

Chaminade University
EN 307, Nature Writing, Syllabus
Spring Day Semester, 2008
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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Course Description

In its essence, Nature Writing is a multi- and inter-disciplinary course about how we humans have learned to create names for, and describe the relationships among, the parts of the natural world. Its aim is to provide an arena within which students are able to develop and refine a concept of "the whole person" as one who is integrally linked to landscape, seascape and cityscape that together manifest as "the environment." Central to the course is the notion of an environmental ethic that is both personal and social and which, like nature itself, is continually evolving. The course's persistent prompting of writing assignments with questions like "What makes a place sacred?" or "What makes it ominous?" or "What (if anything) separates man from nature?" serve to keep students focused on the use of and refinement of language as a tool for self-examination, critical thinking and personal spiritual development.

Additionally, Nature Writing explores the various intellectual histories out of which today's environmental movement continues to critically examine itself and the broader social values from which new environmental policies are emerging. One important theme in this regard is the critical examination of the emergent emphasis on philosophical Pragmatism in the field of environmental ethics.

All participants in the course keep journals in which they record their observations of class sessions, field trips, readings and independent outings. Essays generally consist of edited material from journals and are submitted via the course website to the entire class.

Students who take the course as part of an Environmental Studies curriculum may earn course credit for the completion of simulated environmental proposals, assessments or research project reports.

In sum, the course provides opportunity for practice in a wide range of both professional/technical and non-professional environmental writing through which students can explore, develop and refine a variety of ways of writing about the environment.

Diversity

Chaminade's "Core Beliefs Statement" says, "Students, both traditional and non-traditional, bring a variety of talents, traditions, cultures and abilities. This diversity brings a special opportunity to the Chaminade community, which can then nurture and guide each student to the fullest realization of potential." Consequently, this course encompasses readings that reflect and examine the diversity of our literary, cultural and environmental heritage. Additionally, the course puts special attention on the problems faced by authors seeking to write from unique personal or cultural perspectives to readers who may not share the same perspectives or cultural background.

Summary of Course Objectives:

- * Provide students with a basic understanding of how language has been used to name the parts of the natural world
- * Develop and refine a personalized concept of the "whole person" as integrally linked to the environment
- * Provide an understanding of philosophical Pragmatism in relation to environmentalism
- * Provide a general knowledge of "topistics" as a way of understanding the human environment
- * Understand the origins of the environmental movement

- * Understand the relation of poetry to the development of environmental ideas
- * Understand the place of Emerson ("Nature") and Thoreau ("Walden" and "Walking") in the development of ideas about nature
- * Understand the role of religion in the formation of environmental values
- * Identify the key writers working today in the area of nature writing
- * To help students become independent learners

This course fulfills the following English Program learning objectives:

- * A proficiency in writing through the production of non-fiction essays.
- * The ability to define various literary critical approaches and apply them to given texts.
- * The ability to define, identify, and articulate major movements/periods in British and American literature.
- * The ability to critically analyze significant authors, texts, and issues in British and American literature.

This course also fulfills the following Environmental Studies Program learning outcomes:

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of :

- * The central importance of spirituality and worldviews in the "environmental movement"
- * Problem-solving skills from diverse disciplines for diverse populations
- * Relevant written and oral communication skills
- * Computer literacy
- * The major environmental issues and their potential solutions
- * The importance of the environment in our own health and well being
- * Career opportunities in the environment

Texts

This course requires the purchase of six texts:

Krakauer, John. *Into the Wild*
 London, Jack. *The Call of the Wild*
 Merwin, *The Rain in the Trees*
 Powell, John Wesley. *Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*
 Sutherland, Audrey. *Paddling My Own Canoe*
 Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*

These are available via the Chaminade University Bookstore, through a Chaminade Advisor, through Amazon.com, or through other bookstores.

The following required texts are available via this web site.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"
 Jordan Fisher-Smith, "Field Observations: An Interview with Wendell Berry"
 Aldo Leopold, excerpts from "The Land Ethic" and Sand County Almanac
 Barry Lopez, A Literature of Place
 Steven M. Meyer, "End of the Wild: The extinction crisis is over. We lost."
 John Muir, "The American Forests"
 Thoreau, "Walking"
 E. O. Wilson, "Arousing Biophilia: A Conversation with E. O. Wilson"
 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of Pointed Firs*
 Robert Frost, "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things"
 Gary Snyder, various poems
 Walt Whitman, "Song of the Redwood Tree"

Online References

Online searching and research help from Sullivan Library, Chaminade University
Online searching of University of Hawai'i Libraries
EBSCO Online Research
Literature Resource Center
Environment Hawaii
Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment

Requirements

Participation / Attendance (approximately 20%)
Journal (approximately 10%)
Essays (approximately 30%)
Quizzes, Q&A Exercises and Miscellaneous Assignments (approximately 20%)
Final Exam (approximately 20%)

Participation / Attendance

Since this is an online class, students are required to regularly participate by posting responses to questions presented in the course outline. Each student's first posting should be a direct response to the discussion question itself; it should be an original response based on the student's individual understanding of the question. Follow-up postings should consist of reactions to other students' postings; students are expected to post at least one follow-up response for each discussion question. Students should keep in mind that the best responses often culminate in the assertion of further topical questions.

Participation in online discussions and submission of other assignments will constitute attendance in this class. Consequently, failure to regularly participate in discussions or submit assignments in a timely way will constitute absence. Because the online environment provides considerable latitude in terms of when and where attendance takes place, there is no distinction between in this course between excused and unexcused absence. All students are expected to participate in a timely way. The instructor reserves the right to penalize students for late submission of assignments. If extensions of due dates are necessary, students are advised to email the instructor prior to due dates in order to request extensions.

Consistent with University policies, students who do not participate in the course for two consecutive weeks may be administratively dropped from the course.

Journal

The course also requires keeping a journal in a conventional bound paper notebook. Entries should be dated in order to reflect regular writing practice throughout the term. Entries should consist of responses to prompts in the course outline, as well as free-form responses to the required readings, notes on the writing process and short fictional sketches. The requirement for the journal is a minimum of 30 pages (4500 words minimum) for the term. Journals may be checked periodically during the term and will be checked at the final exam.

Essays

Two essays of 1500 - 2000 words each (a minimum total of 3500 words for both) are due during the term. The two essays are submitted as MSWord (or RTF) documents in the WebCT Assignments section. Document format should be in accord with the MLA guidelines in the Scott Foresman Handbook. In general, written work is evaluated with regard to organization, clarity, correctness, conciseness, and creativity. Essay Guidelines

Quizzes, Question & Answer Exercises and Miscellaneous Assignments

Online quizzes, Q&A exercises and other assignments are due throughout the term. They are intended to pace the student through the course's required readings and to provide a useful index of the student's comprehension of course content. Quizzes are administered via WebCT. Submission of quizzes is required; they are automatically graded and should be seen as preparation for the objective section of the final exam, as described below. Completion of "Questions and Answer Exercises" is also required and other miscellaneous assignments may from time to time be added to the course study guide.

Final Exam

The final exam consists of two sections. The first section is made up of short answer and/or multiple-choice questions similar to those on the quizzes. The second section consists of one or more essay questions. Review questions for the essay section are distributed during the week prior to the exam. Both sections of the exam are "closed book." While the first part of the exam is administered online via WebCT, the second part must be written in a face-to-face, proctored environment during final exam week. See the last section of the Course Outline for the specific time and place of the exam.

Self-assessment and Final Grade

The final grade for the course will be determined in part by the student's self-assessment and grade estimate, which will be submitted after taking the final exam.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

All material submitted in fulfillment of course requirements must be written by the registered student during the term.

Work written for other courses is unacceptable in this one. There may be limited exceptions; approval by the instructor early in the term is required.

While students are strongly encouraged to consult sources outside the required reading of the course, they are also responsible for clearly stating the nature of their sources. Statements of "common knowledge" are generally exempt from this scholarly requirement.

Plagiarism is defined as the presentation of someone else's ideas as your own. Plagiarism in this course will result in a grade of "0" for the assignment and possible failure for the course.

If the instructor suspects plagiarism, the burden of proof of the originality of the writing lies with the student. Evidence of originality would include copies of early drafts of the writing, research and interview notes, as well as the ability to discuss the themes of the writing with the instructor. Students should consider their instructor's vigilance in such matters a normal part of the academic process and should be prepared to present evidence of originality if requested.

Students are strongly advised to save files of early drafts of essays, along with outlines, research notes and other supporting documentation, as the instructor may at any time require that they be presented.

Feedback: Any comments?

Course Outline

Check the course outline frequently for updates. Future weeks of the course outline are subject to revision during the semester by your instructor. If you want to work through course materials ahead of schedule, be sure to check with your instructor first.

Week 1

Journal: Freewrite every other day for increasing periods of time, start with 3 minutes, then work your way up to 30 minutes. This should be "focussed freewriting," i.e. begin by describing something from nature, then let yourself digress to whatever topic comes to mind, then periodically return to your initial subject. Let your mind ramble a bit, but not too much. Read Thoreau's journal entries (see link below) for some inspiration.

- * Log in to WebCT for this course and read through the "Help" files there.

- * WebCT Discussion: Post an autobiographical paragraph to the "Introductions" topic. Due Friday, January 18, 2008

- * Keeping a course journal

- * Thoreau, Journal Selections

- * Walden "The Ponds"

- * Resource Link: http://members.tripod.com/~glad_heart/ponds1.html by Heather Dozier, who took this course during the Winter 1998 term, links passages of the journal selection to "The Ponds."

Throughout the course you will find buttons that link to "Q&A" exercises. You should regard these assignments as important tools for reviewing course readings and preparing for the final exam. For each Q&A exercise you will need to submit answers to 10 questions via the web form. Immediately after submitting your answers, you will be shown a page that provides your instructor's commentary on each question along with the answer you typed and a box in which you will need to give each question a score between 1 and 10. When you submit this page, the system sends an email copy to both you and your instructor. The scores you give do not count in your course grade, but they do provide a good indication of how you feel you are doing in the course.

Due Monday, January 21, 2008

Week 2

Journal: What would Whitman's redwood tree say about Emerson's "transparent eyeball"?

- * Thoreau, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"

- * Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

- * Whitman, "Song of the Redwood Tree"

- * John Muir, "The American Forests"

- o Also of interest: Julia "Butterfly" Hill

- * WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entries (minimum 200 words) to the "Journals 1" topic.

Saturday, January 26, 2008

Due Monday, January 28, 2008

Week 3

Journal: Copy into your journal what you feel are the most interesting quotations from your reading. Describe what you feel is the most important "natural" scene from your childhood.

- * WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entry to "Journals 2." Due Friday, February 01, 2008

- * Selections from Merwin, *The Rain in the Trees*

- * Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, through p. 50

- * WebCT Discussion: Go to the following link <Environment Hawaii> and familiarize yourself with the website. Then do a search of the site with the keyword "Merwin." Then return to Merwin's book *The Rain in the Trees* and pick one or more poems that you feel might suggest an explanation for Merwin's involvement with the Environment Hawai'i publication/website. Then write a commentary about your finding, being sure to quote at least three lines from one of the poems. Post to "Merwin's Ecological Poetry."

Due Monday, February 04, 2008

Week 4

Journal: Suppose Buck (from London's *The Call of the Wild*) were your dog at some point after the events of the story. How would you describe him in his new circumstances?

- * Jack London, *The Call of The Wild*

- * WebCT Quiz 1: Due Monday, February 11, 2008: Covers all reading assignments in Weeks 1, 2 and 3 of the course.

Due Monday, February 11, 2008

Week 5

Journal: Take a walk, preferably a long one, after reading Thoreau's essay "Walking." Take your journal to record your feelings relative to what you read. Thoreau says, "Simplicity! simplicity!" Given what you have read so far, how might the world be different if Thoreau's ideas were widely accepted?

- * Read Essay Guidelines -- Essay Due, Monday, February 18, 2008

- * Thoreau, "Walking"

Due Monday, February 18, 2008

Week 6

Journal: Go to a place where you can imagine creating a garden. Sketch the imagined garden. What plants would you use? Why did you choose this particular place? How do you feel about Thoreau's ideas related to vegetarianism? Have you ever been a vegetarian? Would you ever consider being one? Explain the significance of the term "food chain."

- * Essay 1 Due Monday, February 18, 2008 . Post to "Assignments" section of WebCT.

- * Thoreau, *Walden*

- o "Reading"

- o "Solitude"

- o "Higher Laws"

- * Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, through p. 100

- * WebCT Discussion: Post a prayer or blessing related to food. You may also post a comment about the practice of "saying" "Grace" before meals. Post to "Grace." Due Monday, February 18, 2008

Due Monday, February 25, 2008

Week 7

Journal: After reading excerpts from Powell's book, try looking at Mt. Leahi (Diamond Head) as if you were seeing it for the first time. Use some of Powell's descriptive strategies to the extent that you can identify them.

- * Powell, *The Colorado River and its Canyons* (selections)

- o "Preface" and "The Valley of the Colorado" (pp. iii - 38)

- o "From Green River City to Flaming Gorge" (pp. 117 - 131)

- o "The Canyon of Lodore" (pp. 151 - 165)

- o "From Echo Park to the Mouth of the Uinta River" (pp. 167 - 187)

- o "From the Little Colorado to the Foot of the Grand Canyon" (pp. 247 - 287)

- * Overview of Powell's work, includes biography and bibliography

- * Link to PBS website for the American Experience show "Lost in the Grand Canyon"

- * WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entry to "Journals 3." Due Friday, February 29, 2008

Week 8

Journal: Write about a place you would like to explore, a place you have never been to. Briefly explain your concept of solitude as it relates to Sutherland. Have you gone or would you go on a solo wilderness or backcountry trip?

- * Audrey Sutherland, Paddling My Own Canoe

- * Field Trip: While it is not required that you take the East Oahu field trip described at this link, you are welcome to use it as a model for one that you make up elsewhere. You may take the field trip individually or in groups; however, each individual must submit a report. Preliminary and followup research in a library or bookstore is suggested. Maps as well as fieldguides would be of particular use.

- * WebCT Discussion: Post a description of your field trip including an edited excerpt from your journal to "Field Trips." Due Monday, March 10, 2008. Include the following in your report:

- o Date, time and general location of your field trip.
- o List of research sources used (e.g. maps or fieldguides)
- o Description of primary mode of transportation.
- o Who else was with you or did you observe on your field trip?
- o List of specific places visited. Refer to map or fieldguide for placenames.
- o General description of field trip. Mention scenery / landscape, plants, geology, water, or physical challenges.
- o Description of a plant or animal observed, its general setting, its name, its practical uses. Refer to a fieldguide as necessary.
- o How did others' observations and reactions to particular places or events differ from your own?
- o What food did you take along on the field trip. How did you carry the food?
- o General commentary or freewrite
- o

Due Monday, March 10, 2008

Week 9

Journal: Thoreau, as well as many other nature writers, make much of the distinction between wilderness and civilization. Using your readings so far in this course, formulate your own statement about the relationship between wilderness and civilization, then read the poem "Front Lines," by Gary Snyder, and compare your own ideas to Snyder's.

- * WebCT Quiz 2: Due Friday, March 21, 2008: Covers all reading assignments in Weeks 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the course.

- * Thoreau, Walden

- o "The Bean Field"
- o "The Village"
- o "Brute Neighbors"
- o "The Pond in Winter"

- * Krakauer, Into the Wild, through p. 150

- * WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entry based on either Week 8 or 9 journal prompt to "Journals 4." Due Monday, March 17, 2008

Due Monday, March 17, 2008

Week 10

Journal: Describe a flower arrangement you have made. Frost says, "One had to be versed in country things / Not to believe the phoebes wept." What is it (some secret?) that Frost would have us know about the country? How does Frost's view of nature differ from Jewett's?

Robert Frost, "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things"

Jewett, The Country of Pointed Firs

WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entry based on either this week's journal prompt to "Versed in Country Ways." Due Monday, March 31, 2008.

Haiku: "Lightning Flashes"

WebCT Discussion Post your own original haiku to topic "Haiku." Due: Monday, March 31, 2008
Due Monday, March 31, 2008 Due Monday, March 31, 2008

Week 11 Spring Break -- Monday, March 24, 2008 to Friday, March 28, 2008

Week 12

Journal: After reading Snyder's poems below, pick an excerpt of at least 5 lines, copy the excerpt into your journal, then write a paraphrase of it. Follow that with a comment specific to Snyder's "Four Changes" manifesto. What in general would you suggest be changed?

- * About Gary Snyder
- * Snyder Essays (read "Four Changes" -- scroll about half-way down the page)
- * Snyder, Selected Poems
- * Krakauer, Into the Wild, to end
- * WebCT Quiz 3: Covers all reading assignments in Weeks 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the course. Due Friday, April 18, 2008
- * WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entry based on this week's journal prompt to "Changes." Due Monday, April 07, 2008

Week 13

Journal: Take a "field trip" to your favorite bookstore or library and describe the section related to this course, usually called "nature and ecology," then describe a couple of specific items you find of interest. Finally, visit the periodical section and name one or two periodicals in which some type of nature writing is present. Name the titles of a few periodicals.

- * Excerpts from the Works of Aldo Leopold
- * Rachel Carson
- * The Story of Silent Spring

Week 14

Journal: Pick a natural place you are familiar with, then write a description of a child visiting it for the first time.

- * WebCT Discussion : Take a "field trip" on the internet and report back about what you find. Include at least one url in your posting. Be sure to include the entire url, beginning with "http:// . . ." so that it can easily be copied as a link. Post to "Nature Writing Today." Due Monday, April 21, 2008
- * Jordan Fisher-Smith, "Field Observations: An Interview with Wendell Berry"
- * Barry Lopez, A Literature of Place
- * E. O. Wilson, "Arousing Biophilia: A Conversation with E. O. Wilson" Due Monday, April 21, 2008

Week 15

Journal: Write a short "manifesto" in which you make a series of strong, idealistic statements about what needs to be done to radically improve human society's relationship with the natural world.

- * Environmental Movement Timeline
- * Ecology Hall of Fame
- * WebCT Discussion: Post edited journal entry to "Journals 5." Due Monday, April 28, 2008

Week 16

- * Prepare final revisions of essays

* "End of the Wild: The extinction crisis is over. We lost." by Steven M. Meyer

* WebCT Discussion: Meyer's article seems like a serious dose of reality. But the question is whether or not we prefer reality or the array myths about nature and wilderness that form the very bedrock of human culture. At your option, post a journal entry or other end-of-term commentary about Meyer's ideas. Post to "End of the Wild." Since this is an optional posting, there is no due date.

* WebCT Quiz 4: Covers all reading assignments in Weeks 13, 14, 15, and 16 of the course. Due Friday, May 02, 2008

Post Final Essay to WebCT. Due Friday, May 02, 2008

Week 17 -- Final Exam Week

Final Exam, Section 1 (online): Go to WebCT Quiz Interface. Due Thursday, May 08, 2008

Final Exam, Section 2: Time and Place To be Announced

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