Introduction
This colloquium will examine the early American dialogue with nature.

Within the last few decades, environmental history has emerged as an important sub-field in history. Though it is defined variously by practitioners, at base it studies the relationship between humans and their physical environments, understanding such relationships as "dialogues" between societies and the material (including the "natural") circumstances of their existence. Some environmental historians emphasize culture and intellectual themes, exploring the ways that people have understood and represented the natural world and shaped it in culturally specific ways. Others stress the essential economic foundations of environmental relationships, focusing on the need to procure subsistence, comfort, and wealth and the effects that such production has on physical and natural environments, and those who inhabit them. Still others focus on the politics and policy of humans’ relationships with their environments, and how social and political life—situated in landscapes—is often the object of negotiation and struggle. Finally, some view environmental history as the study of ecology, with people considered as essential (if sometimes disturbing) elements within nature.

We will employ all of these approaches at times in an effort to understand how various Americans in the 17th through the early 19th centuries mentally and physically "constructed" nature, how and why their constructions and reconstructions mattered, and why they matter still.

Course Format and Requirements
As a colloquium, this course will be discussion oriented. Students will be expected to complete the week’s reading assignment and be prepared to discuss it by the time we meet each Monday afternoon. Each week our discussions will be, in part, student-led. Each of you will be required to organize and help moderate discussion of the week’s assigned reading, focusing our attention on key facts, concepts, arguments, and themes.

Students will be required to lead one discussion section, write a short summary of that discussion (approximately 750 words, due within a week of the class meeting), and write 5 other short essays (approximately 750 words) in response to weekly questions (see below). All students must write the essay for week 2. Thereafter, students must complete 4
additional essays over 8 weeks—at least one essay every two weeks. (In other words, students may not go more than three weeks without writing an essay). Student may write more than the required 5 essays, in which case I will use the five highest grades to calculate a final grade.

Students will be evaluated as follows:

**Essays:** 5@14 percent each = 70 percent total.

**Participation:** 30 percent.

**Students must fulfill all the requirements of the course—including active participation in class discussions—in order to pass. Excessive absence will result in failure.**

Academic integrity is important. I will hold all students to the University of Oregon “Standards of Conduct.” Plagiarism will not be tolerated; all work must by your own, written for this class.

**Required Books**


Books are available at the University of Oregon Bookstore. Additional, required primary source readings will be made available on the web through Blackboard. Check the course Blackboard site regularly.

**Reading and Discussion Schedule**

**Unit One: Genesis**

**Week 1** (September 29): Invention of America.

Read: Handouts—Columbus, Native oral narrative, contemporary commentary.

**Week 2** (October 6): Colonialism, Native worldviews, environmental practice.


Essay topic: In an essay of approximately 500-600 words, assess the meaning of “nature” to the participants in the early colonial encounters in North America. Essay due in class.

**Unit Two: Nature and Colonialism**

**Week 3** (October 13): Beachheads: Virginia.
Read: Mancall, documents 3 & 4 (62-106), 6 & 7 (112-32); Carville Earle, “Environment, Disease, and Mortality in Early Virginia” (Blackboard).

Essay topic: In an essay of 500-600 words, assess the environmental impact of early colonization in the Chesapeake. Essay due in class.

Read: Mancall, documents 8 & 10 (133-39, 149-68); Cronon, 54-156; Thomas Morton, “New England Canaan” (1632) (Blackboard).

Essay topic: Write a short essay (approximately 500-600 words) that assesses the justification for, and environmental implications of, New England colonization. Due in class.

Unit Three: Agriculture and Improvement
Week 5 (October 27): Agriculture, environmental alteration, and “improvement.”

Essay topic: Write a short essay (500-600 words) analyzing the concept of agricultural “improvement” in the colonial period and early republic. Due in class.

Week 6 (November 3): Slavery.

Essay topic: In a short essay (600 words), assess the role of slaves in American environmental transformation in the colonial and early national periods. Due in class.

Unit Four: Science & Aesthetics
Week 7 (November 10): Natural History in America.

Essay topic: Write a short essay assessing the meaning of “natural history” in early America. What were the implications of understanding and describing the “natural world” in such a fashion? Due in class.
Week 8 (November 17): Scientific America.
Essay topic: Write a short essay (500-600 words) that assesses the place assigned by 18th-century and early 19th-century white commentators to American Indians in American history. Consider both “natural” and cultural history. Due in class.

Unit Five: Expansion
Week 9 (November 24): The Lewis and Clark Expedition in Context.
Essay topic: Write an essay (500-600) that assesses the environmental assumptions and goals that lay behind the Lewis and Clark expedition. Why did Jefferson initiate it? Due in class.

Week 10 (December 1): Empire of Liberty.
Essay topic: In a short essay, assess the environmental goals and methods, ideas and practices, deployed to create an “Empire of Liberty” in the United States in the early republic. Due in class.