

Liberal Education in the Woods Project Proposal

(Academic Years 24/25-28/29)

Note: This project proposal is shared for information purposes. Please direct inquiries about participation to centerforaestheticeducation.de

(draft-do not distribute)

Liberal Education in the Woods

Project Proposal

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Project description

Project Overview

The guiding vision of this project is to develop a **liberal arts curriculum** as the foundation for a **4–6 week international Summer University** centered on the concept of **nature**. Designed to span **2–3 years**, the project will incorporate a variety of formats, including:

- **Faculty and student exchanges**
- **Diverse pedagogical and research activities**
- **Various forms of knowledge exchange**

Current Project Advertisement

Liberal Education in the Woods

The concept of 'nature' is inescapable in discussions about the most pressing crises facing humanity—climate change, species extinction, and pollution. Yet, it remains so complex and contested that it often escapes close scrutiny, deepening disagreements rather than resolving them. Contemporary debates on these crises reveal a bewildering plurality of competing discourses about 'nature' and 'the natural,' as do the diverse forms of action and activism that respond to them. While there is broad consensus that we are living through multiple, interrelated environmental crises, there is far less agreement on their historical roots, what should be done about them, and what kind of future we should collectively strive for.

This project seeks to navigate and critically examine key cultural and political narratives of nature through a comparative lens. We focus on the discourses and activities that emerge at different intersections of party politics, activist movements, literature and art (including film), religion, science, and education. Given that education provides one of the most inclusive and expansive arenas for engaging with these issues, higher and liberal education hold a special place in our inquiry. While our exploration will extend into broader conceptions of nature, we will never forget to consider the relevance of such inquiry to how existing higher education curricula address climate change, extinction, and pollution. Our central aim is to contribute to the development of liberal education models that will help both present and future generations understand, engage with, and ultimately live better with—or in, or as—this thing we call 'nature.'

FORMATS

The project will be organized in different formats detailed below. The formats currently under consideration are:

Workshops (lecture and seminar series) Courses Conferences Events Summer University

Workshops (lecture and seminar series)

A key component of this project is a series of **invited lectures** by **leaders in liberal education** who have played a pivotal role in developing programs aligned with the project's pedagogical goals. Each lecturer will:

- Deliver a **talk** on their work
- Submit a **curricular proposal** (e.g., a recommended text or discussion topics)
- Have their proposal **tested in a seminar format** with participating students, followed by **conversations evaluating the pedagogical outcomes**

Each invited session will conclude with a **concrete curricular recommendation**, considered for integration into the **Summer University curriculum**.

We aim to **recruit a core group of students and faculty** to ensure continuity of discussion across sessions. However, all events will be **widely advertised, accessible online, and may be recorded for future distribution**.

Each session is **designed to span two days** and will be hosted by a **participating institution**. However, session length will remain flexible to allow expansion into a **mini-conference format** on a case-by-case basis.

The first session took place at **Leuphana University, Lüneburg** 11-12.12.2024. *(For the program, see the attachment.)*

Courses

One of the greatest challenges in implementing **ambitious general education** at the university level is that no single individual possesses the **breadth of expertise** required to cover a sufficiently wide range of subjects. A key strength of this project is its **collaborative approach**, enabling participating institutions and faculty to

develop **courses inspired by its work**, incorporating **guest lecturers and expert consultations**.

Students in these courses may also be selected based on **merit** to receive **scholarships** for attending events and potentially participating in the **Summer University**.

Additionally, **short-format courses**—such as **reading groups** on foundational texts like **Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*** or **Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden***—could serve the **needs of advanced students with developed specific interests**, enriching the project’s framework.

In addition to undergraduate and graduate-level courses, participants are encouraged to organize sessions for **lay audiences**. A portion of the project’s funding will be allocated to providing organizational support for these initiatives, which may include **community events** as well as **programs designed for children**.

Conference

At least two conferences are planned as part of the project, one on a theme TBA in relation to the general theme of the project. The other conference will be organized by the Center for Liberal Arts, Aesthetic Education, and the Environment gGmbH with the provisional title ‘**Nature and the Visual Arts in the Core Liberal Education Curriculum**.’

In keeping with the dialogical spirit of the project, the conferences will be organized in panels as conversations around pre-read, invited papers. Publication of the contributions is planned.

Summer University

The first installment of the **Summer University** is scheduled for the summer semester of the **2027/28 academic year**. The current plan envisions a **five-week curriculum**, with approximately **60 students** and **eight participating faculty members**. The program will be structured with **50% joint sessions** and **50% small seminar formats**, fostering both collaborative and in-depth learning experiences.

Events

A core aspect of the project’s vision is to address the **conceptual challenges** that arise from **practical engagement with nature and activism**, while also connecting these

efforts to **cultural interests**. Potential initiatives include **exhibitions, activism, blogging, an essay competition, and fieldwork**.

If funding allows, these activities could be organized through **grant applications by student groups** at participating institutions, fostering **hands-on involvement** and **interdisciplinary collaboration**.

Institutional Partnerships

The project is currently organized by the Center for Liberal Arts, Aesthetic Education and the Environment gGmbH www.centerforaestheticeducation.eu in cooperation with Leuphana University, Lüneburg.

Partner institutions can support the project in one or more of the following ways:

- **Funding** for participating faculty members' travel and teaching
- **Scholarships** for interested and eligible students to attend events
- **Hosting and/or promoting** project-related events
- **Offering courses** linked to the project's themes
- **Providing opportunities** for practical engagement
- **Collaborating on joint grant applications**

Timeline (draft proposal)

2024/25

- Preparatory workshops at Leuphana University, Lüneburg

2025/26

- Workshops (location TBA)
- Courses offered in the spring/summer semester
- Conference in summer 2026

2026/27

- Workshops (location TBA)
- Courses offered in the fall/winter semester
- Conference in summer 2027

2027/28

- Workshops (location TBA)
- Courses offered in the fall/winter semester
- ISU summer 2028

Fall 2029

Concluding Conference

Attachment I.



**LIBERAL
EDUCATION AND THE
ENVIRONMENT**

Leuphana University Lüneburg,

**11-12 DEC.
2024**

An event in the
framework
of the project

**LIBERAL
ARTS IN THE
WOODS**

Our aim in this project is to enter the thicket of nature narratives and scrutinize some of the most politically central notions of nature in a comparative mode. To do so, we focus on discourses and forms of activity and activism that define the overlapping areas of party politics, activist movements, popular art, religion, science and education. Because it is arguably education that serves as the broadest and most inclusive theatre of activity and conversation, 'higher' and 'liberal' education takes a special place in our investigation. Our central aim is to contribute to the development of forms of liberal education that will help us and the coming generations to live better with? or in? or as? this thing called 'nature'.

LEUPHANA
UNIVERSITÄT LÜNEBURG

**CENTER FOR LIBERAL ARTS,
AESTHETIC EDUCATION
AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Conference Program:

Wednesday, 11th December
Arrival until noon
From **12:00** registration, coffee and welcome at Leuphana College

14:00 welcome addresses by
Steffi Hobuß, Academic director of Liberal Education
Peter Hajnal, Center for Liberal Arts, Aesthetic Education, and the Environment, Berlin

14:30 – 16:00
Lecture and discussion
Thomas Nørgaard: Nature, Bildung & Philosophy

16:30 – 18:00
Seminar with students and colleagues
Peter Hajnal: introduction to the project from the point of view of the Center for Liberal Arts, Aesthetic Education, and the Environment
Steffi Hobuß: introduction to the project from the point of view of Leuphana College

Thursday, 12th December
9:00 – 10:30 Discussion panel
Human-nature relationships and Curriculum development in times of crisis I:
Gesche Keding, Leuphana College: Human-nature relationships in theoretical sociology
David Hayes, BARD College Berlin: The Beginning of 'Nature' in Homer's Odyssey.
Lena Eckert (doctoral candidate, Leuphana College): Field of research: Activism and Academia

Coffee break

11-12:30 Discussion panel
Human-nature relationships and Curriculum development in times of crisis II:
Peter Hajnal: Aesthetic Education, Nature and Popular Art
Veronica Bremer (Post Doc, Leuphana College): Field of research: Art History and Liberal Education
Laura Picht-Wiggering (Post Doc, Leuphana College): Field of research: Curriculum development – experiences from Leuphana Semester

12:30 -13:30 lunch break

13:30 – 15:00 Conclusion and further planning

