**Course Syllabus**

**Title:** Winter Tracking Specialty  
**Credits:** 2  
**Instructor:** Michael Kessler

**Dates and time:** Winter Session course – Four consecutive days of tracking in UVM’s Jericho Research Forest from 9:00am to 5:00pm. Please see the Schedule of Courses for exact dates.  
**Location:** Forrest E. Orr Classroom Facility at UVM’s Jericho Research Forest, 127 Tarbox Road, Jericho, Vermont 05465

**Course Description:**

This course is unique and complimentary to the other WFB tracking courses. It affords students a rare opportunity to ‘walk with the animal’ (e.g., fisher and fox) over several consecutive days in order to enter its world, see through its eyes, experience a portion of its story of winter survival.

Elements of landscape ecology, energetics, and kinematics are introduced to aid students’ discovery and interpretation of wildlife tracks, gait patterns, and trail selection to foster a more intimate and personal connection with the animal. Students work in small teams as they explore the stories of predator and prey throughout the forest. Teams practice sharing their field observations through both logical-scientific and personal narrative (i.e. storytelling) forms of communication in order to synthesize and interpret the overall story of winter survival in the forest.

Advanced winter tracking techniques are also introduced including the analysis of snowflake and ice formation and deformation to more precisely age tracks in winter. Students reflect, discuss, and journal their experiences in order to learn about themselves in relation to the beauty and stillness of the winter landscape and its wildlife inhabitants.

Assessment of student’s competency is not based upon their level of tracking which takes much time to develop, but on their demonstrated understanding of how to apply the material and methods taught in the course.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To discover and relive the animal’s journey through the forest by employing deductive and inductive reasoning to find and follow its tracks.
2. To discover evidence of the fisher’s and fox’s movements in the tracks and trails of other animals in the forest.
3. To synthesize individual, small group and overall class observations into a holistic sense of the animals’ daily patterns and interactions in the forest and how they are impacted by disturbances to their environment.
4. To synthesize information from the natural, life, and physical sciences and the humanities into a holistic awareness and conceptualization of the forest ecosystem and relations among its inhabitants.
Learning Outcomes:

1. Ability to differentiate tracks, gait patterns, behaviors and temperaments of fisher and fox.
2. Ability to form a valid interpretation of the story of wildlife activity in the forest by sequencing, correlating, and corroborating physical track evidence gathered during class.
3. Ability to share field observations through both logical-scientific and personal narrative (i.e. storytelling) forms of communication.
4. Ability to age tracks in snow including reading tracks and trails covered by snow.

General Course Information

Course Policies:

Prior experience – There are no prerequisites for this course and it does not assume nor require that the student has any background, experience, or education in tracking. Students are simply asked to exhibit an open mind, positive attitude, passion for knowledge, and respect for other creatures.

Level of Instruction – This course focuses on the experience of journeying with an animal through its tracks for an extended period of time. Class size is limited to develop and challenge students of all skill levels and backgrounds where the level of instruction is varied to each person. Wide diversity often makes for the most dynamic of class experiences!

Field Work –
- Repeated excursions from the heated classroom will require hiking in the Jericho Research Forest in winter conditions.
- Under favorable conditions, 1-2 miles, or more, may be walked each day.
- Students are expected to dress accordingly and provide for their specific comfort and care, e.g. food, hydration etc.
- There is a 1-hour lunch break in the classroom, with short breaks in the morning and afternoon, as necessary.
- A final reflection assignment is due after the course end date.

Transportation – Students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the Jericho Research Forest. The blackboard discussion forum is used to facilitate ride sharing.

Instructor Communications – The UVM Blackboard online learning system is the vehicle for all course work. Email is the primary mode of instructor communication. Students are responsible for using the Blackboard system and also for receiving messages sent to their UVM email account and/or insuring that their UVM email account is setup to forward their messages accordingly.

Intellectual Property Rights: Recording of class (audio or video-picture-camera/phone, etc.) is PROHIBITED in ALL cases without explicit instructor approval.

Consistent with the University’s policy on intellectual property rights, teaching and curricular materials (including but not limited to classroom lectures, class notes, exams, handouts, and presentations) are the property of the instructor(s). Therefore, electronic recordings and/or transmissions of classes or class notes are prohibited without the express written permission of the instructor. Such permission is to be considered unique to the needs of an individual student (e.g. ADA compliance), and not a license for permanent retention or electronic dissemination to others.

*** Videos, screencasts, and other instructor-generated content provided on Blackboard

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is intended for use by registered students as a private study aid and is not to be shared or published.

**Attendance Expectations:**
Attendance is expected at all classes. Students should not register if they know ahead of time that they cannot attend at least 3 of the 4 scheduled classes. Opportunity to make-up a missed class may be afforded, but is dependent upon instructor’s availability, and if for more than 1 person then whatever works best for the majority of students.

Observance of religious holidays is followed per the University’s Policy as follows:

*Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Each semester students should submit in writing to their instructors by the end of the second full week of classes their documented religious holiday schedule for the semester. Faculty must permit students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance to make up this work.*

Because the course is scheduled differently than a regular 15-week semester course, please communicate known absence(s) to the instructor before the course begins.

**Contributions in Class:**
Everyone is expected to participate online, in the classroom, and in the field exercises and to be a respectful and engaged listener to their colleagues and instructor.

Think, write, reflect, share, and peer review with integrity and respect as part of an online community of learners abiding by commonly accepted ‘netiquette’ (for example, see [http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html](http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html)).

**Academic Honesty & Professionalism:**
Everyone is expected to understand and follow all University of Vermont policies and regulations.

**Required reading:**
All reading material is available in Blackboard.


- **Liebenberg, L.,** *The Origin of Science*, CyberTracker, Cape Town, South Africa, 2013. (pp. 184-191)

- **Low, C.** *HUMAN ORIGINS: Contributions from Social Anthropology*. Chapter 9 – HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY, SAN SHAMANIC HEALING AND THE ‘COGNITIVE REVOLUTION’. (p. 224-244)


- **Whitman, W.** *Kosmos*, The Poetry Foundation, Chicago, IL, [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org) (p. 1)
Electronic Submissions/Internet Use:
The UVM Blackboard online learning system is used for all course announcements, access to course materials, and submissions of work. However, timely submission in alternate formats is allowable if discussed and approved by instructor prior to day of first class.

Student Evaluation/Assessment

Grading:
[Note: Understanding and performing wildlife tracking represents a skill that requires active practice and participation, so attendance will be a key component to learning outcomes.]

The overall class grade is a summation of the following:

- 25% Pre-Class Work
- 25% Attendance and contribution
- 25% Field work
- 25% Final Reflection
- 100%

Format for Expected Work:
Blackboard online discussion posts and journal entries.

Grading Rubric:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>Not present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Not completed.</td>
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<td>Journal Reflections</td>
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Percentage Contribution of Each Assignment:
See “Grading” above. No other graded assignments.

Instructional Sequence (may be adjusted due to annual course scheduling):
The instructional sequence approximates the following and is adapted as necessary to most closely align with the daily activities, discoveries, and weather:

1. Greet and gather (indoor)
2. Individual contemplative time (outdoor)
3. Introduction of a tracking technique applicable to the morning’s conditions (indoor)
4. Field tracking in small teams (outdoor)
5. Sharing and compilation of each team’s observations (indoor)
6. Lunch
7. Introduction of a tracking technique applicable to the afternoon’s conditions (indoor)
8. Field tracking in small teams (outdoor)
9. Sharing and compilation of each team’s observations (indoor)
10. Gather and close