

IDH2952: NATURE, AESTHETICS, AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Honors Uncommon Arts Course Syllabus

Course Instructor: Dr. Vaughn M. Shirey,
Assistant Curator of Lepidoptera
Florida Museum of Natural History
Department of Natural History
[Shirey Lab – Florida Museum of Natural History](#)

Email: vaughnshirey@ufl.edu

any/all/none | Von Shy-ree

Office Location:
McGuire Center 214 (or virtually)

Office Hours Location:
Dickinson Hall Courtyard (or virtually)

Office Hours:
Mondays 12:00 - 2:00 PM
or by appointment.

Course Overview: Human history has been shaped by and, in turn, shapes the appearance, structure, and function of the “natural” world. At the same time, many of our earliest conceptualizations of what is beautiful have centered around the collective experience of our environment and other organisms. Our deeply emotional connection to the natural world has inspired centuries of conservation movements, as well as philosophical, ethical, and moral thought, alongside the creation of artistic works inspired by nature. In the context of ongoing global change and the midst of biodiversity decline, this course will survey the intersections between historical and contemporary perceptions and concepts of nature, the philosophical underpinnings of significant conservation actions and policy, and the parallel artistic works produced during the evolution of the movement to protect Earth’s biodiversity. Students in this course will gain experience in critiquing the major underpinnings of our conceptualizations of nature and conservation philosophy and engage in co-creation exercises to examine and deconstruct their relationship to the natural world on campus.

Course Prerequisites: This course has no prerequisites or major of study restrictions.

Course Credit: 1 credit unit.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this course, students will be able to engage critically with intersections of environmental philosophy, ethics, biodiversity conservation, and artistic practice. Specifically, students will develop the ability to:

1. Delineate the philosophical underpinnings of major conservation biology movements, specifically conceptualizations of the value of nature or biodiversity for its own sake, for us, despite us, and with us.
2. Critique the process and/or merits of assigning value to biodiversity through these movements and the significant political actions behind conservation.
3. Synthesize and describe the relationship between these movements and/or works in the visual, written, and performance arts—citing prominent motifs, techniques, or motivations behind artists and their work that concern their experience of the natural world.
4. Collaborate effectively to produce experience-driven, nature-based artwork on campus.
5. Evaluate how biological and artistic processes reflect an ever-changing interaction between our planet and ourselves.
6. Appreciate and engage with the creative process regardless of major of study and draw connections between it and other domains.

Course Text and Materials: You will receive readings, lectures, and other materials via e-learning (Canvas). In this class, we will use natural and found materials to co-create. A camera (which can include one on your phone) will help record the work we create.

Note on Course Content: My objective as an instructor is to expose you to a variety of opinions and perspectives surrounding art and conservation. At times, this material may be emotionally, politically, or otherwise uncomfortable or challenging—that's the reality of living in a complex world! I encourage you to engage with the material in a way that reflects your value systems, and state up-front that I am not expecting you to conform to any one opinion or viewpoint to get a good grade in this class. I ask that you engage in honest, critical, and respectful dialogue in class and online discussion posts.

Grading and Assessment: This course involves a combination of a final project and discussions for assessment and grading.

- **Discussion Posts (90% of total grade):** These online discussion posts will encourage you to engage with the readings and other materials in class. Discussion posts are graded based on a standardized rubric.
- **Co-creation Project (10% of final grade):** In groups of 2-3, you will create work that will reflect your understanding of nature and conservation as it pertains to the University, Gainesville, or Florida. An end-of-semester event will culminate in you presenting this work to your peers.

Please Note: *A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Milestone / Completion credit.*

Passing grades will be assigned based on the following schema

93-100% A
90-92% A-
87-89% B+
83-86% B

Policy on Missing or Late Work: Part of the college experience is learning to meet deadlines and, if not possible, work with others to develop alternative arrangements. Please contact me at least 24 hours in advance if you anticipate submitting work late. If you do not, I will deduct 2.5% from the assignment for each day the work is not submitted. Work that is missing by the end of the semester will receive a 0% grade (after all, how can I grade you on nothing?).

Working Outdoors: Unless weather conditions are dangerous, we will conduct most of our work in this class outside (rain or shine). I will notify you if we are to have class inside. Typically, if there is thunder or high wind speeds, we will hold class indoors. **Our first class will meet inside Honors Village 114 to review the syllabus.**

Working outside can be both physically and mentally taxing at times. Several ground rules can help us accomplish the work in this class effectively while remaining cognizant of our surroundings.

1. **Dress for the terrain and weather:** As stated, we will meet outside unless conditions are hazardous. This means you should dress appropriately with rain jackets/boots and umbrellas if there is light rain. Conversely, make sure you are comfortably dressed for warm weather.

2. **Sunscreen:** Prolonged exposure to UV radiation from the Sun can increase your risk of developing sunburn and even skin cancer. Please wear sunscreen with a minimum SPF of 30 during this course.
3. **Bug Spray:** Please feel free to wear bug spray during this class if you desire. Biting insects are usually tolerable in NATL but may be more abundant in other areas of campus.
4. **Water and snacks:** Please stay hydrated during this class, and especially when we are outdoors. You may also want to consider packing snacks to support your energy levels while we are outside.
5. **Outdoor hazards:** Alligators, snakes, and other wildlife are present on campus. Maintain a safe distance from bodies of water and wildlife at all times.

FULL COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>CLASS DATE</u>	<u>MAJOR THEME</u>	<u>READINGS AND TASKS</u>
				<i>Syllabus</i>
Week One	Honors Village 114	August 25, 2025	Course Overview What is nature?	<i>Brigitte Baptiste TEDTalk.</i> <i>Alex Carr Johnson at Orion Magazine.</i> 1. Duck, Duck, Goose (Due September 5th)
Week Two			LABOR DAY HOLIDAY	
Week Three	Honors Village 114	September 8, 2025	What do we mean by aesthetics? What do we mean by conservation?	<i>Burt 2008 at Antennae.</i> <i>Mace 2014 at Science Magazine.</i> 2. Florida Highwaymen (Due September 14th)
Week Four	McCarty Woods	September 15, 2025	Nature for Itself	<i>Tribot et al. 2022 at Biological Conservation.</i> 3. Landscapes Art Market (Due September 21st)
Week Five	Natural Area Teaching Laboratory	September 22, 2025	Nature for Itself	<i>Form groups for co-creation.</i> <i>Introduction to NATL.</i>
Week Six	McCarty Woods	September 29, 2025	Nature for Us	Schroter et al. 2014. Conservation Letters. 4. Ecosystem Services (Due October 5th)
Week Seven	Natural Area Teaching Laboratory	October 6, 2025	Nature for Us	<i>Leurig and Gath at Orion Magazine.</i> <i>Set Up Pinholes</i> 5. Postcards from You (Due October 12th)
Week Eight	Natural Area Teaching	October 13, 2025	Housekeeping Midterm Check-in	<i>Cyanotype Postcards</i>

Laboratory				Co-creation Check-in
Week Nine	Honors Village 114	October 20, 2025	Nature Despite Us	Abbey. 1975. Excerpt from "The Monkey Wrench Gang." 6. Untitled (Buffalos) (Due October 26th)
Week Ten	McCarty Woods	October 27, 2025	Nature Despite Us	DamNation Documentary (1.5 hours). 7. Gallery Climate Protests (Due November 2nd)
Week Eleven	Natural Area Teaching Laboratory	November 3, 2025	Nature With Us	Bridging Nature-Electronic (potential guest lecture) 8. Electronic Music Market (Due November 9th)
Week Twelve	McCarty Woods	November 10, 2025	Nature With Us	Andy Goldsworthy: Rivers and Tides Documentary (1.5 hours). 9. Ana Mendieta Collective Works (Due November 16th)
Week Thirteen	Natural Area Teaching Laboratory	November 17, 2025	Collaborative Group Project	Collect Pinholes Cyanotype Class Portrait
Week Fourteen	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY			
Week Fifteen	Honors Village 114	December 1, 2025	Co-Creation with Nature	James Hillman Interview. Wild Geese by Mary Oliver. 10. Back to those Geese (Due December 5th)
Week Sixteen	Natural Area Teaching Laboratory	December 8th, 2025 6:15-7:30 PM	Co-Creation with Nature	NATL Soirée Co-creation Projects Due

RELEVANT POLICIES, SUPPORT, AND OTHER INFORMATION

Students Requiring Accommodations: Students with disabilities who would benefit from academic accommodations for this course should contact the Disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. Please note that it is easier for me to facilitate accommodations with prior or early notification during the semester. Still, you are welcome to initiate the process of requesting such accommodations at any time.

UF Evaluations Process: Professional and respectful feedback on the course and instructor can be provided toward the end of each semester by completing course evaluations on GatorEvals. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback to improve the course can be found at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. You will be invited to submit an assessment through email.

University Honesty Policy: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/4-040/>) outlines several behaviors that violate this code, along with the corresponding sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center is available at <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/> and 392-1575. For emergencies, please contact the University Police Department at 392-1111 or dial 9-1-1.

The Writing Studio: The Writing Studio is committed to helping University of Florida students achieve their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

Relevant Honors Resources

Honors Program, 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email advisor@honors.ufl.edu

Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings: <https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising>