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New UNH Course Turns Fly Fishing into an Academic Adventure

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New UNH Course Turns Fly Fishing into an Academic Adventure
DURHAM, N.H. – From learning about literature, art, and popular culture to biology, environmentalism, and business, students at the University of New Hampshire this fall have the opportunity to explore what it means to be an American through the lens of a fly fisherman.

The new elective course, “Fly Fishing and the American Experience,” is taught by professor Bill Ross and will introduce students to a wide range of American authors, from Ernest Hemingway and Norman Maclean to Nick Lyons, Tom McGuane and John Gierach.

“The practice of fly fishing may seem like a rather specialized topic for a semester-long course, but it allows us to explore a wide range of subjects,” Ross says. He considers it the consummate interdisciplinary pursuit, known both for its rich literary heritage and sometimes fanatical and gadget-prone practitioners. He adds that “some joke that a fly fisher can, and often will, turn any conversation into why a given subject is like or unlike fly fishing, but it’s frequently true. Well...for me anyway.”

Students will learn about fly fishing techniques, stream ecology, and local rivers. They will see how the American landscape and ways of thinking have created something quite distinct from its British antecedents -- a transformation that extends from literary and ethical writings on fly fishing down to fishing techniques and fly design, a change as literal as that from tweed clothing and caps to denim and Stetsons, and as distinct from the chalk streams of southern England as the wild, brawling rivers of Maine and Alaska.

Students will be required to complete the traditional academic requirements, such as term papers, journals, group projects, and exams. However, no class that looks at the American experience from the view of the fly fisherman would be complete without a fly-fishing trip to a local pond.

Students also will complete a 10-hour service learning project, which could include organized stream cleanups on local rivers such as the Oyster, Cocheco, Lamprey, or Bellamy; fall fish stocking; or river or habitat monitoring for water quality. Partners may include Trout Unlimited, the Strafford Rivers Conservancy, and other faculty at UNH.

“These projects will provide participants with a unique and rewarding opportunity to apply class information to real life situations and, at the same time, help them learn a good deal about both the local environment and themselves,” Ross says. “In addition, I’d like to encourage them to unplug from technology by plugging into the outdoors for a while.”

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

PHOTOS
Fly fisherman Bill Cass instructs UNH students.
http://www.unh.edu/news/img/flyfishing1.jpg

UNH students practice fly fishing techniques at the UNH outdoor pool.
http://www.unh.edu/news/img/flyfishing2.jpg

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