

IDH3931: Nature, Activism, and Birding

General Information

- Honors Course, 1 credit
- Fall 2025
- In person
- Location: [HVR1 114](#)

Instructor Information

- Prof. Liesel Hamilton
- Hamiltonliesel@ufl.edu
- Office Hours and Location: Tuesdays from 11:40 – 1:40 in Turlington Hall Rm 2215J
 - My office is tucked into the suite of the University Writing Program. Walk through the University Writing Program towards the back to find me. Office hours can also be scheduled at a different time if you are unavailable during my standing office hours. They can also be scheduled virtually via zoom. Please email me to set up a time to chat.

Course Description

In this 1-credit course, students will explore the transformative power of nature, focusing on the act of birding as a gateway to self-care, personal growth, and social activism. Through journaling, experiential learning, and book discussions, students will reflect on how birding fosters mindfulness, empathy, and an understanding of environmental justice.

Inspired by texts about birds, we will engage in our own cross-genre writing. We will also analyze how other writers have rendered the experience of birding, which encourages slowing down, observing, and connecting with the environment, and how birding can spark a deeper sense of responsibility and care for both the natural world and the communities we are a part of.

As we engage in our own writing/reflection, students will have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning (class outside!), observing and identifying birds firsthand with the use of a bird feeder and a birding scope. By the end of the course, students will have not only honed their birding skills but also developed a personal practice of nature-based activism

that they can carry with them beyond the classroom. No prior birding experience or knowledge is required!

Required Readings and Materials

- *Birding to Change the World: A Memoir*, Trish O’Kane
- A journal or notebook + writing utensil of some kind
 - Please purchase before our first day of class

Recommended Readings and Gear:

(These texts and gear are in no way required, but are recommended if you want to explore this idea of birding and activism more closely)

- Binoculars
 - *The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling*, John Muir Laws
 - *Birdgirl*, Mya Rose-Craig
 - *Vesper Flights*, Helen Macdonald
 - *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*, Amy Tan
 - *Joy if the Justice We Give Ourselves*, J. Drew Lanham
- **Materials/Supply Fees:** There is no supply fee for this course.

Attendance

Attendance is very important in this course as this is a discussion-based course. We only meet once a week, so every missed class means missing a significant portion of the semester. Students are granted 1 free absence to be used at their discretion.

The policy of the University Writing Program is that if students accrue more than **six periods** of unexcused absences during the term, they will fail the entire course. Double periods count as two absences. Being tardy to class counts as 1/3 of an absence.

The UWP exempts from this policy **only** those absences that are considered excused by university standards. Students should discuss absences related to university-sponsored events with the instructor **prior** to the date that will be missed. UWP requirements for class attendance, make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this class are consistent with university policies that can be found at

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

- For extended absences due to illness or other circumstances, students should consult with U Matter We Care: <http://umatter.ufl.edu>, umatter@ufl.edu, 352-294-2273 (CARE), Dean of Students: <https://dso.ufl.edu/>, 202 Peabody Hall, (352) 392-1261

Please note: If students are absent, it is their responsibility to make themselves aware of all due dates. If absent due to a scheduled event, students are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Graded Work

Participation/Preparation/Classwork	40%
Reading and Nature Journal	40%
Informal Presentation	20%
Total	100%

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.

Participation/Preparation/Classwork, 40%

This is a discussion-based class, so your participation is key. I expect you to come to class having read and thought about the material, with your reading journals completed and ready for reflection. Engagement in class discussions is crucial, as we'll be building on each other's ideas and experiences. Be prepared to contribute thoughtfully, ask questions, and share your insights. Your active participation helps create a dynamic and collaborative learning environment for everyone.

Reading and Nature Journal, 40%

In this course, you'll be keeping a weekly nature journal, spending at least 15 minutes each week sitting outside, observing nature, and reflecting on what you see. The key here is to disconnect and immerse yourself in the natural world, so your journal should be in hard copy—no digital entries allowed. If you need an accommodation for a digital journal, let me know.

Each entry should include details like the time of day, weather, and where you are. Feel free to add sketches, photos, or even objects like leaves or flowers. Along with your nature observations, you'll also weave in thoughts from the week's readings. You can integrate these reflections into your nature writing or keep them separate—whatever works

best for you. Just be sure to cite page numbers (e.g., *Keeping a Nature Journal*, p. 42) and share how the material made you think about your outdoor experiences.

This journal is meant to be informal and reflective, so don't stress about structure—just let it flow. Be sure to bring your journal to class every week, as we'll discuss what you've written and learned. This practice will help you build a deeper connection to both nature and the course material, while also encouraging a mindful break from the digital world.

Informal Presentation, 20%

At the end of the semester, you'll present your nature journal to the class, sharing the highlights of your observations, reflections, and insights. You'll create a one-page poster that summarizes your key findings—anything from patterns in nature to species behaviors—and use it to explain what you've learned. Posters are a great way to communicate complex ideas simply and visually, so this is your chance to practice how to share your discoveries in a way that's clear and engaging.

Your presentation will be 8-10 minutes long and informal. Think of it as a casual, talk where you explain what you've learned from your journal and how your relationship with nature evolved. At the beginning, you'll pass out printed copies of your poster to the class, helping everyone share in each other's discoveries.

Along with your poster, you'll submit a 500-word reflective statement on how the course, your journal, and the readings have influenced your thinking. This reflection will connect your personal growth, insights, and course themes.

By the end, you'll not only have a deeper understanding of nature but also be more confident in communicating your findings and reflections.

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76.99%
A-	90 – 93.99%		C-	70 – 73.99%
B+	87 – 89.99%		D+	67 – 69.99%
B	84 – 86.99%		D	64 – 66.99%
B-	80 – 83.99%		D-	60 – 63.99%
C+	77 – 79.99%		E	<60

It is this class's policy NOT to round grades up or down. An 89.9 is a B+.

Weekly Schedule

Week	Topics, Readings, and Assignments
Week 1 8/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Introduction to course • Required Readings: Readings in “Nature Writing Journal” folder under “Files” on Canvas. <p>Assignment: Bring your “Nature Journal” and writing instrument(s) to class. You don’t have to have written in it yet, but be prepared to share why you chose the journal and writing instrument you did.</p>
Week 2 9/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Nature Journal • Summary: Introduces students to the “Nature Journal” as a form. Students will review published and famous examples of nature journals. • Required Readings/Works: Excerpt from <i>The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling</i>, available on Canvas <p>Assignment: Write in your journal.</p>
Week 3 9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Excerpt from <i>The Backyard Bird Chronicles</i> by Amy Tan (Preface – Page 20, available on Canvas) <p>Assignment: Write in your journal.</p>
Week 4 9/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read through Chapter 1 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. <p>Assignment: Write in your journal.</p>
Week 5 9/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapters 2 + 3 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. <p>Assignment: Write in your journal.</p>
Week 6 10/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapter 4 + 5 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. <p>Assignment: Write in your journal.</p>
Week 7 10/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read excerpts from <i>The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling</i>, available on Canvas. <p>Assignment: Write in your journal.</p> <p>Visit the Harn Art Museum during class</p>
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapter 6 + 7 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>.

Week	Topics, Readings, and Assignments
10/15	Assignment: Write in your journal.
Week 9 10/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapter 8 + 9 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. Assignment: Write in your journal.
Week 10 10/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapter 10 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. Assignment: Write in your journal.
Week 11 11/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapter 11 of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. Assignment: Write in your journal.
Week 12 11/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works: Read Chapter 12 + Epilogue of <i>Birding to Change the World</i>. Assignment: Write in your journal.
Week 13 11/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Class: Presentations of your reading journals/reflections about what you've taken away from this process. • Required Readings/Works: None Assignment: Presentations.
Week 14 12/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Class: Presentations of your reading journals/reflections about what you've taken away from this process. • Required Readings/Works: None Assignment: Presentations.

Required Policies

This course complies with all UF policies. For information on those policies and for a list of campus resources, please see this page: <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>."

For Honors Specific Questions:

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>