

## LARCH 2367 / 2367E: Making and Meaning of the American Landscape

**Instructor name:** Jake Boswell  
**Year and term:** Autumn 15  
**Meeting time:** TTH 2:20-3:40  
**Meeting location:** KN 250

### COURSE INFORMATION

#### DESCRIPTION

The word "Landscape," from the German *landschaft* and the Old English *landscape*, connotes both a place of dwelling and a place that has been and is continually shaped by the act of dwelling. The etymology of the word then suggests that landscapes are shaped, they are made rather than "natural." Sometimes this making occurs directly, as when a forest is cleared for a housing development. Sometimes this making occurs indirectly, as when a set of cultural ideas culminate in the identification of a piece of land as "wilderness" -- forever preserving it against a more direct act of shaping. We all come to our landscape both directly and indirectly; we dwell in this landscape and therefore we cannot help but shape it; moreover we each bring a set of normative cultural ideas and beliefs with us which guide us in the shaping of that landscape.

The American Landscape as we know it today, both profound and banal, can thus be read as a palimpsest of the ideas and beliefs of the people that have shaped and reshaped it over the course of the last five hundred years -- and continue to shape it today. This course investigates those ideas and systems of belief in order to engender a more profound understanding of and appreciation for the American Landscape, but also in order to problematize our own deep seated "cultural baggage" (our own assumptions, ideas and beliefs) and the effect that they have had, and continue to have on our national landscape.

#### GOALS

- To enable students to read the contemporary landscape as a palimpsest of social, cultural, economic, and technological ideas and forces.
- To enable students to recognize key figures, events, laws, and ideas that have contributed to the contemporary form of the American landscape.
- To foster an appreciation for the complexities and contradictions implicit within the American Landscape and within our own belief systems and mythologies concerning that landscape.

#### FORMAT

This course meets for two 80 minute lectures per week which are lead by the professor and one 55 minute recitation per week lead by either the professor or a graduate teaching assistant. Lectures and recitations are a required component of the course for all students. Lectures are given in a standard format and encourage students questions and participation. Each lecture focuses on a specific topic within the American Landscape. Recitations are small, discussion based, workshops where students engage in discussion of 4 course readings, writing assignments, and group assignments.

The structure of the course is based on garden historian John Dixon-Hunt's scholarship around the idea of the three natures: wilderness, middle landscape, and garden/city. We will explore each of these "natures" as it relates to our cultural conception of the American Landscape. Moreover, the course is divided into three units, each addressing a specific nature.