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EVST 504.01: Colloquium in the Philosophy of Ecology

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Philosophy/Evst 504
Fall 2008
Deborah Slicer
L.A. 148
243-2527

"To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires training such as athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written," says Thoreau, who spent nine years composing *Walden*.

We're simply going to read Thoreau's *Walden* in this class. We're going to read the text slowly, lovingly, intelligently over and over, three times. Among other things, *Walden* is a meditative prose poem, one that deliberately and continually undermines the reader's attempts to find simple answers or pat, enduring truths about any of the issues that Thoreau raises, including environmental issues. We'll use only a few articles by other readers so that you can make your own discoveries, which is how Thoreau would want us to approach his book. Whatever Thoreau has to teach us, we'll find it in the minutiae and in the most unexpected places—in his sense of humor, word play, images, metaphors, in the very structure of the text, in the text's intellectual switchbacks, and most of all in his silences. To paraphrase, badly, Robert Frost, Thoreau has at heart our getting lost, in the hope we'll become lost enough to find ourselves. If nothing else there should be time enough in the next fifteen weeks to become very lost. After that there's a lifetime to find oneself.

Readings

- 9/3 "Reading," in *Walden*, Dover Thrift Editions (DTE)
Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 from Bickman's *Walden: Volatile Truths* (x)
"Thoreau's Life," from *The New Thoreau Handbook*, by Harding and Meyer (x)
Whitman, ~~excerpts from~~ "Song of Myself"  CV
poems by Emily Dickinson (x)
- 9/10 Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*
Bickman, chapter 6 (x)
various poems in a file entitled "poetry" (x)
- 9/17 *Walden*, DTE, all (Let's try to schedule a hike this week for class)
- 9/24 *Walden*, Annotated Edition, edited by Cramer (AE), Economy
- 10/1 AE, Where I Lived and What I Lived For; Reading

10/8 AE, Sounds; Solitude; Visitors
excerpts from Lawrence Buells' *The Environmental Imagination*, (x)

10/15 AE, Bean-Field; The Village

10/22 AE, The Ponds; Baker Farm

10/29 AE, Higher Laws; Brute Neighbors; Housewarming

11/5 AE, Former Inhabitants; Winter Animals; The Pond in Winter

11/12 AE, Spring; Conclusion

11/19 *Walden*, DTE, all
essays from Philip Cafaro's *Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (x)

12/3 continue DTE

** Please read the AE assignments twice.

Grading

Five 2 page papers consisting of close textual readings from the AE assignments. Please keep very focused, preferably work with no more than 2 pages of text. 50%

One Presentation 15%

Final paper, 12-15 pages 35%

Texts

Walden, Dover Thrift Edition (DTE)

Walden, A Fully Annotated Edition (AE), edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer

(x) Xeroxed essays and poetry on reserve in the philosophy department library, L.A. 101,
open M-F, 8-5, closed noon hour