

The Knox College Green Oaks Term

Revised September 2009



In a Nutshell...

The Knox Green Oaks Term is a spring term program offered once every two years, during which twelve students reside at the DeWitt Brown Research Center of Knox's Green Oaks Field Station and take courses in the arts, natural history and social science. Green Oaks, located half an hour's drive from the main Knox campus, encompasses several different habitats including tallgrass prairie, old growth oaks, second-growth oak-hickory forest, strip-mined lands, lakes, and streams. The program is offered every other spring, with student selection taking place during the preceding fall term. During their ten weeks at Green Oaks, students are immersed in an interdisciplinary curriculum taught primarily by Knox faculty from three different departments and supplemented by guest speakers and field trips. At least one faculty member and one post-baccalaureate Program Assistant are in residence at Green Oaks at any given time during the program. The curriculum pursues an understanding and appreciation of Green Oaks as a natural and social setting as well as a context for artistic creativity. Students of the program have applied their experiences in diverse ways including Knox honors projects, postgraduate studies in a variety of fields, Peace Corps work, and employment in fields ranging from landscape design to public science education.



Who's Qualified?

Students of all academic interests and at all stages of their Knox education (including first-year students) are welcome to apply. There are no specific course preparation requirements, but applicants to the program should have enough background in the arts, natural sciences or social sciences to enroll in one of the courses at the 300 level (see details below), and they should be genuinely motivated to study in all the areas of the program curriculum.

Past students have praised their Green experience as a highlight of their Knox education, but it must also be said that the program is not for everyone. It requires a great deal of energy, versatility and self-discipline. Life in a close-knit cooperative community, where virtually every part of daily life becomes part of an integrated learning experience, is an exhilarating opportunity but one that necessarily means putting aside many of the accustomed diversions of ordinary American (and campus) life. Hence, it's important that applicants consider seriously whether or not they are temperamentally suited to such a program.





The Application Process



Information sessions on the Green Oaks Term are offered during the spring and fall terms prior to each program. Early in the fall term prior to the program, all Knox students will receive mailings with links to an application form and other important information. The application involves filling in some basic information and writing an essay addressing how the program would serve the applicant's educational goals, as well as how the applicant is qualified to do well in the program and contribute to its overall quality. The stated application deadline will be early enough that students can be notified of their acceptance before the end of the fall term. The

criteria for acceptance include demonstrated academic excellence, relevant background and goals, the strength of the application essay, and the content of the two required faculty recommendation letters. Application materials are available on the web at the following locations:

Application form: http://www.knox.edu/Documents/PDFs/GOT_App-1.doc

Instructions for faculty referees: http://www.knox.edu/Documents/PDFs/GOT_referees-1.pdf

Questions about these or other program details may be directed to Jon Wagner (jwagner@knox.edu).



Finances and Logistics

The Green Oaks Term program fee is equivalent to one term of Knox fees for a full meal plan and double occupancy dormitory room. Thus, for most students the program will cost the same as a term on campus. Since dormitory space is at a premium, students are required to move out of their campus dorm rooms while residing at Green Oaks. Billing for the Green Oaks Term is done in the same way as for regular campus terms, and financial aid is applied in the same way.



Curriculum

Students accepted into the Green Oaks Program are required to enroll in a half-credit winter term course, ENVS 250, "Visions of Nature," which meets for two hours each week at a time to be arranged in keeping with students' other scheduled commitments; this course, graded S/U, is designed to prepare students for the program through reading and discussion of core background texts.

The formal spring term curriculum includes three regular one-credit courses and one half-credit course: "Natural History of Green Oaks," taught by a faculty member in the natural sciences, "The Natural Imagination," taught by a faculty member in the creative and performing arts, and



two other courses taught by a faculty member in the social sciences: "Deep Maps of Place" and "Dynamics of Intentional Community" (1/2 credit). Each course except the latter is offered at both the 200 or 300 levels, and a student must enroll in at least one of these courses at the 300 level, depending on his or her academic interests and background. Students in each course undertake individual disciplinary or interdisciplinary research projects to be presented in seminars and poster presentations at the end of the term. In addition to these courses, the program includes cross-curricular workshops and experiences in a variety of relevant topics such as astronomy, photography, first aid, weather signs, and so forth. Here are the official catalog descriptions:

Environmental Studies 282/382: Deep Maps of Place. Taught at Knox's Green Oaks Field Station, this course concentrates on the various ways in which place is understood and represented, both in the individual imagination and in the collective memories and representations of cultures. One of the course's principal aims is to cultivate an enhanced ability to probe beyond the surface appearance of place in order to inquire into the rich tapestry of narratives—ranging from the geological and natural processes involved in the formation of place to mythic, personal, historical, and artistic/imaginative narratives. Students who enroll in ENVS 382 must complete the academic requirements of ENVS 282 and also be responsible for a more advanced level of participation and a more substantial term project. Prerequisite: Acceptance into the Green Oaks Term. Prerequisite for 382: two courses in Anthropology-Sociology or permission of instructor. Jon Wagner



Environmental Studies 283/383: Natural History of Green Oaks. Taught at Knox's Green Oaks Field Station, this course provides students with detailed scientific knowledge and understanding of the main ecological components and relationships within Green Oaks' prairie, forest, and aquatic habitats. Students learn how to make systematic observations and conduct ecological studies, and they also examine their own place within the Green Oaks ecosystem. Students design, carry out and present individual or team research projects. Students who enroll in ENVS 383 must complete the academic requirements of ENVS 283 and also be responsible for a more advanced level of participation and a more substantial term project. Prerequisite: Acceptance into the Green Oaks Term. Prerequisite for 383: two courses in biology or permission of instructor. Stuart Allison or Jim Mountjoy



Environmental Studies 284/384: The Natural Imagination. Taught in the natural setting of the Green Oaks Field Station, this course explores works of the imagination conceived in dynamic relationship to nature by individuals and groups who live and work in communities shaped by site-specific environments. The creative process is engaged in through a variety of visual, literary and/or performing arts. The course examines the relationship between observation, memory, and imagination, the relationship between feeling, insight, expression, and experience, and the nature of imagination as an act of non-linear, analogical cognition. Students encounter "texts"; respond to and "analyze" artistic and natural phenomena (often according to the principles of bioformalism), and create original works in a medium of their choice, with a particular emphasis on creative writing (poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction), two-dimensional and three-dimensional art. Students who enroll in ENVS 384 must complete the

academic requirements of ENVS 284 and are responsible for a more advanced level of participation and a more substantial term project in the creative arts. Prerequisite: Acceptance into the Green Oaks Term. Prerequisite for 384: relevant course work in the area of creative arts in which one plans to do a term project: e.g., creative writing; studio art; photography; music composition; dance; acting; directing; stage; set; costume; or lighting design. Tony Gant



Environmental Studies 285: Dynamics of Intentional Community (1/2 credit). Students in the Green Oaks Term will be involved in the enterprise of forming an effective learning community. Through readings, field trips and discussions examining the processes by which communities reconcile individuality, social harmony and collective goals, this course explores the challenges and practices entailed in the building and maintaining communities. Prerequisite: Acceptance into the Green Oaks Term program. Jon Wagner



Facilities and Living Arrangements

The Green Oaks research center has a fully equipped classroom, computers, a library of several hundred volumes, study space, double-occupancy dorm rooms, two bathrooms with showers, and full cooking, dining, laundry and other living accommodations. The building has central heat, telephone, and internet service, and students are able to send and receive email and postal mail. One or more college vehicles are kept on the premises for program use. For safety and health reasons, smoking is not permitted inside the buildings.



One of the program faculty serves as the program director. The Director and other program faculty take turns residing at Green Oaks in separate quarters near the research center. The director and other resident faculty members oversee daily program activities, monitor safety and student life issues, and share in the daily life of the group. All the program faculty are on site for several days each week, sharing meals, teaching classes and participating in various activities. One or two post-baccalaureate Program Assistants, typically alumni of the Program, also live on site to help with student life, daily needs and organizational tasks.

Program students and staff can receive mail addressed c/o the Green Oaks Field Station, 1797 Knox Highway 15, Victoria, IL 61485, and can access their campus email accounts as well. The telephone number for Schurr Hall is 309-879-2483, Director's office phone at Green Oaks 309-879-2127, Program Director Jon Wagner's cell phone 309-550-4887, and resident caretaker Joe Diveney's cell phone 309-335-2003.



Daily Life

The Green Oaks Term is a true “off-campus” program—that is, students in the program do not commute to Knox or Galesburg for outside diversions but live off campus in practically the same sense as a student in an overseas program. In fact, due to limited space at the facility, students are not permitted to keep their personal vehicles at Green Oaks. Green Oaks students do go to Galesburg from time to time for grocery shopping or other program business and may also get permission to leave for important personal business, but they will spend almost all their time at the Green Oaks facility, which will truly be their home for the duration of the program.

Although students in the program stay on the Green Oaks premises, they can invite friends to visit on the day when Green Oaks is open to the Knox community (Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays). Students and faculty also go on day trips or campouts to various destinations of historical, natural or cultural interest, including a six-day trip to southwestern Wisconsin.



Students in the Green Oaks Term are responsible for structuring and carrying out the tasks of daily living, as well as service projects as part of their stewardship of their Green Oaks home. Evening meetings are held to deal with issues of daily living, and students are encouraged to make decisions about their daily living through a dedicated and systematic process of dialogue and consensus-building,

Daily life at Green Oaks does not seek to replicate that of campus life, but instead is more attuned to close interpersonal cooperation, the rhythms of nature, and the demands of the learning community. Every student is also a teacher, and every occasion a “teaching moment.”

In this connection, it is useful to reflect critically on the role that such things as cell phones, text messaging, email, iPods, and stereos play in dominating everyday experience in mainstream American life. While these are not bad in themselves and can even play a positive social or personal role, the purpose of the Green Oaks experience is to focus on the more immediate and intimate experiences of nature, people and place. For example: cell phones at Green Oaks can be useful as a supplement to the facility’s single phone line, but it’s important that prolonged or frequent phone conversations should not overshadow the direct social involvement that is central to the Green Oaks ideal. Similarly, laptop computers are neither encouraged nor discouraged, but the spirit of the program clearly precludes spending a great deal of time surfing the web, emailing, and so forth. The blaring stereo or headphones, which—along with the drone of the TV set—have become the ubiquitous background of modern life, must be put aside if we wish to attend to the natural sounds of actual life going on around us. The commercialized, taken-for-granted stimuli of modern life are not bad in themselves, but you’ll have the rest of your lives to be immersed such stimuli if you choose, and only ten weeks to savor the Green Oaks experience.



While on the subject of daily life, it must be noted that the Knox College alcohol policy applies to the Green Oaks facility and the Green Oaks program. Possession or consumption of alcohol is generally prohibited at Green Oaks, except for the Schurr Hall residential area where the rules for other campus residential spaces apply. Anyone planning to participate in the Green Oaks Term should be familiar with the Knox College Alcohol Policy in its entirety (on the web at <http://www.knox.edu/x12716.xml>). The program staff respect the privacy and personal autonomy of Green Oaks students and have no desire to “police” their daily lives, but they

are also deeply committed to safeguarding the health and safety of the students as well as the academic quality and reputation of the Green Oaks program. Although inappropriate conduct in the program is relatively unlikely, any behavior that compromises the integrity of the program would surely become the concern of the whole Green Oaks Term community—both students and staff—and would be conscientiously addressed in community meetings. The teaching staff are, of course, ultimately accountable to the College for the responsible oversight of student life, safety, legal and disciplinary issues.



Recreation

Although the Green Oaks Term does involve some of the familiar “work” of school including classes, papers and assignments, much of the learning takes place through trips, walks in the woods, group activities, informal discussions, campfires, music sessions, guest performances, service projects, trips and other experiences that are rewarding in their own right. In addition to this, students have some free time to use as they wish, and Green Oaks presents a variety of opportunities—library browsing, shop projects, boating, fishing, bird



watching, hiking, jogging, and so on. During times between program activities, Green Oaks



students may host visits from their families or friends, even using the program’s camping gear for overnight campouts. Guests may occasionally be invited for dinner, provided the invitations are approved by the group beforehand and the guests are willing to participate in the needed kitchen chores. The last night of the program traditionally features a picnic and barn dance with live old-time music, to which members of the Knox community and their families are invited.

