**PLS 231 Fall 2015**

# Nature Study

Meeting Time: Tues 4:00 – 6:20pm

Classroom: ML Commons

Instructor: Rick Gage

Email: [gager@marshall.edu](mailto:gager@marshall.edu)

Office: 105 Morrow Lib

Office Hours: Mon/Wed 1:00-3:00pm

Tues 2:00-4:00pm

**Course Description and Objectives**

From Course Catalog: “Designed to provide students with the fundamental understanding of and for the delivery of nature-based educational programs offered through an experiential framework.”

In this course we will study the land, the animals, and the plants of the Marshall University campus and surrounding areas as a way of understanding the nature and scope of biological diversity and the impacts that humans have had on the natural world. The course will involve extensive field work identifying plants and animals, natural systems, and human influences. Students should be prepared to work outdoors in all manner of weather conditions. Only extreme weather conditions will prevent us from going into the field for scheduled outings. Students should also be prepared to think critically and apply abstract concepts to their field observations to gain a deeper understanding of natural phenomena. Some concepts of evolutionary biology and ecology will be learned through direct observation. No biology background is required, but prior interest in natural history will be helpful.

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| **Course Student Learning Outcomes** | **How students will practice each outcome in this Course** | **How student achievement of each outcome will be assessed in this Course** |
| Students will show understanding of natural systems and how they relate to plant and animal communities | Discussion of Sand County Almanac readings, field exercises, field guide and identification key exercises | Field notebooks, homework assignments, Exams 1-3 |
| Students will become proficient in common techniques used for classifying and identifying plants and animals in the field | Field guide and identification key exercises, field practice | Exams 1-3, homework assignments, field notebooks |
| Students will identify common habitat and community types in West Virginia and the surrounding region | Field exercises | Field notebooks, homework assignments, Exams 1-3 |
| Students will be able to describe the importance of observation and show how to take careful, clear field notes | Field notebook practice, discussions of Sand County Almanac | Field notebooks, Sand County Almanac review |
| Students will articulate the historical context of conservation and land ethics in America | Sand County Almanac discussions, field exercises | Sand County Almanac review, Homework assignments |
| Students will identify ways that human activities have shaped the natural world around us | Field exercises, Sand County Almanac discussions | Book review, field notebooks |

**Required Readings**

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

Additionally, handouts, text chapters & other readings may be assigned throughout the semester as needed. **Students are expected to read these articles** and be prepared to discuss them during the assigned class period. This information may appear on quizzes.

**Course Requirements**

This will be an unusual course in many respects. Its main object will be to help you acquire a large body of factual knowledge about the animals and plants of our area, knowledge that will come to you through direct exploration of the grounds and hands-on attempts to identify as many species as possible. The course will demand much personal effort on your part during class, as it is not a lecture course that will feed you information. Students who do not have some genuine interest in the subject matter and an active curiosity will have a hard time doing well. Students will be graded on the following measures:

**Field Notebook: (20% of semester grade)**. Your field notebooks should develop into valuable records of what you have seen, and should aid you in studying for the exams. They should contain an entry for each meeting of our class, and you should expect to spend time between classes adding details and filling in missing information for each entry (“working up” your entries). The entries do not have to be continuous prose. I am not necessarily looking for narrative descriptions of the walks we take. Rather, you should record the facts we uncover, the lay of the land, and descriptions of the animals and plants we see. You may include drawings, figures, leaf pressings, poems, quotes, or anything else you find useful. Field notebooks will be collected and reviewed by the instructor several times during the semester. More details will be given in class.

**Homework and In-Class Assignments: (20% of semester grade)**. In addition to field notebook entries, after some of our outings there will be assignments that I expect you to submit electronically for a grade. These will generally be short 3-5 page reflection papers, but we may stray from that format as the situation dictates. Details will be given in class at least one week before assignments are due.

***Sand County Almanac*: (25% of semester grade)**. Throughout the semester, we will read *A Sand County Almanac*. Each student is expected to have read the required sections prior to class and come prepared to discuss. There will be short writing assignments due periodically as we read the book. Additionally, students will write a critical review of the book, analyzing an aspect of the text that they feel is important. The final review will be due on the last day of classes.

**Exams: (20% of semester grade)**. There will be three open-notebook exams during the semester. These will be cumulative, with an emphasis on new material presented after the previous quiz. The exams may involve both field and classroom components. Exams will be announced at least one week before they are given.

**Class Attendance and Participation: (15% of semester grade)**. Attendance is required and punctuality is also critical because we will ordinarily be leaving the classroom to explore outdoors. While we are outside walking as a group you should stay close together and keep conversation to a minimum so you can hear when things are pointed out. However, each student will be allowed one “un-excused class” per semester (except for Quiz dates or Special Topics dates). Two or more un-excused absences will result in a *significant* reduction in your class attendance and participation grade. Any absences due to illness must be documented according the Marshall University Policy. In addition to attendance, in-class participation will be evaluated at the end of the semester and can contribute *significantly* to this portion of the grade. This portion of your grade is not a given, and you will be expected to earn your grade beyond just “showing up.” This means speaking in class, asking appropriate questions, and taking adequate notes during lectures.

**Student Evaluation**

Field Notebook 20%

Homework and In-Class 20%

*A Sand County Almanac* 25%

Exams (3) 20%

Attendance & Participation 15%

**Grading Scale**

A = 90 or above B = 80 to 89 C = 70 to 79 D = 60 to 69 F = 59 or below

### Grading Policy

All electronic course assignments (e.g., Critical Review) should be **typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font**, **double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and use APA format**. Handwritten assignments (e.g., Notebook Entries) must be neatly written and legible. Grading of all assignments will be based both on content as well as the style and adequacy of the presentation itself. Assignments should be neat, succinct, clear, and use the appropriate terms. Spelling/grammar will be evaluated. In-class assignments are to be neatly written, signed by all group members (where appropriate), and submitted at the end of the class period. **Late submissions will not be accepted.**

**Required Field Gear for Outings**

* Rain gear
* Comfortable footwear
* Field notebook
* Writing implement (mechanical pencils are recommended)
* Knapsack with water, snacks, and a change of clothes

**Optional Field Gear for Outings**

* Hand lens
* Binoculars
* Field Guides
* Camera

**Classroom Expectations**

Please be considerate of the other students in the class. It is up to you whether or not you choose to attend class and if you choose to pay attention. It is unfair, however, for you to negatively impact the ability of others students to learn. Please take care that your actions are considerate and do not detract from the learning environment. **Once class has begun, please refrain from sending text messages, reading newspapers, or otherwise distracting from the class discussion**.

It is also expected that the opinions and backgrounds of all class members will be welcomed and respected. All students are encouraged to participate in class discussion, but please address others with respect.

**Accessing Course Information**

Power-point slides, assignments, and other necessary class information will be posted on Blackboard. The website for Blackboard is marshall-bb.blackboard.com. It is imperative that you have access to Blackboard and that you **check your MU email regularly**.

**Inclement Weather Policy**

Refer to the appropriate Marshall University handbook section. For this class, a little rain, wind, or mud will not prevent us from going into the field. Plan ahead for bad weather.

**Academic Integrity**

Please be aware that academic integrity is taken very seriously at this university and in this class. Any type of cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes citing anyone else’s words or ideas in your own writing without giving credit. Additionally, self-plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. This includes turning in assignments that have previously been used for another class or purpose. All assignments must be completed specifically for this course. More information regarding plagiarism is provided in the Marshall University handbook. However, if you have a question about any academic integrity issues, please contact me.

By enrolling in this course, you agree to the University Policies listed below. Please read the full text of each policy by going to [www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs](http://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs) and clicking on “Marshall University Policies.” Or, you can access the policies directly by going to <http://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/?page_id=802>

Academic Dishonesty/ Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates/ Computing Services Acceptable Use/ Inclement Weather/ Dead Week/ Students with Disabilities/ Academic Forgiveness/ Academic Probation and Suspension/ Academic Rights and Responsibilities of Students/ Affirmative Action/ Sexual Harassment