THE EDGE OF WILDERNESS: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COASTAL ALASKAN FISHERIES

STUDENTS CAN ENROLL EITHER IN BY 395 (TOPICS IN BIOLOGY – Marine Biology of Alaska) OR EH 492 (SPECIAL TOPICS IN ENGLISH – Writing about the Natural World)

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Course Instructors:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This team-taught interdisciplinary course will focus on coastal sustainable fisheries resources and the natural history and human enterprises of the region that support the fisheries. Built around a central course narrative of sustainable fisheries, the students will participate both in experiential learning in the field each day intermixed with lectures and creative writing workshops.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE: Lecture examination (40 pts); Field Natural History Notebook which will include 10 one-page species descriptions and final drafts of creative writing pieces (50 pts); Student participation (10 pts).

Note: Students can take this course for graduate credit at the discretion of the faculty. To receive graduate credit additional requirements will be required.

Undergraduate university honors students can also take this course for honors credit (with the approval of their honors program director).

PRE-TRIP LECTURES

Lecture #1 – (McClintock and Vines) Logistical planning and course overview.
Lecture #2 – (McClintock) – Sustainable fisheries biology, fish ecology, aquaculture and mariculture

Lecture #3 – (Vines) – Prose writing (creative non-fiction and fiction) about the natural world

Lecture #4 – (McClintock) – Alaskan marine life: invertebrates, fish and mammals

Lecture # 5 – (Vines) Poetry writing about the natural world

Lecture Examination – Taken prior to departure
(Exam will cover all the material in the previous lectures)

Suggested readings (students will read everything below, with the exception of choosing the Steinbeck or Krakauer option)

Selected sections of the following publications will be suggested readings:


Selected readings from the scientific literature on Alaskan fisheries

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Lectures (UAB prior to departure)

1. **Orientation to travel site and field station**

A presentation will be made by McClintock and Vines orienting students to the various habitats of coastal Alaska in the Sitka region. Field trips, health forms, and air travel plans will be discussed. Faculty will also present some introductory information about the local indigenous people and their culture. The course mechanics and syllabus will be discussed.

2. **Overview of sustainable fisheries biology, fish ecology, aquaculture and mariculture**

McClintock will provide an overview of the fisheries in the central coastal Alaskan region that focuses on the abundant populations of salmon, king crab, and halibut. The
life history of these fish will be presented. The local Alaskan fish hatchery operations will also be discussed.

3. **An overview of creative non-fiction and fiction writing about the natural world**

Vines will discuss the vocabulary and techniques of these two prose genres. He will provide models of essays and fiction related to the natural world.

4. **Alaskan marine life; seaweeds, invertebrates, fish, and mammals**

McClintock will present a survey of the Alaskan marine organisms encompassing a rich diversity of seaweeds, marine invertebrates, sea birds, and marine mammals. Aspects of life history and ecology will be discussed. Ed Ricketts, a marine biologist who figured prominently in Steinbeck's novels and who frequently visited Sitka, will be introduced to students.

5. **Poetry writing about the natural world**

Vines will discuss the vocabulary and techniques of poetry and provide models of poetry related to the natural world. Students will participate in a generative creative writing exercise.

**TENTATIVE COURSE OF STUDY IN SITKA, ALASKA**

Day 1 – Travel day
Day 2 – Fisheries and aquaculture field trip
Day 3 – Morning writing exercise; Afternoon writing workshop
Day 4 – Rocky intertidal field trip
Day 5 – Morning coastal wilderness hike; Afternoon writing exercise and workshop
Day 6 – Boat trip to visit local islands and view seabirds, seals and whales
Day 7 – Morning workshop and draft editing session; Afternoon mountain wilderness hike
Day 8 – Morning intertidal ecology exercise; Afternoon draft editing session; Evening student presentations to community of Sitka in the Odess Theatre (a UAB patron of the arts) on the Sitka Fine Arts Campus

*After dinner each evening, we will discuss the new species added to our species list each day and progression of creative writing assignments*

**Description of natural history notebook and final drafts of creative writing pieces**

Students will pull from daily (morning and afternoon) species lists compiled by faculty and students during each of the days spent in Sitka. Students will select 10 species from these lists and compile a natural history notebook. This notebook will consist of students preparing an overview of the ecology, natural history, biogeography, habitat
characteristics, and personal observations for each of the selected species. Photographs or drawings of the organisms will be encouraged.

As a separate component of the natural history notebook students will turn in final drafts of pieces in all three genres of natural world writings.

**Research Paper (Graduate Students Only)**

Students taking the course for graduate credit will consult with faculty to decide upon a theme for a research paper that combines aspects of creative and scientific writing (a creative non-fiction essay for a general informed public).

**Definition of credit hours**

The UAB requirement for a 3- credit semester-long course is 45 hours of facetime with faculty. In addition to the five UAB-based lectures (7.5 hours faculty facetime) prior to departure, students will be spending at least 6 hours of faculty facetime with their two faculty each day for 7 days (42 hours faculty facetime) and evening recaps (7 hours faculty facetime). Total faculty facetime with students is estimated to be 56.5 hours.

This is a conservative estimate of faculty facetime as the faculty will also be literally living with their students during the field portion of the course and participating in daily field trips, informing them about biology and creative writing.