

## Nature Writing

EN 307, Spring Term, 2026

### Syllabus

**Instructor: James Kraus, PhD, Chaminade University**

**Course website:** <https://courses1.edwebs.com/course/view.php?id=147>

### Description

Nature Writing is an online 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 place 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. Forum postings and essays normally consist of edited material from journals and are submitted via the course website.

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.

### *Online Course*

This semester's course is being conducted as an asynchronous online course. As such, it requires internet access and email. Students are expected to engage in active online discussions and submit all assignments via the course website. Students are also expected to check email regularly.

- This online course uses a site called "Edwebs Moodle," rather than Canvas. Students interested in taking the course should email the instructor for an enrollment key after creating an account on this system.
- Course url: <https://courses1.edwebs.com/course/view.php?id=136> (Open new account, by clicking on "Create new account.")

- Technical Requirements: Must have successfully opened account on course web site. Email instructor for enrolment key if necessary. Students must be able to view “Films on Demand” via Chaminade Library Web site. To test this, go to the following to this url:  
<https://login.ezproxy.chaminade.edu/login?url=https://fod-infobase-com.ezproxy.chaminade.edu/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103281&xtid=210669>
  - If logging on to Films on Demand from off-campus, Chaminade ID and password are needed. The course web site is mobile-accessible; however, access via personal computer is required for full participation in the course.
- Technical Support: Contact instructor first with all technical problems.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Compose regular entries in a personal nature writing journal.
- Post responses to discussion forums that link journal entries to readings and course activities.
- Compose an essay, a short story or a poem that describes the origins of the environmental movement and the evolution of ideas about nature.
- Explain a personal understanding of the dynamic between faith and reason in the formation of environmental ideas.
- Work collaboratively with other class members, produce a presentation (multi-media or performance) that identifies two or more writers who have been influential in the formation of personal values related to living an environmentally responsible life.

*This course fulfills the following English Program learning objectives:*

- Produce non-fiction essays, short stories and poems.
- Define and apply various critical approaches to given texts.
- Analyze significant authors, texts, and issues from various global literary traditions.

*This course also fulfills the following Environmental Studies Program learning outcomes.*

- Explain the central importance of spirituality and worldviews in the “environmental movement.”
- Apply problem-solving skills from diverse disciplines for diverse populations.
- Write and speak with authority about environmental issues.
- Apply computer skills to presenting ideas about the environment.
- Analyze major environmental issues and their potential solutions.
- Explain the importance of the environment in our own health and well being.

### **Contact**

- Mail: Humanities Division, 3140 Waiālae Ave., Honolulu, HI 96816
- Email: [jkraus@chaminade.edu](mailto:jkraus@chaminade.edu)
- Office Hours: By appointment via telephone or Zoom. Preferred times: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10:30-11:30 am.
- Humanities Division Front Desk: ph. 808-735-4827

## Texts

The following texts are available via this web site.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"
- Robert Frost, "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things"
- Jordan Fisher-Smith, "Field Observations: An Interview with Wendell Berry"
- Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of Pointed Firs*
- 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"
- John Wesley Powell, *Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*
- Audrey Sutherland, *Padding my own Canoe*
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*
- Gary Snyder, various poems
- Walt Whitman, "Song of the Redwood Tree"
- E. O. Wilson, "Arousing Biophilia: A Conversation with E. O. Wilson"

## Online References

[Online searching and research help from Sullivan Library, Chaminade University](#)

[Online searching of University of Hawai'i Libraries](#)

[EBSCO Online Research](#)

[Environment Hawaii](#)

[Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment](#)

## Requirements (see details below)

Participation (approximately 30%)

Journal (approximately 10%)

Essays (approximately 30%)

Quizzes and Miscellaneous Assignments (approximately 10%)

Final Portfolio (approximately 20%)

## Participation / Attendance (approximately 30%)

Since this is an online class, students are required to regularly participate by posting responses to prompts included on the course website. 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 prompt. 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 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 (approximately 10%)***

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 draft responses to forum prompts in the course outline, as well as free-form responses to the required readings, field notes, notes on the writing process, short fictional sketches and poetry. 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 during final exam week. Graded journal reports are required at mid-term and during final exam week.

***Mid-term Essay (approximately 30%)***

Mid-term essay submissions should consist of edited excerpts from journals and forum postings. An introductory section is also required, along with MLA-formatted citations and works cited listing.

***Final Essay (approximately 30%)***

The Final Essay is an edited collection of writings from journals and forum postings since mid-term. Like the Mid-term Essay, this one also requires an introductory section along with MLA-formatted citations and works cited listing.

***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. Use of AI (ChatGPT and the like) should be discussed with instructor beforehand.

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.

**Important Dates**

Monday, January 12: First Day of Spring Term  
 Monday, January 19: No Class, Martin Luther King Day  
 Tuesday, February 14: Valentine's Day  
 Monday, February 16: No Class, Presidents' Day  
 Monday – Friday, March 16-20: Spring Break

Monday, Thursday, March 26: No Class, Prince Kuhio Day  
Friday, April 3: No Class, Good Friday  
Friday, May 1, Last Day of Class

### **Tentative Course Outline**

Week 1 -- The Nature Journal

- Thoreau's Journals
- Thoreau, "The Ponds," *Walden*

Week 2 -- Activism: from Thoreau to Greta Thurnberg

- Thoreau, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"
- Emerson, selection from "Nature"
- Whitman, "The Redwood Tree," "This Compost"

Week 3 -- Activism: from John Muir to Julia Butterfly Hill

- Muir, "The American Forests"
- Sierra Club's John Muir Exhibit
- Articles about Julia Butterfly Hill

Week 4 -- W. S. Merwin, Environmental Journalism

- Journal Report
- Merwin, *The Rain in the Trees*
- *Environment Hawai'i*

Week 5 -- Writing about "the Wild"

- Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*
- Quiz 1

Week 6 -- Walking

Thoreau, "Walking"

Week 7 -- The Food Chain

- Thoreau, "Reading," "Solitude," "Higher Laws"
- Project 1 due

Week 8 -- Exploration

- John Wesley Powell, *The Colorado River and its Canyons*

Week 9 -- Going it Alone

- Audrey Sutherland, *Paddling My Own Canoe*
- Field Trip Report Due

Week 10 -- Wilderness vs. Civilization

- Journal Report
- Thoreau, "The Bean Field," "The Village," "Brute Neighbors," "The Pond in Winter"
- Quiz 2

Week 11 -- Versed in Country Things

- Robert Frost, "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things"
- Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of Pointed Firs*
- Haiku

Week 12 – Gary Snyder, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson

- Snyder, Manifesto and other writings
- Leopold, Sand County Almanac
- Carson, Silent Spring
- Quiz 3

Week 12 -- The Environmental Movement

- Environmental Movement Timeline
- Ecology Hall of Fame
- Collaborative Project Due

Week 14 -- Extinction

- Steven M. Meyer, "End of the Wild: The Extinction Crisis is Over. We Lost."
- Quiz 4

Week 15 – Review and Final Portfolio

## Marianist and Native Hawaiian Values

Education is an integral value in both Marianist and Native Hawaiian culture. Both recognize the transformative effect of a well-rounded, value-centered education on society, particularly in seeking justice for the marginalized, the forgotten, and the oppressed. See below for a more expansive description of Marianist Core Beliefs that was adopted by the Chaminade Faculty some years ago.

### Credit Hour Policy Time Allocation

Note Taking / Discussions / Field Trip	5
Reading and Researching	40
Writing and Revising essays	40
Preparing Final Portfolio	5
Journal Writing	15
Preparing Forum Postings	15
Preparing Collaborative Group Project / Presentation	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>

### Title IX and Nondiscrimination Statement

Chaminade University of Honolulu is committed to providing a learning, working and living environment that promotes the dignity of all people, inclusivity and mutual respect and is free of all forms of sex discrimination and gender-based violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. As a member of the University faculty, I am required to immediately report any incident of sex discrimination or gender-based violence to the campus Title IX Coordinator.

### Nondiscrimination Policy & Notice of Nondiscrimination

Chaminade University of Honolulu does not discriminate on the basis of sex and prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity that it operates, as required by Title IX and its regulations, including in admission and employment. Inquiries about Title IX may be referred to the University's Title IX Coordinator, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, or both and contact information may be found at the [Chaminade University Title IX Office Contact Information and Confidential Resources website](#). On-campus Confidential Resources may also be found here at [CAMPUS CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCES](#).

The University's Nondiscrimination Policy and Grievance Procedures can be located on the University webpage at: <https://chaminade.edu/compliance/title-ix-nondiscrimination-policies-procedures/>.

To report information about conduct that may constitute sex discrimination or make a complaint of sex discrimination under Title IX, please refer to the [Campus Incident Report form](#). Chaminade University of Honolulu prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity that it operates. The NOTICE of NONDISCRIMINATION can be found here: [Notice of Nondiscrimination](#).

### CUH Alert Emergency Notification

To get the latest emergency communication from Chaminade University, students' cell numbers will be connected to Chaminade's emergency notification text system. When you log in to the Chaminade portal, you will be asked to provide some emergency contact information. If you provide a cellphone number, you

will receive a text from our emergency notification system asking you to confirm your number. You must respond to that message to complete your registration and get emergency notifications on your phone.

### **Assessment of Student Work**

With the goal of continuing to improve the quality of educational services offered to students, Chaminade University conducts assessments of student achievement of course, program, and institutional learning outcomes. Student work is used anonymously as the basis of these assessments, and the work you do in this course may be used in these assessment efforts.

### **Student with Disabilities Statement**

Chaminade University of Honolulu offers accommodations for all actively enrolled students with disabilities in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act (2008).

Students are responsible for contacting Kokua Ike: Center for Student Learning to schedule an appointment. Verification of their disability will be requested through appropriate documentation and once received it will take up to approximately 2–3 weeks to review them. Appropriate paperwork will be completed by the student before notification will be sent out to their instructors. Accommodation paperwork will not be automatically sent out to instructors each semester, as the student is responsible to notify Kokua Ike via email at [ada@chaminade.edu](mailto:ada@chaminade.edu) each semester if changes or notifications are needed.

### **Kōkua ‘Ike: Tutoring & Learning Services**

Chaminade is proud to offer free, one-on-one tutoring and writing assistance to all students. Tutoring and writing help is available on campus at Kōkua ‘Ike: Center for Student Learning in a variety of subjects (including, but are not limited to biology, chemistry, math, nursing, English, etc.) from trained Peer and Professional Tutors. Please check [Kōkua ‘Ike’s](#) website for the latest times, list of drop-in hours, and information on scheduling an appointment. Free online tutoring is also available via TutorMe. Tutor Me can be accessed 24/7 from your Canvas account. Simply click on Account > TutorMe. For more information, please contact Kōkua ‘Ike at [tutoring@chaminade.edu](mailto:tutoring@chaminade.edu) or 808-739-8305.