

ENGLISH 6310.701
American Nature Writing

Geography. . . is finally knowledge that calls up something in the land we recognize and respond to. It gives us a sense of place and a sense of community. Both are indispensable to a state of well-being, an individual's and a country's. –Barry Lopez

When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset. There is no substitute for the direct perception of the concrete achievement of a thing in its actuality. We want concrete fact with a high light thrown upon what is relevant to its preciousness. –Alfred

North Whitehead

Spring 2022. Wednesday 5:40-8:20

The course is conducted in Teams with a Canvas shell. All discussions for this class will be conducted in Teams. The due dates and times for the activities will adhere to the Central Time Zone.

Instructor: Dr. Todd Richardson
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Office Hours: M 1:30-4:30, W 4:30-5:30, TH 2-3, and by appointment.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell
- *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau
- *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey
- *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler
- *Flight Behavior*, Barbara Kingsolver
- *So Far from God*, Ana Castillo
- *Practice of the Wild*, Gary Snyder
- *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Sarah Orne Jewett
- *Body Toxic: An Environmental Memoir*, Susanne Antonetta
- *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty and Fromm, eds.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the textual representations of "Nature" and "Wilderness" in the American literary tradition. Accordingly, it will explore shifting definitions of these terms by way of our nation's environmental, industrial, and spiritual history. A component of our discussion will be various writers' ethical concerns regarding humanity's responsibilities to preserve the environment. We will also make extensive use of literature from ecocriticism, a cross-disciplinary school of literary and environmental thought.

COURSE CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:

This course explores the development of American Nature Writing from European contact to the present. The course also makes extensive use of literature from ecocriticism, a cross-disciplinary school of literary and environmental thought.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Successfully completing the assignments will help you to meet the following objectives by the end of this course:

- Explain the place of nature and wilderness in American thought
 - Through weekly seminar discussions and discussion papers
- Write within the professional guidelines of ecocritical theory
 - Through weekly seminar discussions and discussion papers, midterm paper, seminar paper, and bibliography.
- Analyze gender and ethnicity's shaping of a community's engagement with the non-human environment
 - Through weekly seminar discussions and discussion papers
- Analyze the reasons for the emergence of the environmental justice movement
 - Through weekly seminar discussions and discussion papers
- Practice the conventions of literary scholarship, including the conference paper proposal and the scholarly essay.
 - Through weekly seminar discussions and discussion papers, midterm paper, seminar paper, and bibliography.
- Select and evaluate current scholarship in the field.
 - Through weekly seminar discussions and discussion papers, midterm paper, seminar paper, and bibliography.

COURSE THEMES:

True to an adult learning environment, this course will present many sensitive topics, including race, class, sexuality, gender, religion, profanity, politics, and violence. I encourage you not to shy away from these topics in class, but you must be aware that others have different backgrounds and hold different opinions on any given subject than you, so please think before you speak. At the same time, it is of utmost importance that we all be willing to be open and considerate of the thoughts and comments of others. Please respect each individual's right to have and share her/his ideas and opinions. Listening to others' perspectives should help create greater understanding of the diversity of experience in contemporary America. As chief facilitator, I will do my best to make our differences of background and opinion enhance the course.

ATTENDANCE:

Absences are costly in terms of missed learning opportunities. If you must miss a class, you should contact me so I can tell you how to make up missed work. Upon your third absence, you automatically fail the course. Do not come to class late or leave early. You will miss important announcements which I give at the beginning and end of each class. Active participation is expected at all times. This means you will treat our time together in Teams meetings the way you would a face-to-face class. Your camera will be turned on, you will actively pay attention to speakers, and you will not "multi-task" – that includes texting, emailing, walking around, and having conversations with others even with your microphone off. Be advised that recording this (and any) class at UTPB,

without the consent of the instructor, is a violation of university policy. Violation of this attendance policy could lead to your being removed from the class.

ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR:

All classroom behavior should enhance the instructor's ability to conduct the class and the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (*Code of Student Life*). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be muted, have video turned off, or removed from the Teams class. Inappropriate behavior may result in disciplinary action or referral to the University's Behavioral Intervention Team. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, discussion groups, etc.

PAPER POLICIES:

Use MLA formatting and citation methods. If you don't already have one, you should purchase a copy of *MLA Handbook*, 9th ed.. Paper grades will drop 1/3 letter grade for each day your paper is late.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses. Those who plagiarize will fail the class and will be referred to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Additional punishments could include expulsion from the university. For complete information on UTPB student conduct and discipline procedures consult the [University's Handbook:Scholastic Dishonesty](#).

COURSE INCOMPLETE/WITHDRAWAL/GRADE APPEAL:

Students are required to complete the course within the semester they are signed up. Incomplete grades for the course are given only in unusual circumstances. Students must contact me prior to the scheduled last class to request an incomplete. Find information and dates regarding drops and withdrawals consult the University Handbook: [Drops and Withdrawals](#) and [Appeal Process](#).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

The University of Texas Permian Basin in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act provides "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities. Only those students, who an Instructor has received an official Letter of Accommodation (LOA) sent by the Office of ADA for Students, will be provided ADA academic accommodations. Any student with a disability who is requesting an accommodation must provide me with official documentation from Mr. Paul Leverington, ADA Officer for Students, Mesa Building 4242/4901 East University, Odessa, TX 79762. Ph: 432-552-4696, email ada@utpb.edu. For the accessibility and privacy statements of external tools used within courses, go to [Accessibility and Privacy Statements](#).

DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY

Distance Education Courses and Student Identity Authentication Requirements and Policy

SACSOC defines a distance education course as one in which more than 50 percent of the planned instruction occurs when students and instructor(s) are not in the same

physical place. Distance education courses, therefore, include online, remote, and hybrid courses as defined above. Per SACSCOC and University policy, all distance education courses are required to follow our Distance Education Student Authentication Policy procedures (please see below), and these requirements and policies must be stated in the course syllabus. Further, any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity must be indicated on the courses schedule and course syllabus.

The Distance Education Student Authentication Policy does **not** apply to Hyflex Courses--those in which at least 50% of the planned instruction occurs when students and instructor(s) are in the same place--and Face-to-Face/In-Person Courses--those in which more than 85 percent of the planned instruction occurs when students and instructor(s) are in the same place. Student authentication and identity verification in these courses may be accomplished by in-person attendance monitoring as well as through in-class instructor proctored examinations and other assessments. These same "in-class" authentication procedures also may be employed in hybrid courses, but in the case of these defined distance education courses, they must be documented on the course syllabus as described below.

Distance Education Student Authentication Policy and Syllabus Requirements

UT Permian Basin's Distance Education Student Authentication Policy requires the University to employ processes (documented in each distance education syllabus) to verify that each student who registers for a distance education course is the same student who participates in, completes, and receives credit for the course.

The policy requires faculty members teaching distance education courses to employ at least **two** methods of verification to ensure student identities. The first method of verification is accomplished by the student logging into Canvas, our learning management system. To access all UTPB courses, students must login to Canvas uniqueness personal identifying username and secure password. This is the primary method of student identity verification. The Distance Education Student Authentication Policy requires at least one **additional** student identification method within the distance learning course that has been determined and approved by the faculty or academic program. The second method of authentication **must be explicitly stated in the syllabus**.

This course satisfies the second method of student authentication by submitting to the Authentication Assignment in Canvas. Approved up to date photo identifications are: passports, government issued identification, driver's licenses, military ID from DoD. Dual credit and early college high school students use school district identifications.

COMPUTER SKILLS, TECHNICAL AND SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS:

Students will need free access to a computer with a microphone and camera and must be familiar with the Microsoft Teams platform. You will also need to create word processing files, save files, submit files, and be familiar with how to use the UTPB Library Inter-library Loan service. Students can use cloud version of Word, PowerPoint and other Microsoft products through use of their UTPB Outlook 365 and UTPB email address. For more information refer to [UTPB Office 365 Page](#). For computer technical requirements, please see [Technical Requirements](#).

GRADES:

- Seminar paper, 40%. 15-20 pages, due at the end of the term. A 300-500 word prospectus and bibliography will be due in advance. You are expected to produce a well-researched and critically savvy contribution to the field of nature writing and/or ecocriticism. Your paper should be a rough draft of a conference presentation – keep in mind that travel money is available for graduate students.
- Midterm Ecocriticism Paper, 20%. 5-7 pages. You will explore a literary work using some aspect of ecocritical theory.
- Bibliography and presentation, 10%. Each student will be asked to compose and present one short annotated bibliography. Details to follow.
- Ten short (two page) discussion papers in response to weekly readings, 20%. Details to follow. You may substitute three of these papers with an environmental service project to promote sustainability on campus or in the community. You may pair up or form a group to complete this project. You must consult with me before you begin this project.
- Class Participation, 10%. Since our class is a seminar, energetic and collegial participation is assumed for each class period. I will distribute midterm evaluations of your participation.

GRADING SCALE

Grade Range	Letter Grade
90 and above	A
80 to 89	B
70 to 79	C
60 to 69	D
Less than 60	F

COMMUNICATION, GRADING, AND FEEDBACK:

As a general practice, I will return graded work to you with feedback within a week after you submit it to me. Should you need to reach me for any reason, or to submit drafts of your writings, feel free to email or phone me any time. If I am not able to answer, leave a message and I will get back to you within one working day. I will also return all emails within one working day.

TIME MANAGEMENT:

As you know, a graduate English class requires a good deal of work outside of scheduled class time. Please allow yourself plenty of time to complete required reading and writing before each class meeting.

PREPARATION FOR EMERGENCIES:

- **Computer Crash:** Not having a working computer or a crashed computer during the semester will NOT be considered as an acceptable reason for not completing

- course activities at a scheduled time. Please identify a second computer before the semester begins, that you can use when/if your personal computer crashes.
- **Complete Loss of Contact:** If you lose contact with course connectivity completely (i.e. you cannot contact me via Canvas or email), please call me and leave message regarding connectivity loss and contact information.
 - **Lost/Corrupt/Missing Files:** You must keep/save a copy of every project/assignment on an external drive, UTPB Outlook 365 OneDrive, or personal computer. In the event of any kind of failure (e.g. virus infection, computer crashes, loss of files in cyberspace, etc.) you may be required to resubmit the files.

COURSE EVALUATION:

During the last two weeks of class, there will be an announcement in Canvas, an email, and a button in your course navigation that will take you to a course evaluation. The evaluation is anonymous and your responses are confidential. I sincerely appreciate your feedback!

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES:

For more information on academic, technical, and support services for UTPB students, please see the [Online Student Services](#).

IMPORTANT ACADEMIC DATES:

UTPB [Academic Calendar](#)

If you have any questions about course policies or requirements, please feel free to ask me.

DISCLAIMER & RIGHTS

Information contained in this syllabus was to the best knowledge of the instructor considered correct and complete when distributed for use in the beginning of the semester. However, the instructor reserves the right, acting within the policies and procedures of UTPB to make changes in the course content or instructional techniques without notice or obligation. The students will be informed about the changes, if any.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

Many of the materials that are posted within UTPB courses are protected by copyright law. These materials are only for the use of students enrolled in the course and only for the purpose of the course. They may not be further retained or disseminated.

CLASS SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Many of our course readings are available through hyperlinks, below.

1/12 Introduction and course overview.

1/19 Cheryll Glotfelty "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis" xv-xxxvii, Lawrence Buell from *The Future of Environmental Criticism*

- vi-ix, 1-28, 97-108, 128-33. Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" 3-14, Wendell Berry "Gift of Good Land" (handout). (Recommended: Buell's "The World, the Text, and the Ecocritic" 29-61, "Glossary of Selected Terms" 134-49, Glen A. Love "Revaluing Nature" in *Ecocriticism Reader* 225-240.)
- 1/26 Michael Wigglesworth from "[God's Controversy with New England](#)" (II 1-80)
- Nathaniel Hawthorne "[Young Goodman Brown](#)."
- Roderick Frazier Nash "A Wilderness Condition" (handout).
- Annette Kolodny "Unearthing Herstory" 170-181. [Last day to drop a class without creating an academic record]
- 2/2 Ralph Waldo Emerson from [Nature](#), Introduction through chapter 3.
- Nash "The Romantic Wilderness" (handout). Henry David Thoreau *Walden* (selections).
- 2/9 *Walden* (cont.), Louise Westling "[Thoreau's Ambivalence toward Mother Nature](#)"
- Lawrence Buell "*Walden's Environmental Projects*" (handout), Buell "Space, Place, and Imagination from Local to Global" 62-96.
- 2/16 *Walden* cont., Sarah Orne Jewett "[A White Herron](#)"
- 2/23 Sarah Orne Jewett *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Buell "Complications of Gender" 108-112. Stacy Alaimo selections from *Undomesticated Space* (handout). (Recommended: Vera Norwood "Four Women Respond to the American Landscape" 323-350.)
- 3/2 Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (selections), Don Scheese "*Desert Solitaire: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden*" 303-322. **Short paper due**
- 3/9 Spring Break – no class
- 3/16 Gary Snyder *The Practice of the Wild* (selections).
- 3/23 Buell, "The Challenge of Environmental Justice Revisionism" 112-27. Stacy Alaimo "[Material Memoirs](#)"
- Susanne Antonetta *Body Toxic*. **Prospectus and bibliography due.** [3/25: Last day to drop a course.]
- 3/30 Castillo *So Far from God*,
Laura Pulido "[Deconstructing Environmental Racism](#)"

4/6 Barbara Kingsolver *Flight Behavior*, Dale Jamieson “The Nature of the Problem” (handout)

4/13 *Flight Behavior* concluded. bell hooks “[Touching the Earth](#)”

Evelyn White “[Black Women and the Wilderness](#)”

Octavia Butler *Parable of the Sowers*.

4/20 *Parable of the Sowers* concluded.

4/27 Wrap up.

Wednesday, May 4, by 5:30pm: Final paper due.

Sample Syllabus