

# Nature & the New Deal

HIS 320-01; Mears 217  
Mon & Fri, 12:45-2:05; Spring 2015

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**Spring Office Hours:**  
Mon: 2:30-4; Tue: 10-11:30; & by appointment

## Course Overview

This seminar examines the central role that environmental issues played in the era of the New Deal. We will explore how a generation of policy-makers, intellectuals, and artists came to see a fundamental connection between the economic crisis of the “Great Depression” and the environmental crisis of the “Dirty Thirties” (manifest in a series of epic droughts, dust-storms, floods, forest fires, and collapsing farms). The course readings will outline some of the iconic programs that embodied this new vision of rebuilding society through innovative programs in conservation and environmental outreach—e.g. the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the “Greenbelt” program, rural electrification, soil conservation programs, and the funding of environmentally conscious literature, photography, and film by the Works Progress Administration. Students will design their own research projects that examine in greater detail some aspect of environmental policy or thought during this era.

## Course Readings

The one required book for the seminar is available for purchase at the campus bookstore, and a copy will also be available on one-day reserve at Burling Library. Other articles, essays, and primary sources will be made available through the course module (Blackboard) on Pioneer Web, or placed on course reserve at Burling.

✎ Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

## Course Requirements

The central focus of the seminar is the advanced research paper that you will produce over the course of the semester. Modeled on the kinds of articles you read in scholarly journals, this research paper (20-25 pages) should develop a clear and compelling line of historical analysis that uses primary sources to address a well-defined question. Given the complexities and time involved in crafting such a project—ranging from research to framing to interpretation & writing—we will be spending the vast majority of the semester tackling this project in successive stages (often meeting in smaller research groups where we can discuss these issues in a more focused & concrete manner).

For this reason, our common course readings will be limited to the first 3 weeks of the semester—giving you an essential overview of the topic while allowing everyone a chance to begin the long process of exploring particular topics and sources for your individual research projects. As you will see from the schedule below, there are a variety of shorter research & written assignments that are designed to break down the process into more manageable stages, so that you can move at a steady pace towards completing the various stages of this paper.

## Grades

Grades will be assigned according to the following formula:

Assignment Grade	Date	Percentage of Total
Weekly Research & Writing Assignments	***	25%
Full Draft	May 1 <sup>st</sup>	10%
Presentations	Week 9 & 14	5%
Final Research Paper	May 14 <sup>th</sup>	40%
Class Participation	***	20%

### Religious Holidays

The religious observance policy of the college states:

Grinnell College acknowledges and embraces the religious diversity of its faculty, students and staff. Faculty and students share responsibility to support members of our community who observe religious holidays. Students will provide faculty members with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent, and this notice would be expected to occur no later than the third week of the semester. Faculty members will make reasonable efforts to accommodate students who need to be absent from examinations or class due to religious observance. Students are responsible for completing any part of the course work, including examinations, that they have missed due to religious observance, and faculty members are responsible for giving them the opportunity to do so.

As the policy indicates, I will be glad to work with students to make sure that class requirements do not conflict with religious holidays and observances. But it is your responsibility to let me know in advance when these potential conflicts may occur, so that we can address these issues at the beginning of the semester.

### Learning Accommodations

If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning needs that require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Associate Dean and Director of Academic Advising, Joyce Stern, whose office is located in Rosenfield Center (x3702).

## Class Schedule & Reading Assignments

- Please bring a copy of the readings, along with your notes, to class so that we can have a focused and grounded discussion. Everyone should be prepared to cite specific examples or passages from the texts, and to examine them together.
- Readings available through Pioneer-Web are marked **(P)**

### Section 1: Making Sense of the “Dirty Thirties”

#### Week 1: Getting Started

Wed, Jan 21<sup>st</sup>: Introductions, Syllabus & Course Goals  
**Mears 217 (1:15-1:45pm)**

Fri, Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>: Conservation: Old & New

- Ted Steinberg, “Conservation Reconsidered” in his *Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History*, 136-54 (P).
- Sarah Phillips, “Poor People, Poor Land,” in her *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal*, 75-148 (P).

#### Week 2: Analyzing the Civilian Conservation Corps

Mon, Jan 26<sup>th</sup>: The Intellectual Context

- Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, pp. 3-41.
- \* Periodicals Exercise (P)

Fri, Jan 30<sup>th</sup>: New Landscapes & New Bodies

- Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, pp. 43-113.
- **Group A:** Gregory T. Cushman, “Environmental Therapy for Soil and Social Erosion: Landscape Architecture and Depression-Era Highway Construction in Texas,” Michel Conan, ed., *Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture*, 45-70 (P).
- **Group B:** Brian Black, “Organic Planning: Ecology and Design in the Landscape of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1933-45,” in Conan, ed., *Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture*, 45-70 (P).
- **Group C:** Gabriel Rosenberg, “Breeding the Future: 4-H and the Roots of the Modern Rural World, 1914-1948” (Ph.D diss., Brown University, 2011), introduction (P).

### Week 3: Confronting “Human Erosion”

Mon, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>: Community

- Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, pp.115-150.
- *The City* [1939 documentary] (P).
- \* Community Studies Assignment (P)

Fri, Feb 6<sup>th</sup>: The Environmental Consciousness of the Thirties

- Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, pp. 151-180.
- Archibald MacLeish, *Land of the Free* (P).
- \* Documentary Assignment (P)

### Week 4: The Promise of Planning

Mon, Feb 9<sup>th</sup>: New Deal Experiments in Regional Planning

- Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, pp. 181-226.
- \* Group A: National Resources Planning Board Assignment
- \* Group B: Iowa State Planning Board Assignment

Fri, Feb 13<sup>th</sup>: A Transnational Perspective

- David Anderson, “Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography, and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s,” *African Affairs* 83 (1984), 321-43 (P).
- Sarah T. Phillips, “Epilogue: Exporting the New Deal,” in her *This Land, This Nation*, pp. 242-83.

## Section 2: Framing Projects: Sources, Methods & Questions

### Week 5 Preliminary Proposals

Mon, Feb 16<sup>th</sup>:

- “Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer” (P)
- \* Assignment: *Bring a one-page research proposal to class identifying the general topic, questions, and source base you plan to investigate* (further guidelines will be posted on p-web).

We will be scheduling trips this week to the State Archives in Des Moines and Iowa State University for those students interested in using the relevant collections at both institutions. These are not *required* trips, but may prove useful to developing your projects.

Fri, Feb 20<sup>th</sup>: No Class Meeting

## Week 6 Historiography

*Based on research interests, you will be divided into two smaller groups that will meet once a week.*

Assignment: Email me an annotated bibliography of *secondary sources* (2 pages) by 8pm the night before your group meets (further guidelines will be posted on p-web).

Mon, Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>: Research **Group A** meets

Fri, Feb 27<sup>th</sup>: Research **Group B** meets

## Week 7 Primary Sources

Assignment: Email me an annotated bibliography of *primary sources* (1-2 pages) by 8pm the night before your group meets (see p-web for further guidelines). *You will also bring one key source (or an excerpt from it) to your group meeting where you will discuss its strengths and weaknesses as a source base for your project.*

Mon, Mar 2<sup>nd</sup>: Research **Group A** meets

Fri, Mar 6<sup>th</sup>: Research **Group B** meets

## Week 8: Interpretation & Methodology

Reading: Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (excerpts) (P).

Assignment: Email me a short document analysis (2 pages) by 8pm the night before your group meets. See p-web for further guidelines.

Mon, Mar 9<sup>th</sup>: Research **Group A** meets

Wed, Mar 11<sup>th</sup>: Research **Group B** meets

**Spring Break (March 16-27)**

## Section 3: The Writing Process

### Week 9: Moving from Research to Writing

Mon, Mar 30<sup>th</sup>: Structuring the Argument

- “Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer” (P)
- Short presentations on how you plan to structure the narrative & argument of your project

Fri, Apr 3<sup>rd</sup>: No Class Session

*You should be working on developing an outline for your paper. Students are encouraged to meet with me during the extended office hours I will be having this week (or during the class slot) to discuss the outlining process.*

### Week 10: Outlines

*This week I will meet with each of you individually to discuss a first draft of your outline. A final (and detailed) version will be due by 5:00pm on Friday, April 10<sup>th</sup>.*

### Week 11: Positioning Your Argument

Assignment: Email me and your group members a draft of your introduction by 5pm on the day before your research group meets in my office. You should also come prepared to give constructive feedback on your colleagues’ introductions.

Wed, Apr 15<sup>th</sup>: Peer-Review sessions for groups 1 & 2

Fri, Apr 17<sup>th</sup>: Peer-Review sessions for group 3

### Week 12: Writing

Assignment: Email me and your group members a draft of one section of your paper, along with an updated outline, by 8pm the night before your group session. You should also come prepared to give constructive feedback on your colleagues’ section and its place within the larger structure of the paper.

Mon, Apr 20<sup>th</sup>: Peer-Review sessions for groups 1 & 2

Fri, Apr 24<sup>th</sup>: Peer-Review sessions for group 3

### Week 13: Finishing the First Draft (no class or group meetings)

Assignment: A complete first draft should be submitted via the electronic drop-box on pioneer web by 5pm, Friday May 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **Week 14: Presentations & Meetings**

Mon, May 4<sup>th</sup>:

- Assignment: 10-minute presentations on your research projects (further details on p-web)

Wednesday-Friday: **Individual Meetings (by appointment)**

*I will be returning your drafts back to you by noon on Tuesday, and will schedule an hour-long appointment with each of you to discuss your paper (and the revision priorities) in more detail.*

### **Exam Week: Final Draft**

Your final draft of the Research Paper will be **due by 7pm on Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup>**. You should submit it online, using the electronic drop-box on pioneer web.