



# At Home in the World

## Ecopsychology program extends Naropa beyond Boulder

Naropa University's innovative Ecopsychology program attracts students from around the world. The low-residency MA program, a concentration within Transpersonal Psychology, was launched in 2004. An entire master's program in the subject is rare, if not unique to Naropa. Since its inception, Naropa's Ecopsychology program has attracted 74 students from around the world. It evolved from the Center for Ecopsychology's workshops and trainings offered through Extended Studies since 2000. The program's roots go back even further to a 1976 summer rock climbing workshop taught by John Davis, who is now the program's director.

"Ecopsychology promotes the views that humans are not separate from nature, disconnection from nature has negative consequences for humans and for the rest of nature, and connecting with nature is healing both for humans and for the rest of nature," Davis says.

The term 'ecopsychology,' combining ecology and psychology, gained popularity with the 1992 publication of Theodore Roszak's book, *The Voice of the Earth*, but its tenets are inherent in indigenous wisdom. Recent studies have shown that contact with nature, even in small doses such as a window in a hospital room, can facilitate healing.

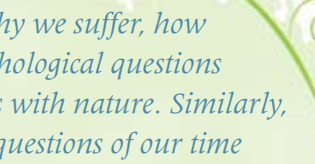
"Ecopsychology brings insights from our evolutionary heritage to modern psychology. While some traits honed in nature may not be integrated into modern society, they still affect us. For example, when asked to visualize a place of retreat and relaxation, very few of us visualize the mall or an office setting. Instead, we visualize places in nature, such as a seashore, park or forest glen. This may be because nature is our 'home' where we feel alive and balanced," says Jequita "J.P." McDaniel, a visiting instructor in the program. McDaniel recently received her doctorate degree in ecopsychology.

Students from Canada, Wales, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Ireland, France, Singapore, Japan and the United States have enrolled in the program, which allows them to conduct their studies from wherever they are. Some see ecopsychology as a doorway to the work they wish to do, while others incorporate ecopsychology practices into their established careers. Several of the program's graduates incorporate nature-based experiences into their work, including a Canadian naturopathic physician who provides patients with nature-based healing practices and a corporate trainer in Puerto Rico who exposes her clients to nature.

Davis says the program "extends Naropa beyond Boulder" through contemplative pedagogy, contemplative practice and transpersonal psychology. "While many ecopsychologists and courses speak of a spiritual or contemplative basis for

ecopsychology, they generally don't have the view or the practice to fully develop it," he says. "However, at Naropa, this is our main way of understanding ecopsychology."

One of the challenges of a program delivered primarily online is in developing community between students, faculty and staff. To address the challenge, community-building starts with nearly two weeks of face-to-face time in Boulder through shared experiences of meditation, nature-based experiences, rituals and practices for sharing and deep listening. A key component of the program is an eight-day wilderness retreat with a three-day solo that offers students a chance to step outside the usual demands and constrictions of everyday life to explore new ways of seeing, feeling and being. Davis says most students consider the retreat as a "high point" in the program. The online courses, too, are designed to develop authentic, rich communities.



*Who we are, how we grow, why we suffer, how we heal—these enduring psychological questions are bound to our relationships with nature. Similarly, the enormous environmental questions of our time are deeply rooted in our psyches and our views of self and nature. Ecological and psychological questions are interlaced. And at their deepest, self and nature emerge as expressions of the same whole, revealing these questions as essentially spiritual.*

—John Davis, Ecopsychology director

First-year Ecopsychology student Christopher Quiseng lives in Hawai'i and works as an archaeologist at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. On any given day he might find himself walking through volcanic landscapes of barren lava flows, in lush green rainforests or among subterranean lava tubes. Ecopsychology provides Quiseng a way to link traditional knowledge of human-nature relationships with modern psychological research and practice. He became interested in Naropa's graduate program because he felt Naropa's approach emphasizes students' growth and development as well as service to ecological communities.

"Studying ecopsychology through the combination of contemplative practice and academics takes education beyond just knowing about a subject, topic or field of study," says Quiseng. "The combination of contemplative practice and academic study helps me to develop more personal discipline, an ability to cope with the challenges of life and a creative discovery of what makes me most alive."—Brenda Gillen