**FYSP 116  Natural History of the Vermilion River Watershed**

**SYLLABUS**

**Instructor:**
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**Writing Associate:**
Kate Melanson  
Office hours: Tues.7:30-9pm in Sci Ctr. atrium  
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**Course Description**
The Vermilion River and its tributaries have been carving into the northern Ohio landscape for over 10,000 years. Through weekly field trips, visual arts, readings, and discussions, we will examine the life forms and natural processes that occur in and along the river. We will also study past and present human land use patterns and develop our own sense of place as the most recent settlers of the land. Field notes and weekly writing assignments will be discussed in class and with the instructor during individual appointments.

**Objectives:** Through this course you will enhance:
1. Critical thinking skills
2. Discussion skills
3. Awareness of the liberal arts at Oberlin and different forms of knowing—e.g. visual and verbal—and how these forms can enhance your liberal arts college education
4. Observational skills and awareness of the importance of these skills as the basis of both good writing and the scientific process
5. Awareness of your personal composing processes and your ability to use your writing skills with a minimum of frustration or at least increased tolerance for frustrating or difficult stages of writing. In particular you should gain an increased awareness of the skills of revision.
6. Information literacy skills—i.e. the ability to use a variety of sources (print, online, interpersonal) to identify interesting questions and research them, with the ability to discriminate between reliable and unreliable sources of information.

**Class meeting times**
Tuesday and Thursday 9:35-10:50am in K209 (the Biology Department conference room) in the Science Center

**Field lab meeting times**
Wednesday 1:30 - 4:20pm. Meet at the Woodland Street U-drive entrance of the Science Center. The van leaves for the field site at 1:30 sharp! Please arrive 5-10 minutes early.

**Required Texts**
All of the following texts are **required** for this course (notice that two are provided in class):

Provided for you in class:
Available at the College Book Store:

Other texts that we will read will be available on the Blackboard course website or in class.

Other Supplies Needed
- some form of notebook for a field journal—available at numerous stores in town, including Ginko Gallery*, Oberlin Bookstore, Mindfair (in the Ben Franklin store)
- good sketching pencils or pens—also available at Ginko Gallery*, Oberlin Bookstore, Mindfair
- some sort of color media—colored or water color pencils, pastels, etc to take into the field for sketching (required)—available in several stores, such as Ginko Gallery*, Mindfair
- a folder to keep all work in, for preparation of the midterm and final portfolio
- if you are allergic to insect stings, you are required to bring your medication on every outdoor lab. For your safety, please share information about insect allergies or other important medical conditions with the instructor.
- shoes (required!) and clothes suitable for walking through woods and shallow water and rain protection (recommended)

*Liz Burgess, the owner of Ginko Gallery, has kindly offered to give students in this course 20% off art supplies; if you shop there, simply inform the clerk that you are a member of “Garvin’s Vermilion River FYSP 116” class.

Class and lab formats
Course meetings will consist of two 75-minute classes and one 3-hour lab per week. Tuesday classes typically will be devoted to discussion of readings in preparation for the Wednesday field experience and workshopping drafts of student papers. Thursday classes will provide time for discussion of student writing drafts, individual appointments with instructors, time in the science library with instructors, and sometimes outside speakers. The weekly labs will provide time for watershed exploration, laboratory examination of organisms, museum visits, and film viewing.

Grading Policies
Your final grade will be based on attendance, assignments, and class discussions. You will receive feedback on the quality of your work in individual appointments, which will usually occur about once every 1 - 2 weeks. If at any time you have questions concerning the progress you're making, please make an appointment to discuss your work.

You will receive written or oral comments on your work to help you determine how to improve. During individual appointments in the week after the midterm, we will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the work in your portfolio and field journal.

Grade breakdown:
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in discussion</td>
<td>150 pts (10 pts/wk)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field journal</td>
<td>150 pts (10 pts/wk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assignments</td>
<td>150 pts (25 pts x 4 papers &amp; 2 portfolios)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final project</td>
<td>50 pts</td>
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Expectations for Student Participation
A seminar is an intellectual community. Everyone enrolled works independently and with others to learn and evaluate information, explore ideas and viewpoints, and develop knowledge. In contrast to a lecture course or a course alternating between lecture and discussion, seminars are discussion-based. Everyone's commitments, engagement, and ability to take part in the give-and-take of focused discussion are essential to the success of the seminar. The instructor may facilitate discussion and occasionally introduce or make remarks about a particular topic, but this is your class, so most discussions will be lead by you, the students. The consistency and caliber of your participation are what will make it work for you and your classmates.

Because college instructors rarely publicly chastise students for coming late to class or drifting in and out to use the bathroom or for other reasons, it may appear that such bad habits are okay. However, they are disruptive and break the flow of the class activities for your classmates. Please get to class on time and make sure you've taken care of all needs before class begins.

We will expect you to bring a copy of whatever text we're discussing to class.

Attendance Policies
For a seminar to work, everyone must be present to contribute. Therefore more than 2 absences from class and/or 1 absence from a lab will be grounds for receiving a failing grade in this course. For an absence to be excused, you must discuss the situation with Mary prior to class or lab. Tardiness to class or lab will count as an absence. It is your responsibility to contact the instructor to find out what you missed or to turn in anything that was due. You will be expected to be prepared for discussion or to turn in any assignment due at the next class.

Assignments
This course involves 6 different kinds of assignments (all are mandatory):

1. Field Journal - In your field journal, you will make an entry of your observations and ideas at least two times a week (typically once in lab and once outside of lab), using assigned chapters of Leslie and Roth's Keeping a Nature Journal as a guide for new techniques to try. One of the two weekly entries has to include notes/sketches of a particular species. (Being able to name flowers, ferns, insects, birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, etc. that you see in the watershed will give you a sense of knowing it intimately, and will give you practice in using field guides and other identification manuals available in the Science Library or online.) The instructor will review your journal about once every two weeks. The field journal is meant to provide you with a place to stockpile the ideas, explore understandings, and increase the observational skills so necessary to a thorough understanding of place, good writing, and the scientific process. We expect that everything in your field journal will be your own personal work, unless you acknowledge someone else’s contribution (for example quoting from a reading). Please write out and sign a “blanket” Honor Code at the beginning of the journal to cover everything you will put in it.

2. Writing Assignments - These more formal papers are intended to provide you with an opportunity to thoroughly work out your ideas about a chosen subject observed in lab and to take your ideas through a revision process that polishes them for other readers. You will submit at least 1 draft per week. Papers should be submitted on blackboard on the due date. (More extensive descriptions of each assignment will be discussed in class throughout the semester.) Some of these assignments may be collaborative, while others
will be individual. In either case, you may solicit advice for the assignments from classmates, the instructor, the writing associate, Writing Center tutors, or any other Oberlin College readers you trust, unless we stipulate otherwise on the assignment, but you must explicitly acknowledge your consultants to avoid violating the Honor Code. Every class member who has worked on a writing assignment is required to sign the Honor Code, which should be included on every assignment turned in.

At the end of every paper draft we will also expect you to include a “Writer’s Comment” reflecting on what you have accomplished in that draft, what questions may have arisen for you about the assignment, or what feedback you’re most interested in receiving. Papers lacking the Honor Code plus signature (electronic or print) or Writer’s Comment cannot be read by the instructor or classmates.

We are fortunate to have the assistance of a Writing Associate, Senior Kate Melanson and Teaching Assistant, Sonya Kaufman for this course. Kate took the course in the fall of 2008 and Sonya in the fall of 2009. They will both be present for our Wednesday afternoon field experiences. Below are messages from them to explain how they can assist with course work during the semester:

From Kate:
Welcome to your first semester at Oberlin College. My name is Kate, I’m a senior Biology major and Rhetoric and Composition minor and took this very class my freshman year. I will be acting as the writing associate (or WA) for this first-year seminar. I’m here to talk with you at any point during your writing process, whether it be brainstorming or editing your final draft. We can also discuss how the class is going for you or what specific things you are having difficulty with. I’m less of a tutor and more of someone to bounce ideas off of and help you reflect your ideas in a clearer way. I’m not here to write your papers for you or make you do things the way I want them done on subjects that are cool to me, I’m only here to help make you a stronger writer for this year and all the years to follow.

I would like to meet with all of you throughout the course of the year and work on your papers at any stage. If you want me to look at a draft but don’t have time to meet feel free to shoot me an e-mail. Also if you do want to meet, send me the draft you want to discuss and your concerns before hand so that I can properly be prepared to give you feedback. I’ll hold drop-in office hours Tuesday nights from 7:30-9:30 in the Science Center Atrium. If you’d like to meet at another time we can most likely schedule something but let me know in advance. If there’s anything else feel free to let me know via e-mail (I check it ten million times a day).

From Sonya:
As a general teaching assistant for this seminar, I'll be available to help out in all sorts of ways. I will come along for lab every week and am excited to get to know each of you as you settle into being at Oberlin and a part of this class. I'm happy to discuss writing, journaling, reading, and all other assignments with you, as well as more broad topics of adjusting into a college lifestyle and anything else you can think of. I'll be happy to read over drafts of papers and offer suggestions; Kate and I will be collaborating to figure out how to best help each of you. Please don't hesitate to contact me either by email or at office hours with any questions or worries that you have!
3. **Information Skills Worksheets** - It’s time to go beyond plain “Googling.” These short assignments will guide you through using library resources. They are intended to expand your “information literacy,” in other words your ability to find and judge the quality of various outside sources of information in both print and electronic form. We expect that you will use the advice of your classmates, instructors, or library staff to complete all of them. Be sure to explicitly acknowledge any help you receive in the completed worksheets and to write the Honor Code on them, signed by yourself and your partner(s) on the assignment, if any.

4. **Portfolios** - at midterm and the end of the semester you will collect *all the work that you have done thus far for the course*, then read through it and write a reflection on what you have learned. This will be submitted for midterm or final grade evaluation. Both the collected material and the written reflection will be handed in via a folder, or "portfolio." You should work on the synthesizing reflection primarily by yourself, but you may ask for advice on it from your classmates, the Writing Associate, the Writing Center writing assistants, or any other reader you trust at Oberlin College. Be sure to also include the Honor Code (explained below) on the synthesizing reflection paper and your signature under it.

5. **Final Project** – Your final project is to connect the natural history of the Vermilion River to a discipline outside of the natural sciences. You are allowed a great deal of latitude on this assignment and may focus on either the social sciences or humanities. Start thinking about a focus and discuss it with Mary. You will be provided with more specific instructions at the midterm. This assignment is due in hard copy on Friday, December 9 and will be presented to the class orally during the final two weeks of the semester.

See the Assignments section of the Blackboard course website for more specific descriptions of the writing assignments for this course as they come up in the schedule. See the Labs section for the lab assignments.

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**A Cautionary Word about the College and Conservatory Writing Requirements**

For College of Arts & Sciences students: this first year seminar provides students with writing instruction. If you demonstrate sufficient skill in academic writing in this course, you will earn Writing Certification. To graduate, you must earn Writing Certification in two courses. The course grade is separate from writing certification. **Passing this course does not automatically entitle you to certification.**

For Conservatory of Music students: Earning a passing grade in this course satisfies the Conservatory Writing Requirement.

If you have any questions about writing requirements or concerns about earning writing requirement credit through this course, please talk to Mary early in the semester.

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**Disabilities**

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let one the instructor know as soon as possible so that your needs can be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to Jane Boomer, the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities in Peters G-27. Jane and her staff can also provide excellent advice about acquiring accommodations in other courses and adjusting to the demands of Oberlin College in general.
The Honor Code
Oberlin College’s student-created, student-enacted Honor Code is vital to the integrity of the work that all of us do in the institution. Acknowledging the influence of others and understanding the academic customs of showing one’s sources are highly valued skills of liberal arts learning. We expect you to read the Oberlin College Honor Code carefully, and we will discuss how it applies to each assignment. You can find the code in the College catalog or online at http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/honor.

One requirement of the code is that you must write the following statement on every assignment: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." You must also sign your name to that statement. If you don't include the code and your signature, we will not be able to respond to the assignment until you have included it. Typing your full name after the Honor Code will serve as a signature if you submit an assignment electronically via Blackboard or email.

Animal Use
The procedures using vertebrates in this course have been reviewed and approved by Oberlin’s Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Inquiries related to the use of animals at Oberlin College can be directed to Mary Garvin and/or to the chair of IACUC.