

Environmental Studies 600

CAPSTONE SEMINAR

Last Child in the Park: How Kids and Birds Can Save the Planet

Spring Semester 2012 (3 Credits)
Wednesdays 7:30-9:30am, Wednesdays 2:00-5:00pm

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Course Description:

This class is a capstone experience for the Environmental Studies Certificate Program and a seminar for other undergraduates in environmental fields. It is a place-based course in which UW students explore nature once a week in Madison’s largest urban park with a child from Sherman Middle School. Sherman Middle School educates many students from Madison’s underserved Northside community where a high percentage of this school’s ethnically-diverse student population lives in poverty. Sherman teachers and administrators are making herculean efforts to meet student needs by providing after-school programming. Our class helps the school meet those needs by pairing our students as after-school mentors or “co-explorers” with Sherman students.¹ Collectively, and in pairs, we spend every Wednesday afternoon exploring nearby Warner Park to learn what the park and its landscape and wild creatures have to teach us, and what we all have to teach each other. UW participants help their Sherman counterparts develop academic and social skills while building an awareness of and appreciation for the natural resources of Warner Park.

The course also has a lab component: seminar participants meet every Wednesday morning for an introduction to basic field ornithology in the Lakeshore Preserve. This lab teaches UW students how to identify Wisconsin’s most common birds; bird identification is a concrete skill that the UW student then teaches to their Sherman co-explorer. Birds are vital indicators of the planet’s overall ecological health. For lower-income urban children, birds are also the nature that children can see and hear every day without having to be driven to a zoo or a distant wilderness area. As builders, artists, musicians, inventors, comedians, acrobats and actors, birds are a

¹ Last year UW students and their Sherman partners were called “Bird Buddies.” At the end of the year, Sherman students voted to change the club name to “The Naturalists.” Sherman students are now called “co-explorers.”

constant source of wonder. They make tools. They learn and compose songs. They travel thousands of miles to their many homes with the sun and stars as their guides, and they build complex structures. One of the most visible and accessible forms of wildlife, they grace our daily lives with flashes of color from dull city hedges and songs that pour from leafy treetops.

Course Objectives:

This course's main objective is to infuse UW students with a sense of wonder towards all wildlife, and for them to share that wonder with Sherman Middle School students. The program also has an environmental justice focus. In addition to exploring Warner Park, UW students also explore how race and class influence how we all perceive and experience nature. For some Northside residents, Warner Park is an invaluable refuge for urban wildlife and a green island of peace in the midst of urban sprawl. For others, it is an overgrown, scruffy menace where drug dealers purportedly hide and children are endangered. For still others, it is home to Rhythm and Booms—the largest firework show in the Midwest--and an under-utilized land area that could spur economic growth in a lower-income neighborhood. Throughout the course, UW students learn from their Sherman co-explorer what Warner Park's nature specifically means to that child.

In this course you will:

- Explore how race and class affect how we perceive nature and how we decide what is nature;
- Learn to find and identify 40 Wisconsin birds by sight and sound;
- Teach a middle school student how to do the same;
- Explore Madison's largest urban park with a child and discover the wonders of nature;
- Keep a scientific fieldbook and teach a middle schooler to do the same;
- Develop and use outdoor teaching techniques;
- Play a lot of fun nature games;
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and reflections;
- Share your experiences with other members of the class.

Course Structure and Logistics:

This course has two components: a Wednesday morning Bird Lab and a Wednesday afternoon outdoor classroom program at Warner Park. For the morning Bird Lab, we meet at Science House (1645 Linden Drive) from 7:30am until 9:30am. During the lab we alternate weekly between working outside on bird identification in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve and holding class discussions inside on the assigned readings. For the Wednesday afternoon sessions, we meet at Sherman Middle School at 2:40pm. We walk to Warner Park as a group, explore the park until 4:30pm, and then return on foot to Sherman Middle School by 4:50pm. Since this is a service learning class, UW students are eligible for free transportation from campus to Sherman Middle School via cab, funded by UW's Morgridge Center (details provided during orientation).

Attendance:

Since this course involves mentoring and community service, attendance is imperative. We leave

Sherman Middle School at 2:40 pm whether or not you are there; tardiness will not be tolerated. If you must miss a class because of an extremely urgent matter (illness or family emergency), please contact the instructors before the afternoon session; we will have to find another mentor for your Sherman co-explorer. A child is depending on you to show up, on time, every week. Please do not let that child down.

Reflection Journal:

After working with your Sherman co-explorer each Wednesday, you will write a 1.5 page, single-spaced reflection. The reflection journal is worth 25% of your total grade. This weekly assignment is your chance to think about your discoveries with your co-explorer and also to relate these discoveries to the class readings for that week. In the first page of the reflection you will write about your experience in Warner Park that week. In the second half-page you will link that experience to the week's assigned readings. The weekly reflection is also a space for you to critique this service-learning program and help us improve it. What works? What does not work? Any magic moments with your Sherman co-explorer or flashes of insight? **The deadline for weekly reflections is every Friday at 12:00 noon; email it to both Kloppenburg and O'Kane. Late papers receive half-credit. No exceptions. If you are seriously ill, contact the instructors to arrange a make-up assignment.**

Homework Assignments:

Some short homework assignments will be given to help you work with your Sherman co-explorers. These are practical assignments designed to give you real skills. **All homework is due by Thursdays at 5:00pm. Please turn in homework to O'Kane's office or put in the envelope on the office door. Late work receives half-credit.**

Course Grading:

Attendance/Participation	50%
Reflection Journal	25%
Reading Discussion Participation	15%
Bird Lab Exam (40 Birds)	5%
Homework	5%

	100%

Security in the Park:

- Use common sense. Think like a bird. If you feel or smell danger, make a lot of noise and fly out of there.
- Co-explorers should always stay together. You are responsible for your Sherman student; keep them within view at all times. If your co-explorer needs to use the restroom, wait outside for him/her.

- Stay away from the railroad tracks.
- Please do not stray too far from the group.
- Get back on time so the rest of the group does not worry (and so I don't call the police).
- Teach your bird buddy how to be outside, have fun, and stay safe.

Course Texts and Readings:

There is a course reader available for purchase on the first floor of the Social Science building. You also need to purchase the following texts:

Leopold, Aldo

A Sand County Almanac

An orange engineering fieldbook (waterproof): available at the UW Bookstore, main floor.

The following books will be used in this class and we strongly recommend that you purchase them for future reference. However, purchase is *not* required as excerpts are in the course reader.

Crossley, Richard

2011 *The Crossley ID Guide, Eastern Birds*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Carroll, David

Self-Portrait with Turtles.

Darwin, Charles

The Voyage of the HMS Beagle.

Haupt, Lyanda

Rare Encounters with Ordinary Birds.

Heinrich, Bernd

Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival

Louv, Richard

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.

Stutchbury, Bridget

Silence of the Songbirds.

Useful Web Sites:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1189>

Wild Warner Park

<http://wildwarnerpark.org>

The Birds of North America
Online

<http://www.wisc.edu> (free access with student ID on library website).

Northside Planning Council
Together Green

<http://www.northsidemadison.org>

<http://www.togethergreen.org>

Madison Audubon Society

<http://wisconsinaudubon.org/audubon/>

We Love Birds

<http://www.welovebirds.org/>

Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas

<http://www.uwgb.edu/birds/wbba/aboutsite.htm>.