical weaknesses (e.g., sentence structure may be simplistic and/or repetitive)

"D" paper: Needs a Major Overhaul

- Makes a minimal effort to fulfill the assignment, but fails to do an adequate job
- Lacks a clear purpose/focus
- Is seriously deficient in terms of audience awareness, organization, mechanics, documentation, etc.
- Is difficult to follow -- fundamental errors or lack of thoughtful development make reading a chore

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.

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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).

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