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| Course Title: | Ecology and Conservation in Algonquin Park | |
| Instructor(s): | Dr. Ben Rubin & Dr. Graeme Taylor Department of Biology; Western University brubin2@uwo.ca , gtaylor8@uwo.ca 519.661.2111 ext. 87475 (BR) or ext. 81467 (GT) | |
| Dates: | Sunday, August 7 – Saturday, August 20, 2022 | |
| Location: | Algonquin Wildlife Research Station Whitney, ON | |
| Cost: | \$1750 Includes lodging, and meals and transportation during the course. Students Arrange their own transportation to and from Algonquin Park. Instructors will try to facilitate carpooling among students. To reserve a place in the course, a deposit of \$350 is due at registration, and the balance (\$1400) is due in full on June 30, 2022. | |
| Prerequisites: | Two courses in biology | |
| Enrolment: | Maximum: 15 (4 reserved for Western students) | |
| Course Description (brief): | <p>Algonquin Provincial Park represents a landscape that is managed for the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services and, at the same time, for multiple human uses, particularly resource extraction and recreation. We will simultaneously explore the natural and human history of this landscape. Through this course, you will become familiar with key species, ecosystems, and ecological interactions that occur in the Park. At the same time, you will learn about both historical and contemporary human activity in the park. Through the lens of ecosystem management, you will explore how the dual objectives of biodiversity preservation and human use might be sustainably and simultaneously supported.</p> <p>We will immerse ourselves in the diverse and unique mixture of forest types and ecological communities found in the Park, including coniferous, hardwood, upland, and lowland forests, as well as rivers, lakes, and various types of wetlands. We will also visit key locations in the Park that illustrate both the past and present human footprint.</p> <p>We will be based at the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station (AWRS). From here, much of our time will be spent exploring the Park's environments, often by hiking, canoeing, or snorkeling. We will learn to be field biologists, to document and to interpret what we observe, and to pose scientific questions. Based on your observations, you will develop a research project.</p> | |
| Evaluation: | Pre-class quiz Participation and Professionalism* Topic proposal (to be completed on site) Field journal (to be completed on site) Final report* (due September 12) | 15% 10% 5% 30% 40% |
| | * You must pass this component of the course to pass the course. | |

An Average Day – What to Expect

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| Daily timeline | Each day we'll head outside shortly after breakfast and be back by dinner. You should expect to be outdoors all day, rain or shine. Evenings will include time to work on field journals, free time (campfires, canoeing, cards games), and occasional mandatory or optional class activities. |
| Work habitat & Physical exertion | We will hike on and off trails in terrain that varies from flat to steep and rugged. Expect to carry a daypack all day through moderately rough terrain. Wearing a good-fitting and sturdy pair of hiking boots and having good rain gear with you will help you stay comfortable and safe. |
| Common activities | Common activities include riding in 11- seat vans on rural roads, hiking (as described above), practicing field measurement techniques individually and in groups. There is the opportunity to canoe or swim in a cold lake at the research station during free time. Swimming is done at students' own risk and must be restricted to daylight hours when others are present. |
| Weather, dehydration, & biting insects | You will likely be outside in the rain at different points during the course, uncomfortably warm, physically tired, and annoyed by mosquitoes. Temperatures will usually be ward during the day, but evenings can be chilly. Students should carry two litres of drinking water with them each day to remain hydrated. |
| Toxic/poisonous, wildlife/ plants | Natural dangers include possible encounters with black bears, poison ivy, ticks carrying Lyme disease, and venomous snakes. All of these are unlikely to be problems because even though these organisms are all present in the area, the odds of encountering them are low (especially with a large group). Nevertheless, proper vigilance and regular tick checks are good practices. |
| Sleeping, washroom & laundry facilities | We will sleep in single-gender cabins that normally house up to 10 people each on bunk beds but will be operating at 50% capacity due to COVID-19. We'll eat breakfast and dinner at a cookhouse (a short walk from the cabins). Bathrooms, showers, and laundry are also available in nearby buildings. At breakfast, we will be able to pack a bag lunch. Cabins have heat and electricity but no plumbing or WiFi. Bedding and towel service are not provided. Showers, flush toilets, and coin laundry are available in a nearby building. |
| Meal plans & food allergies | Breakfast and dinner are prepared for us in the cookhouse. We have access to food to make sandwiches, fruit, and other snacks to pack our bag lunch at breakfast time. The kitchen will accommodate most dietary restrictions so long as they are informed in advance. |
| Non-academic responsibilities | We are collectively responsible for keeping our cabins clean and for leaving the facilities in as good condition as we find them. We recommend students do not attempt to take an online course while taking this field course because free time and internet bandwidth are both limited. |
| Degree of isolation | From the research station, it is a twenty-minute drive to the nearest town (Whitney, ON), which offers a limited selection of snacks, souvenirs, and supplies you may have forgotten. The nearest WiFi is at the Algonquin Park Visitor Centre (approx. 5 km away). Cell service is spotty at best. We have first aid supplies on hand, and I will bring some common over-the-counter medicines. If further medical attention is required, there is a medical clinic in Whitney and ambulance service is available. |
| Alcohol & drugs | Alcohol use is permitted in moderation. You must not drink alcohol, be intoxicated, or be hung-over during course activities. Other recreational drugs are not permitted. Violation of this policy may result in failing the participation and professionalism component of the course and therefore failing the course. |
| Vaccinations/ Insurances | COVID-19 vaccinations are required. Besides that, no vaccinations are recommended beyond Ontario's routine vaccination schedule. No special insurance is required for the course. |
| Social Situations | As described above, this course involves living in close quarters with other students, instructors, and the TA. We work together, sleep in the same cabins, eat together and often recreate together during free time. It is essential to respect each other's needs for quiet, personal space, privacy, etc. |
| Final comments | Algonquin Park is a unique experiment in conservation and recreation and has a place close to the heart of many Ontarians. If you have not been, this course can be a wonderful introduction. If you are already a regular visitor, this is a chance to view the Park in a new light. |