

**FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON**

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or** any **other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first-year seminar requirement.

<b>COURSE NUMBER:</b>			
<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>	<i>A QUESTION OF PROGRESS: THINKING THROUGH HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE ENVIRONMENT</i>		
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Jason Matzke and Michael Reno	<b>DATE:</b>	25 Jan 2016
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			<b>X</b>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** In the space below, provide a one- to two-sentence description of this course. The description will be entered in Banner and will also be used in other publications about the first-year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

**This course uses material from literature, nature writing, philosophy, ecology, and other natural sciences to investigate the question of our responsibilities to the (natural) environment. Students will research theories regarding the value of nature and examine their own experiences of their surroundings through these theories.**

**RATIONALE.** Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM’s basic components, explaining *specifically* how it will meet the common FSEM student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above), and arguing why this course should be approved to meet the FSEM General Education requirement. Please point to specific readings, assignments, and exercises and show how they will meet the learning outcomes.

In the first two weeks, the students will read selections from the Bible, classical Greek myth and philosophy, and examine the view of contemporary techno-optimists through readings and video. These materials give a kind-of Western cultural background for thinking about where we are in relation to the natural environment. Following this, we will engage in a close reading of Aldo Leopold’s “The Land Ethic.” This phase of the course will introduce the students both to the content of the course, questions surrounding the value of nature, and methods for investigating these questions. Over the course of next 7 weeks, each week, students will present on a reading, summarizing the content, spelling out and analyzing two specific arguments from it, or offering critical reaction to them. During the second half of the semester, they will be finding and reading additional argumentative positions on a topic they have assigned.

In terms of the specific FSEM learning outcomes: Students will find and consult original sources (articles, books) on the topics they are assigned, as well as additional sources on the topic for their final paper and work-in-progress oral presentation. Each week, each student has to write up two arguments from the assigned readings. These will be submitted to critical scrutiny during class time. Each student will submit a written 2-page report on six readings, and will have to peer-review the report of another student before the next class meeting. In all, each will peer-review and be peer-reviewed six times. Students will be accountable for overlooking grammatical or spelling errors (they will lose points on their own reports if they let writing errors go by in the reports of others without pointing them out). Students will have to participate in class discussions every day in class, and will present their work in progress orally to the class. In addition, each student will be keeping a journal, either on paper or digitally, which will be a record of their experiences with the lived environment over the course of the semester. As a collection of responses to specific prompts, this journal will foster reflection upon their experience and the application of the theoretical material to concrete situations.

**SYLLABUS.** *Attach a complete course syllabus.*

**SUBMIT** this form and attached syllabus **electronically as one document** to Will Mackintosh ([wmackint@umw.edu](mailto:wmackint@umw.edu)) by 5 PM on February 1, 2016. All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

## A Question of Progress: Our Responsibility to the Environment

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In the West, especially, culture is frequently opposed to nature. That we have organized ourselves in particular ways and then proceeded to reflect upon those arrangements (culture) is seen as the mark that distinguishes us not only from animals (nature), but also from our “pre-historic” forbearers. Today, we generally think of this as progress. In this course we will reflect upon the concept of progress through engaging some of our relationships to nature. In particular, we will focus on three issues: the value of wilderness, food ethics, and our responsibilities in relation to global warming. How we see our own species-history is crucial to how we develop our current and future relationships to nature and with one another. How we see nature is crucial to how we develop and organize our relations with one another. This seminar engages the question of progress through the lens of our relationships to external nature, and indirectly how this determines our treatment of other human beings.

In the first few weeks of the class, students will read some foundational texts in the West’s thinking about nature (and progress) including selections from the Bible, Classical Greek mythology and philosophy. Students will also view the film “Transcendent Man” on Ray Kurzweil’s aim to transcend nature. These provide context for our thinking about our relationships and responsibilities to the environment. Over the next 7 weeks, students will present articles to the class on the value of wilderness, food ethics, and our responsibilities in the face of global climate change. Students will also provide and receive peer review on these presentations. Throughout the semester students will keep a journal in which they reply to specific prompts. The course culminates in a final paper and presentation of this paper as a work in progress.

Week 1: Introduction to FSEM, UMW, and college expectations. Read selections from Genesis, Hesiod, and Plato’s Statesman.

Week 2: Read Aristotle, On Politics, Martin Krieger, “What’s Wrong with Plastic Trees,” Watch “Transcendent Man,” (film about Ray Kurzweil).

Week 3: Collaborative presentations on Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic.” Each student will be assigned a portion of the piece to summarize, and/or an argument to explicate, and/or the task of developing a critical response to an argument or set of concepts. The aim here is provide a baseline for expectations regarding summarization, explication, and critical analysis. The one-page written assignment will also be presented orally. Both the written product and presentation will be critiqued by the professor and other students.

Weeks 4-11 Each week, students will be responsible for bringing one 2 –page report consisting of a summary, argument explication, and critical analysis of the reading. In addition, each week, students will receive peer review from their colleagues and provide peer-review of their colleagues’ reports.

Weeks 4-6: Wilderness and Value. Readings from Aldo Leopold, selections from *The Sand County Almanac*. Selections from among J. Baird Callicott, “The Wilderness Idea Revisited,”

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," Val Plumwood, "Being Prey," Ramachandra Guha, "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," and William Denevan, "The Pristine Myth."

Weeks 7-9: Food and Responsibility. Readings from Roger King, "Eating Well," and Richard Manning, "The Oil We Eat." Viewing Food, Inc.

Weeks 9-11 Global Warming/Climate Change. Denial and Responsibility. Selections from Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital*, Stephen Gardiner, *The Perfect Moral Storm*, Kari Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*.

Weeks 12-14 Work in progress presentations.

Work for the course:

10 Journal Over the course of the semester, I will give you several prompts linking the content of the readings to your own experiences.

10 1-page written and oral report on selection from *The Land Ethic*.

30 Six 2-page reports on readings, peer-reviewed. 5 pts total. 3 pts for revised report. 2 pts for the oral presentation. And, up to 2 pts may be lost for inadequate peer-review.

20 Final Paper.

10 Presentation on Final Paper in Progress.

10 Midterm Exam.

10 Final Exam.

### Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an FSEM, students will

- utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments; **Students will find and consult original sources (articles, books) on the topic they are assigned for their final paper and oral presentation.**
- improve development and organization of written arguments; **Each student will be responsible for 6 2-page reports on the readings. These will include critical analysis. These will be subjected to both peer and professor review. In addition, a semester journal will give students practice in thinking through the relevance of the theories and arguments from class for thinking about our everyday actions and interactions.**
- demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process; **Each student will submit a written 2-page report six times and will peer-review the report of another student before the next class meeting. In all, each will peer-review and be peer-reviewed six times. Students will be accountable for overlooking grammatical or spelling errors.**
- apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; **Students will be made to**

**understand that giving a presentation is not merely reading a paper. Students will, through informal class discussion, and formal presentations of their analyses throughout the semester, learn to use visual aids and oral communication to inform and convince as well as converse with their audience.**

and

- **communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion. Students will have to participate in class discussions every day in class, and will each be doing a formal 15 minute oral presentation supported by presentation software.**