



Eco Practicum Catskills Syllabus, Summer 2015

There are currently 7 billion people living on our planet, approximately four times the number of people that were alive merely one century ago. Now more than ever, our willingness and aptitude for responsible natural resource use and management will determine the quality of life for all species on Earth. Through experiential democratic education and partnerships with over 20 organizations, Eco Practicum empowers emerging environmental leaders by providing them with the knowledge, connections, and hands-on experience necessary to have a positive impact on society.

Eco Practicum Catskills is an immersive summer program for current college students and recent graduates who are interested in engaging with the most pressing socio-environmental issues of our time and working towards social and environmental justice. Part think-tank, part action-workshop, participants live on an environmental education facility in the heart of the Catskills and get the opportunity to farm, learn from peers, and meet with the foremost experts in the field.

Dates & Cost

The program is comprised of two sessions, each spanning 2 weeks. Participants can take part in either one or both of the sessions. The cost to participate is \$1600 for one session, \$3100 for both, which includes housing, food, and transportation for the duration of the program.

- **Session One: Food, Farming, and Animals (May 31 – June 14)**
- **Session Two: Energy, Land Use, and Waste (June 14 – 27)**

Method

Meeting Experts

Every day, participants take a field trip to meet with an expert in the field, representing one of the partner organizations. Participants tour facilities, meet with staff members, and learn about how these organizations function on the ground. These encounters often include a hands-on component and always include a candid conversation with the speaker about the work that they do, relating to both their achievements and challenges.

Farming & Land Stewardship

Participants work on an on-site organic farm, an urban farm, and a forest garden. They care for the farm animals, which include goats, chickens, and bees. They learn techniques in permaculture, composting, and animal husbandry. In addition to farming, participants manage the water flows, rain catchment systems, and waste outputs, gaining holistic ecosystem and natural resource management experience.

Democratic Education

Through text studies, videos, discussions, and peer-led activities, participants share their knowledge, learn from one another, and analyze the dynamics of the Catskills bio-region. The place-based learner centered educational approach honors the different ways that people learn best. The democratic pedagogy ensures a horizontal structure in which students and educators alike express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Final Project

Participants collaborate on a final project with local artists and activists in an effort to process, synthesize, share, and actualize lessons learned. The final project is designed to positively impact the space in which it is created, and the discourse surrounding the issues that are addressed throughout the program.



The Educators & Experts

Eco Practicum is led by Columbia University professor Eugenia Manwelyan and is co-facilitated by a team of educators committed to promoting social and environmental justice through empowering learner-centered programming. The on-site educators are dynamic, experienced, and trained to provide high-quality guidance for Eco Practicum participants. The educators lead intellectually rigorous activities and help maintain an open and healthy summer community.

Eco Practicum participants meet with professionals, farmers, activists, and policy-makers who represent organizations that have a tremendous impact on the environment and society. Here is a partial list of the organizations we encounter:

Session One: Food, Farming, and Animals

Channery Hill Farm
Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT)
Gorzynski Ornerly Farm
Greenmarket
GrowNYC
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Pure Catskills
Silver Heights Farm
Skydog Farm
Slow Food
Sullivan County Farm Network
Willow Wisp Organic Farm
Cargill Regional Beef Slaughterhouse
Dirie Raw Milk Dairy Farm
Quality Deer Management Association
Snowdance Farm
Slope Farm
Woodland Weavers' and Spinners' Guild

Session Two: Energy, Land Use, Waste

Apple Pond Farm & Renewable Energy Education Center
Catskill Watershed Corporation
Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Center for Bioregional Living
Friends of Natural Gas
New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)
Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development
Delaware County Department of Public Works
Frost Valley Model Forest
National Park Service, Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River
Root N' Roost Farm
Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management
Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC)
Watershed Protection & Partnership Council / NY State Department of State
Wildflower Farm and Aquaculture Center
WJFF Public Radio



Session One: Food, Farming, and Animals

Food is both a biological and cultural imperative. Thus it plays a myriad of roles in our personal lives, as well as our ecosystems and our economy. Food choices do make an impact, but beyond the simplicity of consumer choice lies an exploration of a food system that is at once centralized and dispersed, efficient and ineffective, utterly destructive and inspiringly regenerative. Food is a driving force in the human augmentation of the earth, destruction of countless ecosystems, and subsequent extinction of thousands of species. At the same time, we have devoted nearly 1/3 of our planet's land surface to animals that we have domesticated. Ultimately, the way we feed ourselves and relate to animals has tremendous consequences for the climate, biodiversity, and life on earth.

Session One addresses the impacts of various farming and food distribution models, and considers issues surrounding our curious and intimate relationship with animals. Participants examine the role that New York City demand for "local food" plays in the Catskills economy, and get to know the plant and animal life that this landscape is best suited to sustain. Discussions cover issues such as seed patents, genetically modified foods, and organic certification, as well as animal domestication, hunting, and eating meat.

Itinerary

SUNDAY: Introduction to Food & How it Grows

MONDAY: Different Farming Models

- Work on Willow Wisp Organic Farm with owner Greg Swartz, former Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York

TUESDAY: Organic Certification & GMOs

- Visit Silver Heights Farm, a certified organic farm specializing in heirloom and open pollinated vegetables.

WEDNESDAY: Eating for a Healthy Body & Planet

- Meet Jen McClashen from Slow Food, an international grassroots movement that encourages access to food that is healthy both nutritionally and environmentally.

THURSDAY: Getting Food from Farm to Table

- Promote and work at a local farmers market

FRIDAY: Regenerative Regional Food Systems

- Meet Jennifer Grossman, of Natural Resources Defense Council, to discuss the Catskills Foodshed Initiative, which aims to promote regional agriculture.

SATURDAY: Final Project Workshop Part I

SUNDAY: Hike

MONDAY: Large-Scale Industrial Meat Production

- Visit Cargill Regional Beef Slaughterhouse, tour the facility and see first-hand the entire meat production process, including the cow's arrival, slaughter, butchering, and packaging.

TUESDAY: Domestication and Replicating Nature

- Work on Slope Farm, tend to the herd of grass-fed cows, and discuss farming, marketing, and distribution.

WEDNESDAY: Hunting

- Track deer with wildlife biologist Dick Henry and examine the role of hunting in forest management.

THURSDAY: Animal Products

- Tour Dirie's Raw Milk Dairy Farm and discuss the economics, politics and environmental impacts of small-scale versus large-scale dairy production with Richard and Mary Ann Dirie.

FRIDAY: Killing Animals

- Take part in a lamb slaughter at Snowdance Farm, which specializes in pastured poultry, pigs, and beef, and with owner Marc Jaffe, the President of the Cornell Cooperative Extension, Sullivan County.

SATURDAY: Final Project Workshop Part II

SUNDAY: Evaluations, Arrivals, and Departures

(Please note that dates and trips are subject to change.)



Session Two: Energy, Water, and Waste

There is no doubt that man has had a tremendous impact on the planet. From micro-plastics in the oceans now outnumbering plankton, to massive terrestrial alterations that transform the wilderness into cities, we live in a time when the way we choose to manage natural resources has significant consequences for our species, and all the species around us. What approach can we use to understand the complex systems-wide challenges we face? How can we best examine the systems we use to manage our natural resources? All too often, we misunderstand one system by examining it in a vacuum and even our mechanisms for investigating are overly specific and fragmented. Energy, water, and waste are interconnected elements that shape and are shaped by both the natural and the built environment. Approaching these topics as parts of one whole picture allows us to make connections, forge new pathways, and discover opportunities for deep collaboration.

Session Two examines the impacts of various energy sources, from fossil fuels to renewables. Participants consider the implications of growing energy demand, the role of conservation, as well as the hope and hype surrounding renewable energy. Participants gain insights into multiple sides of the fracking debate, and particular attention is given to the New York City watershed, which drastically impacts the landscape and energy policy. Finally, we look at the myth of trash, considering the implications of a linear, versus a closed loop, ideology.

Itinerary

SUNDAY: What is "Energy"?

MONDAY: Natural Gas

- Meet Friends of Natural Gas representative to discuss the potential benefits of shale gas.

TUESDAY: Dangers of Fossil Fuels

- Work at Catskill Mountainkeeper, which protects the ecological integrity of the Catskills.

WEDNESDAY: Fracking on the Ground

- Travel to Dimock, PA with citizen journalist Vera Scroggins to visit fracking wells, see the infrastructure that fracking requires, and meet homeowners who have been impacted.

THURSDAY: Community Advocacy

- Learn about the role that grassroots advocacy played in the banning of fracking in New York State with Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy.

FRIDAY: Renewable Energy Infrastructure

- Work on Apple Pond Farm & Renewable Energy Education Center. Tour facilities, which include livestock, a straw bale house, a windmill, and solar panels.

SATURDAY: Final Project Workshop Part I

SUNDAY: Hike

MONDAY: Socio-Geological History of the Catskill Region

- Canoe the Delaware River with National Park Service.

TUESDAY: Water

- Visit Ashokan Reservoir with Executive Director of the Watershed Protection and Partnership Council / New York State Department of State and discuss issues surrounding water management.

WEDNESDAY: Forests

- Work on a trail management project at Frost Valley Model Forest and learn about the role that forests play in maintaining a safe and healthy watershed.

THURSDAY: Waste, Composting, and Recycling

- Tour the Delaware County composting, recycling, methane recovery and waste disposal facility.

FRIDAY: Adaptive Reuse

- Work on Wildflower Farm and Aquaculture Center and see how this farm utilizes wastewater from the tilapia farm to grow plants.

SATURDAY: Final Project Workshop Part II

SUNDAY: Evaluations and Departures

(Please note that dates and trips are subject to change.)