With the approaching bicentennial of Henry David Thoreau's birth, a great deal of exciting research activity and reassessment of his work is beginning to take place. Of particular interest to recent scholars are Henry's various insights on perception, education, knowledge, ecology, and ethics. In keeping with this exciting trend, this course will explore the relevance of Thoreau's “topics of composition” to these arenas, and it will do so in three, interrelated ways:

1) As **readers**, we’ll focus on the central themes (topics) of *desire*, *imagination*, and *memory* in Thoreau's most famous composition, *Walden*.

2) As **researchers**, we’ll investigate Thoreau’s approach to these themes in each location (topics) of his three-stage method of composition: the field notes, the journal, and the published texts.

3) As **writers**, we’ll remain true to these first two endeavors, by adhering to the following course itinerary, composition process, and semester goals:

   - The composition of student field notes concentrating on the themes of desire, imagination, and memory, grounded in an exploration of these phenomena in both *Walden* the book, and Walden the place.
   - The composition of an anthology of individual research essays, based on this initial fieldwork and writing, and focused on the relevance of these themes to present-day student concerns, such as sustainability, education, and the economy.
   - The composition of a student film documenting our entire research endeavor, our findings, and our ultimate recommendations. This film will be presented to the Honors College at the end of the year.

Throughout the semester, we shall be assisted in all that we do by Jeffrey S. Cramer, the curator of collections at the The Thoreau Institute in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Mr. Cramer has edited and annotated many of Thoreau’s works, including the award-winning edition of *Walden* which we shall be using. We’ll visit Jeff at the Thoreau Institute, discuss our ongoing work with him via Skype sessions, and welcome him to the university at the end of the semester. We shall also benefit greatly from the help and expertise of John Callahan of the UML Media Center. Mr. Callahan has offered to assist us at all stages of our final media project.

**Possible Subjects for Student Exploration (Among Others)**

- Desire - Imagination - Memory - Perception - Embodiment - Spirituality -
- Textual Analysis - Education - Composition Theory - Friendship - Communication -
- Practical Wisdom - Self Knowledge - Ecology - Metaphysics - Hermeneutics -
- Truth - Beauty - Goodness