

**English/Environmental Studies 243:
Introduction to Nature Writing
Fall 2013**

Instructor: Douglas Haynes, Associate Professor of English
Office: Radford 204
Office Phone: 920-424-0914
Email: haynesd@uwosh.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 8:30-9:30 & by appointment
English Department website: <http://www.uwosh.edu/english>

Required Texts:

American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau. Ed. Bill McKibben. The Library of America, 2008.

American Earth website: <http://americanearth.loa.org/>

Flight Behavior. Barbara Kingsolver. Harper Perrenial, 2012.

Course Description: This course is built on the premise that writing is a form of action. Throughout the history of the United States, writers have been important generators of cultural and political changes in relation to our natural and built environments. We will not only read and discuss some of these influential writers and changes to better understand them and their role in American life; we will also read them as writers aiming to learn how to better prompt our own desired changes through acts of writing. In short, we will seek to steal tricks of the writing trade to become more effective advocates in different genres of writing prominent in the American nature writing tradition: personal essays, arguments, speeches, laws, poems, songs, and stories.

Taking action through writing involves cultivating different skills appropriate to particular purposes, audiences, and issues. Together, purpose, audience, and issue create the rhetorical situation of any act of writing. Reading or writing a personal essay, a persuasive speech, an argument for a particular political policy, or a poem that moves people to mourn or protest requires that we understand why someone is writing and for whom. Therefore, understanding the rhetorical situation of both our readings and our acts of writing will be our starting point for discussions and assignments throughout this course.

In addition to understanding each course text's particular rhetorical situation, we will strive to situate it in the larger tradition of American nature writing. Though we could study texts from any historical period, from all corners of the globe, and in any number of languages in this course, we will limit our readings to texts from the United States written from the mid-19th century to the present. This national and temporal fence around our studies of nature writing will help us immerse ourselves in what recent writers have had to say about the human-nature relationship in places closest to home. As Bill McKibben, the editor of our primary course text, says, "an argument can be made that environmental writing is America's most distinctive contribution to the world's literature . . . only on this continent was Culture fully conscious while

Economy went about the business of knocking down nature.” While these claims are subject to criticism and clarification like any broad generalizations about literature and culture, McKibben’s point is that there’s something unique about how North Americans write about the ways they have interacted with their land. Part of our purpose will be to identify and articulate this uniqueness and position ourselves as writers in relation to its dominant strands of thought. Ultimately, this will allow us to reflect on whether American society is sustainable (in other words, whether it creates a socially-just, economically-viable, and ecologically-sound society in perpetuity) and imagine what changes might or might not need to be made to create a more sustainable society.

Course Goals: Through completion of this course, students will strive to:

- Develop analytical reading skills through the study and discussion of course texts and through writing about course texts.
- Improve writing skills in multiple genres through revision, studying model pieces of writing, and responding to both peer and instructor feedback on writing.
- Gain confidence, precision, and clarity of oral expression in contributing to class discussions, small-group work, and speeches.
- Increase understanding of writing as a form of social action and the role of literature in articulating the relationship between people and their places.
- Reflect in more informed, specific ways about the sustainability of human communities.

Course Format: Classes will combine lecture, multi-media presentations, and large-group and small-group discussions to ensure collaboration and opportunities for everyone to speak. Everyone must participate. Occasionally, the reading will be difficult. This means that your participation may often be in the form of questions to the class rather than observations or ideas. Questions about the meaning of specific passages will be especially helpful in guiding our close-reading in class, so please feel that all questions are valid. Not understanding a text is no excuse for not participating. Assume that if you don’t understand, then others don’t understand either. Asking specific questions does the whole class a service; your goal should be to ask questions every week.

As a humanities component of your liberal education at UW Oshkosh, this course also involves intensive writing and public speaking. You will be expected to devote significant time in and out of class to written responses to the course texts, as well as your own creative forms of nature writing. To help you with your writing and speaking, we will utilize online writing resources and in-class writing and speaking workshops. These tools—along with feedback on your writing and speaking from your instructor—will improve your writing and public speaking in this course and help prepare you for communicating in your life, college career, and future workplace.

Coursework:

- **Class Participation:** This will include vocal contributions to large-group and small-group discussions, written and vocal comments during peer review of writing, as well as bringing written questions and reading responses to class. An ‘A’ class participation grade cannot be earned by just attending all classes. You should aim to contribute vocally to every class session. If you don’t volunteer contributions, I will prompt you to. Exemplary class participation involves coming to class prepared to share a question about

the assigned reading every day. It also involves making connections between the readings and your life and other texts and contemporary culture; and prompting class discussions. Your class participation grade can also be enhanced by attending and writing about co-curricular events that will be announced occasionally as extra-credit opportunities. Your class participation grade will account for **10% of your final course grade.**

- **Group presentation/discussion-leading:** Each student will work with two other students to plan and present a ten minute informative, multi-media presentation that incorporates research about a course author and text and then prompts discussion with specific questions for the class. Your group will then lead the discussion of the day's reading. You will sign-up for your presentation time ahead of time to prepare. Further guidelines for presentations will be discussed in class. Your small-group presentation will account for **10% of your final course grade.**
- **Reading responses:** At the beginning of class periods, I will regularly ask you to write a short response to the reading due to be discussed that day. Each response will be structured by a question or theme for writing that I provide, and you will have a limited amount of time to write your response, without referring to the texts. Your reading responses will be evaluated based on their accuracy and specificity with a check (equivalent to a B), check-plus (equivalent to an A), or check-minus (equivalent to a C-). Together, these in-class responses will account for **15% of your final grade.**
- **Personal Essay:** This assignment asks you to tell a true story in the first-person about your own relationship to a specific place, aspect of the physical world, and/or environmental issue. This 4-5 page essay should tell a personal story with vivid sensory details and anecdotes of things that have happened to you. Your essay should also have a central question and a clear main idea. In addition, your personal essay should make connections with at least two assigned readings from the course to deepen your main idea. To make these connections, identify and quote or paraphrase specific passages from at least two texts that either resonate with your own experiences or contrast with them somehow. The first draft of this essay will be due on October 8th. The final draft of this essay will be due on October 22nd. Two substantively different drafts, showing substantial revision, must be turned-in on the final due date to receive full credit for this assignment. This essay will account for **25% of your final course grade.**
- **Persuasive Speech:** This four minute, two page written speech should make a specific argument about a current environmental issue for a particular audience. Your speech should include a clear, specific action you want to persuade your audience to take and use appeals of logic, ethos, and emotion to support your case. The first draft of this speech is due when you present it in class for feedback from the class. The final, written speech is due on November 14th. This speech will account for **15% of your final course grade.**
- **Poem, Song, or Story:** This assignment asks you to write a subjective, artistic representation of a significant place, aspect of the physical world, or current environmental issue. Poems and songs must be at least 250 words long. Songs should be set to music. Stories must be at least 500 words long. Your poem, song, or story will account for **15% of your final course grade.**
- **Final exam:** On the last day of class, you will be asked to write a 500 word essay about significant course themes and texts. Your essay should offer a clear main idea that makes connections between these themes and texts. This exam will account for **10% of your final course grade.**

Final Course Grade Scale:

A = 93%-100%
A- = 90%-92%
B+ = 88%-89%
B = 83%-87%
B- = 80%-82%
C+ = 78%-79%
C = 73%-78%
C- = 70%-72%
D+ = 68%-69%
D = 63%-68%

Manuscript Format: All written assignments, unless otherwise noted or completed in class, must be typed, double-spaced, and stapled. These assignments should be formatted in MLA style with your name, professor's name, course number, and date in the upper left hand corner. Each formal assignment should also have an original title centered on the first page, and every page should have a page number in the upper right corner. No cover pages, please. Use a standard font (Times New Roman, Book Antiqua, Palatino, Georgia) and size (12 pt.). One-inch margins. Proofread for spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Attendance, Late Work, & Writing Assignments: Since this is a discussion-based course, your attendance at every class meeting is crucial. If you miss class, you will inevitably miss valuable information and insights that will help you succeed in your coursework. In-class discussions and writing assignments cannot be made up. Your class participation grade will be reduced by one letter grade for every absence over two. Anyone with more than six absences will automatically fail the class. Please sign-in at the beginning of every class. If you arrive in class late, it is your responsibility to sign-in after class. If you come more than 10 minutes late, you will not be allowed to sign-in.

Assignments will not be accepted after their due date. If you know you are going to miss class on a day a written assignment is due, it is your responsibility to submit that assignment to me early or contact me and make other arrangements before the due date. Early assignments, like all assignments, will NOT be accepted via email. All written assignments should be handed-in typed, on paper, in MLA format.

Classroom Climate: In order to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning, we must treat each other respectfully. Hateful language will not be tolerated. Treating each other respectfully also includes leaving the distractions of everyday life outside of the classroom. Cell phones, I-pods, laptops and other electronic devices detract from everyone's learning experience, and if you use them in class, you will be asked to leave.

Plagiarism and Unauthorized Collaboration: Presenting other people's ideas and language as your own is not only dishonest and academically counterproductive; it is a serious offense punishable by the disciplinary codes of the university. Plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, will result in a failing grade for student writing.

Writing and Study Resources:

The Reading and Study Skills Center offers students at all stages of academic development an opportunity to acquire more sophisticated reading and study techniques. Students can schedule an individual consultation for topics such as note-taking, learning and memory enhancement, textbook reading strategies, test preparation, time management, and test-taking techniques. Learning specialists will work with students to assess individual strengths, target areas for improvement, and apply new strategies directly to their courses. Other forms of assistance include a walk-in reading skills lab, one-credit classes, workshops, and self-help resources. Students can schedule an appointment online, in person, by phone, or via e-mail. For more information, please visit their website <http://www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter>. The Reading/Study Center is located in the Nursing/Education building, room 201.

The Writing Center offers all UW Oshkosh students for free, one-to-one conferencing. All writers can benefit from talking with engaged, interested readers about their work. Trained peer consultants help writers of all ability levels understand an assignment, envision possibilities for a draft, and improve their writing process. They also can help writers learn to identify and correct their own proofreading errors. Students can make an appointment or stop by to see whether a consultant is available. <http://www.uwosh.edu/wcenter> • 920-424-1152 • wcenter@uwosh.edu • Student Success Center, Suite 102 (across from Reeve and Polk on Elmwood Avenue)

The Center for Academic Resources (CAR) provides free tutoring for students in most undergraduate courses. Check the Tutor List page on CAR's website (www.uwosh.edu/car) for a current list of available tutors. To schedule a tutoring session, simply email the Tutor, let him/her know what class you are seeking assistance in, and schedule a time to meet. If your course is not listed, click on a link to request a Tutor. Tutoring takes place in SSC 102. The Center for Academic Resources also provides support to students through Supplemental Instruction and the Peer Educator program. <http://www.uwosh.edu/car> • 920-424-2290 • car@uwosh.edu • Student Success Center, Suite 102 (across from Reeve and Polk on Elmwood Avenue)

Course Schedule: This list of assignments is subject to change. Please confirm all assignments in class or on D2L. Unless otherwise noted, all readings are in *American Earth* or *Flight Behavior*. All readings should be completed by the date they are listed. CAPS indicate an assignment due.

9/5: Introduction to the course

Unit 1: The Personal Essay

9/10: “Foreword” by Al Gore & “Introduction” by Bill McKibben

9/12: N. Scott Momaday, “A First American Views His Land”

9/17: H.D. Thoreau, excerpts from *Journal* & excerpts from *Walden*

9/19: H.D. Thoreau from *Huckleberries* & Rebecca Solnit, “The Thoreau Problem”

9/24: John Muir, from *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* & “The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form” (on D2L)

9/26: Aldo Leopold, from *A Sand County Almanac* (266-276) & Sigurd Olson, “Northern Lights”

10/1: Annie Dillard, “Fecundity”

10/3: Scott Russell Sanders, “After the Flood”

10/8: Evelyn White, “Black Women and the Wilderness” (on D2L). FIRST DRAFT OF PERSONAL ESSAY DUE.

10/10: Sandra Steingraber, from *Having Faith*.

10/15: Wendell Berry, “The Making of a Marginal Farm” & Janisse Ray, from *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*

10/17: Michael Pollan, from *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*

Unit 2: Argument, Oratory, & Law

10/22: John Muir, “Hetch Hetchy Valley” & Theodore Roosevelt, “Speech at Grand Canyon.” FINAL PERSONAL ESSAY DUE.

10/24: Howard Zahnriser, from *The Wilderness Act of 1964* & Edward Abbey, “Polemic”

10/29: Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (276-294). GROUP 1 SPEECHES

10/31: Paul Ehrlich, from *The Population Bomb*; Garrett Hardin, from *The Tragedy of the Commons*; & Stephanie Mills, “Mills College Valedictory Address.” GROUP 2 SPEECHES

11/5: Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring* & César Chávez, “Wrath of Grapes Boycott Speech.” GROUP 3 SPEECHES

11/7: Robert Bullard, from *Dumping in Dixie* & Carl Anthony & Renee Soule, “A Multicultural Approach to Ecopsychology.” GROUP 4 SPEECHES

11/12: Bill McKibben, from *The End of Nature* & Al Gore, “Speech at the Kyoto Climate Change Conference.” GROUP 5 SPEECHES

Unit 3: Poem, Story, Song

11/14: Chippewa Songs (on D2L) & Walt Whitman, “This Compost” & “Song of the Redwood Tree” FINAL SPEECH DUE (EXCEPT GROUP 5)

11/19: John Steinbeck, from *The Grapes of Wrath* & Woody Guthrie, “This Land is Your Land”

11/21: Gary Snyder, “Covers the Ground”; Joni Mitchell, “Big Yellow Taxi”; Marvin Gaye “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology).”

11/26: Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day”; W.S. Merwin, “Place” & Wendell Berry, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front.” FIRST DRAFT OF POEM, STORY, OR SONG DUE

THANKSGIVING

12/3: Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* chapters 1-6

12/5: Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* chapters 7-1. FINAL POEM, STORY, OR SONG DUE

12/10: Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* chapter 12-Author’s Note & Paul Hawken, from *Blessed Unrest*.

12/12: Final exam