Iowa State University  
MFA Program in Creative Writing and Environment  

Guidelines for Completion of English 560:  
Environmental Field Experience  

Description  
Each MFA student will be required to engage in an environmentally based internship or fieldwork experience during his or her program of study. This work should be somehow related to the content of the student’s thesis work. Ideally, the field experience would contribute, in some meaningful way, to the student’s general knowledge or understanding of his/her thesis project. Therefore, each student will have the freedom to propose and design his or her own field experience in consultation with the advisor/major professor and the field experience facilitator.

The facilitator will have a variety of fieldwork options on file, but the student will not be obligated to choose one of these. Instead, this will be an opportunity for each student to acquire real world, hands-on experience in an environment unavailable in the ISU classroom.

Examples of previous and proposed fieldwork projects include the following: working on an experimental farm; collecting and researching medicinal plants in Spain; collecting data for an international aid organization about farm workers in Zimbabwe; and working on a study about Mexican fisherman. The possibilities are limited solely by each student’s imagination.

Requirements  
1. Proposal: By mid-term of the semester before the fieldwork is to begin, each student must present a 250-word proposal for the project to the facilitator and thesis advisor for approval. The student must also provide documentation of partnership and/or affiliation with professional organization under whose auspices the internship/field experience will be conducted.

2. Process-Documentation: During the course of the internship/field experience, the student must remain in contact with either the facilitator or thesis advisor. Each student is required to document his/her fieldwork in more than one medium of his/her choosing—a journal, photos, video, blog, tape recordings, sketches, paintings, etc.

3. Creative Response: In addition to the above process-documentation, each student will write a polished creative piece (e.g., twenty-five pages of prose; ten fully revised poems) that grows out of and is informed by the student’s field experience.

4. Presentation: During the semester following his or her return to Iowa State University, each 560 student will give a short presentation about his or her experiences. Multi-media presentations are encouraged.
5. PORTFOLIO: At the end of the internship/field experience, an organized portfolio of all documentary and creative work produced during the fieldwork will be turned in and approved by the facilitator. This record of final presentation materials—creative piece, videos, photographs—will be kept and stored in the department library upon completion of English 560.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

1. Fieldwork projects must be completed under the auspices of a reputable organization engaging in field activity relevant to the student’s research needs. For example, a student may not simply request going out to study the mating habits of hummingbirds in rural Indiana. They would need to work in partnership with a national or international group active in that field.

2. Each fieldwork project should consist of 90 – 120 active hours. This would include 80 – 90 hours of work in the “field” and 30 to 40 hours of private work on documentation and creative projects. Included in the documentation would be evidence of each student’s work in the field.