

**Chaminade University  
EN 307, Nature Writing  
Spring Day Semester, 2009**

**Syllabus**

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***Course website: <http://www.edwebs.com/cham/307/09spday/index.lasso>***

**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 three texts:

Merwin, The Rain in the Trees ([Link to Amazon.com](#))

Powell, John Wesley. Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons ([Link to Amazon.com](#))

Sutherland, Audrey. Paddling My Own Canoe ([Link to Amazon.com](#))

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

The following additional texts are available free via the course 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, Henry David. Walden

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"

Related websites:

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. 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.

### ***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. 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 "Question 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, 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.

## **Course Overview**

### **Week 1**

Readings: Thoreau, "Journal Selections," *Walden*, "The Ponds"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

### **Week 2**

Readings: Thoreau, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"; Emerson, "Nature"; Whitman, "Song of the Redwood Tree"; John Muir, "The American Forests"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

### **Week 3**

Readings: Selections from Merwin, *The Rain in the Trees*  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

### **Week 4**

Reading: London, *The Call of The Wild*  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal  
Quiz 1

### **Week 5**

Reading: Thoreau, "Walking"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

### **Week 6**

Thoreau, from *Walden*, "Reading," "Solitude," "Higher Laws"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal  
Essay 1 due

### **Week 7**

Reading: Powell, *The Colorado River and its Canyons* (selections)  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

### **Week 8**

Reading: Audrey Sutherland, *Paddling My Own Canoe*  
Field Trip  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

**Week 9**

Reading: from Thoreau, *Walden*, "The Bean Field," "The Village," "Brute Neighbors," "The Pond in Winter"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal  
Quiz 2

**Week 10**

Reading: Robert Frost, "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things"; Jewett, *The Country of Pointed Firs*  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

**Week 11 Spring Break -- Monday, March 23, 2009 to Friday, March 27, 2009**

**Week 12**

Reading: Gary Snyder, selected essays and poems, "Four Changes"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal  
Quiz 3

**Week 13**

Readings: selections from Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac* ("The Land Ethic"); selections from Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

**Week 14**

Reading: 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"  
Q&A Exercise  
Online Discussions  
Journal

**Week 15**

Reading: Environmental Movement Timeline; Ecology Hall of Fame

Q&A Exercise

Online Discussions

Journal

Quiz 4

**Week 16 (toc)**

Reading: Steven M. Meyer, "End of the Wild: The Extinction Crisis is Over. We lost."

Q&A Exercise

Online Discussions

Journal

Quiz 4

Essay 2