

ENGL 1365 Literature and the Environment

Instructor

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Course Description

This course explores how the nonhuman world is depicted in literature and other media, emphasizing the value of sustained attentiveness to environmental phenomena and their representation. Special emphasis is placed upon the relation between literature and ecological activism; narrative as a tool for persuasion and technology for understanding a more-than-human world; stories of environmental justice and how they persuade; and possibilities for the environmental humanities as modes of civic engagement. Much of the course will focus on what we can learn from close observation of the natural and built environments that surround us, and what we can learn from the long history of literature that takes environmental engagement as its theme. We will be concerned throughout with how to speak effectively to an interested public about the issues upon which the environmental humanities are centered: this is a course about analysis, cogent writing, and persuasive presentation. We meet twice a week in a discussion based, active-learning format.

Prerequisites

All are welcome. There are no prerequisites other than an interest in the topic.

Required Texts

Author	Title
Rachel Carson	<i>Silent Spring</i>
William Shakespeare	<i>The Tempest</i>
Chrétien de Troyes	<i>Arthurian Romances</i>
Neil Gaiman	<i>American Gods</i>
Trans. Borroff	<i>Poems of the Gawain Poet</i>
Octavia Butler	<i>Parable of the Sower</i>
Margaret Atwood	<i>Oryx and Crake</i>
Jesmyn Ward	<i>Salvage the Bones</i>
Cohen and Duckert, eds.	<i>Veer Ecology</i>

Learning Outcomes

As a result of completing this course, students will be able to:

- identify and describe key critical concepts in the environmental humanities, and translate these concepts across genres, periods, and scales
- apply techniques of critical reading and sustained attentiveness across a diverse body of literature and media as well as in the field

Learning Outcomes related to CRITICAL THINKING

- analyze scholarly literature through the production of annotated bibliography
- evaluate the relation between literary production and environmental action in specific forms
- formulate an original argument through careful research and the process of revision

Learning Outcomes related to ORAL COMMUNICATION

- identify a significant topic for environmental humanities study
- design presentations that summarize your research and communicates your knowledge to your fellow classmates in a compelling manner
- deliver presentations with confidence and clarity

Average minimum amount of independent, out-of-class learning expected per week:

Students are expected to commit to spending a minimum of 100 minutes out-of-class conducting work for every 50 minutes of direct class time instruction. This 3-credit course includes 2.5 hours of direct instruction and peer learning per week and therefore expects students to spend a minimum of 5 hours of independent learning per week.

Class Schedule [week-by-week]

Jan 16	Course Introduction
Jan 18	Rachel Carson, <i>Silent Spring</i>
Jan 23	Chrétien de Troyes, <i>The Knight with the Lion</i>
Jan 25	Chrétien de Troyes, <i>The Knight with the Lion</i>
Jan 30	Chrétien de Troyes, <i>The Story of the Grail</i>
Feb 1	Gawain Poet, <i>Cleanness</i>
Feb 6	Gawain Poet, <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
Feb 8	Outdoors Day (gathering materials for Write Like a Scribe Day)
Feb 13	Gawain Poet, <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
Feb 15	Write Like a Scribe Day

Feb 20 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
 Feb 22 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
 Feb 27 Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
 March 1 Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
 March 6 Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
 March 8 Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
 March 13, 15 Spring Break
 March 20 Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*
 March 22 Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*
 March 27 Conference consultations and research
 March 29 Conference consultations and research
 April 3 Tiny Ecology Conference
 April 5 Tiny Ecology Conference
 April 10 Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*
 April 12 Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*
 April 17 Veer essay cluster
 April 19 Prep Day for Essays
 April 24 Veer Essay Due
 April 26 Retrospect

Assignments and Grades

Assignment	Description	Total Points
Active learning during class	This class is structured around collaboration, group discussion and engaged learning. You are assessed on your ability to generate a body of knowledge in class by working closely with your peers.	20
Tiny Ecology oral reports	Short oral reports on your chosen "Tiny Ecology" to be	10 points total over the course of the semester

	delivered from time to time in class	
Close reading exercise	Detailed literary unpacking of an assigned passage for analysis of literary and environmental themes and creation of argument from that close reading	10
Veer word essay	Research and compose a lucid, critical history of a key environmental term essential to the study of literature and film. The essay should be modeled on the entries for <i>Veer Ecology</i> .	30
Annotated bibliography	A critical list of the sources you have examined as you composed your final "Tiny Ecology" presentation for the course	10
Tiny Ecology Conference	Presentation that brings together the work you have done on your Tiny Ecology in light of additional research you have undertaken on some environmental issue or problem that became evident during your observations. You will be graded on clarity, cogency, and ability to articulate difficult problems to a wide public.	20
	Total Possible Points	100

Your grade will be determined by totaling the points earned above: 94-100 points = A, 90-93 = A-, 87-89 = B+, etc.

CLOSE READING

For this assignment you will choose a rich passage and re-read it several times. Think about the significance of this passage to the book as a whole. Then think about the imagery, language, sounds, repetition, and content; underline key terms, phrases, and images. Making specific reference to the text, you will answer the questions: What details are included in the passage and why? What central images are being employed in the passage and what kind of

environmental do they convey? Exactly how are the images being employed? Does the passage emphasize a central theme or issue of the work? Does the passage contain images or metaphors that are interesting in relation to some of the text's themes? What is "nature" in Walden as conveyed by this passage? 2 pp.

VEER WORD ESSAY

You will compose a well researched experimental essay in the style of those collected in *Veer Ecology*. The ecocritical concept you choose should be one useful for illuminating the relationship between the study of literature, film and other media and environmental issues. This paper offers you the opportunity to work through some issue or question of your own choosing involving the relations between literature and the representation of environmental crisis by following a favorite verb. 8 pp.

TINY ECOLOGY

During the first week of class you will choose a place near your home for intense and sustained ecological attentiveness. During the course of the seminar you will make frequent visits to note changes within this space from late August into December. There are no special requirements for the ecosystem you choose: a built environment, a natural space, a humanly curated expanse (park, garden), an abandoned corner or lot, a creek or a fountain. Best is an area close to where you live or work that you have passed by or near for some time without paying much regard to what unfolds within its little biome. The area can be as small as a concrete planter by a Metro station or as large as a tree and its environs. Attention should be paid to human influence and neglect, nonhuman forces (weather, sunlight, microclimates, pollution, decay, gentrification), and the surfacings of particular histories (especially but limited to the species of animals and plants evident; you may have to learn the difference between kudzu and dandelion, starling and wren). Take ample notes that include questions your observations elicit and make sketches if possible. You will also be expected to create various narratives from these observations: poems, vignettes, short essays and journalism. Your notes and narratives will be used for ten weekly oral presentations, and then as the basis of your culminating presentation on Tiny Ecology Day.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A list of the sources you have consulted for thinking about the critical issue you are studying within your tiny ecology. Each entry should be accompanied by four or five sentences of evaluation. 3 pp

TINY ECOLOGY CONFERENCE

This class culminates in a student conference. Participants will be divided into panels based on shared themes. You will have five minutes to speak about the environmental issue that arose from your observation of your "Tiny Ecology" and important for understanding how literature or film may be used to raise awareness of or surface problems centered around your issue. You are expected to present in a compelling manner which makes full use of images as well as texts.

University Policy on Religious Holidays

1. Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.
2. Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.
3. Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

Support for Students Outside the Classroom [should be included verbatim]

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: gwired.gwu.edu/dss/

Mental Health Services 202-994-5300

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals.

counselingcenter.gwu.edu/

Academic Integrity Code

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For the remainder of the code, see:

studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity