ES 490: Senior Seminar in Environmental Studies
Introduction to the Research Project

Each student in the course will complete an individual case study of an environmental issue, drawing together the knowledge and skills you have gained in the ES program and as an undergraduate. This assignment is not just another paper; it is a culminating academic accomplishment which you would be proud to show to potential employers or co-workers. There are a number of key features of the assignment.

1. This paper is a RESEARCH PAPER. It should demonstrate extensive research and an application of that information in an efficient and compelling way. This involves the ability to use a variety of types of sources including scholarly sources and sources of conflicting views, and the ability to critically evaluate sources of information. Each paper should include sources from scholarly journal and scholarly books, as well as websites of the media, the government, and environmental organizations. Each paper should show evidence of critical evaluation of information. The paper should include an ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY of major sources which summarizes the content, significance, and validity of the information in one paragraph.

2. The paper needs to be more than a report of information; it must be an analysis. Usually this means that there is a specific THESIS that you are arguing, and the thesis should be stated in the first page or two. The paper then sets out to demonstrate the thesis. In another model you begin by highlighting complex ISSUES that you state and then proceed to explore. See “Barnhill’s Friendly Manual for Empowered Writing and Great Papers” for “Two Models of Papers.” Either model is fine; they are both ways to go beyond a mere report of information by giving the paper a direction and a point. In either case, however, the more a paper is animated by real and complex issues, the more interesting it is and the deeper the analysis will go.

3. The paper needs to PROBE DEEPLY into an issue and generate new insight. This requires that the paper have a narrow focus. A general topic such as “pesticides” is too broad: you will end up touching on many things superficially. An alternative would be to focus on one or two common pesticides and go into detail about positive and negative consequences and possible alternatives.

4. Research papers must INTEGRATE THE THREE MAJOR DIVISIONS OF KNOWLEDGE (natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities) in analyzing a specific environmental dilemma and recommending concrete strategies and solutions. What usually gets slighted is the HUMANITIES DIMENSION OF VALUES. This includes ethical issues, philosophical world views, and social philosophy. Refer to specific theories or schools of environmental philosophy. Recall your course work in environmental ethics, nature writing, and ES 282. Consider using terms such as anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and schools such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and animal rights. Consider applying major thinkers you have studied, such as Aldo Leopold. Consider how environmental policies impact different social groups differently: females, minorities, the poor, the elderly, the rural. See sheet on “Values in Environmental Policy.”

5. The paper needs to HIGHLIGHT COMPLEXITIES, whether it is contrary views, political obstacles, problematic consequences, scientific uncertainties, etc. The paper has to go beyond being a one-dimensional view of an issue.

6. Despite the complexities, you need to TAKE A STAND. You should go beyond a one-dimensional view, but you also need to articulate a particular stand on the issue or problem. Your stand may be clear and firm, or it may include a recognition of doubts or the validity of other views, but it
must take a stand. The paper should support and illustrate your stand, using evidence, argument, and authority. Again, this helps the paper go beyond being just a report.

7. The length of the paper should be approximately TWENTY TO TWENTY-FIVE PAGES (excluding bibliography and other addenda). Papers under twenty pages or over twenty-five are suspect, but may be acceptable.

8. It should include an ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY of the main sources you used, as well as a Works Cited page.

9. The paper needs to be polished and SQUEAKY-CLEAN in terms of typos, grammar, sentence structure, paragraph construction, citation, and bibliography. Citations may be in the text or end-notes, as long as it conforms to a standard citation format, which you should specify.

10. Completed papers are DUE at the beginning of the final class. Late papers are not accepted; bring in what you have.

**Topics in 2007:** Corporate Agribusiness; Wisconsin’s Deer Herds; Conventional Versus Organic Farming; Water Pollution; Permaculture; Ecomunicipalities; Roadless Area Conservation Rule; Wildlife Management In Wisconsin; Sustainability In Public School Standards; Sustainable Energy Management; Sustainability In Art.

**Topics in 2006:** Ecopsychology; Drilling in the ANWR; Pharmaceuticals Contaminating Our Water Supply; Urban Sprawl; Lake Sturgeon; Pollution in the Great Lakes; Radical Environmentalism; Crandon Mine; Non-point Groundwater Pollution in Wisconsin; Environmental Apocalypticism; The Campus Greening Movement here and across the country; Approaches to Environmental Education; Restoration of Wolves in Yellowstone Park.

**Topics in 2005:** Sustainable agriculture in America, hydroelectric power, hazardous waste associated with water and the work zone, the African wild dog, a possible geologic repository for the storage of high-level nuclear waste at the Wolf River batholith in northern Wisconsin, white-tail deer management, smart growth, industrialized factory farming, invasive species in the Great Lakes, the role of ISO 14,000 in achieving corporate sustainability, clean energy in Wisconsin, green construction, sustainable development

**Topics in 2004:** Green Cars, Global Warming and the Automobile, Invasive Species, Self-sustaining Subdivision, Confined Animal Feeding Operations, Exotic Pet Industry, Pesticides, Wolf Restoration, Corporate Sustainability, Genetic Engineering, Wind Energy, DDT and Malaria

**Other possible topics**
Biofuels, population, the market economy, environmental justice, genetically engineered foods, immigration, climate change, trading pollution credits, and many others.