

**Writing Based Inquiry Seminar, sections TBA**

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Fall 2013

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**A Pre-Apocalyptic Inventory of the Human Legacy:  
Focus on Intercultural Knowledge and Competence**

“I hear the human race is falling on its face  
And hasn't very far to go,  
But every whippoorwill is selling me a bill  
And telling me it just ain't so!”

Rodgers & Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 1949

Both observable and prophesized evidence (both recent and ancient) has suggested that the human race as we know it may be nearing the end of its short but successful run on the planet Earth. In this **WBIS/Quest I** course, students will take a pre-apocalyptic look at key moments, achievements and trends in the history of the human endeavor in such categories of concern as environment, society, commerce, religion, science, and culture. Attention will be paid not only to how the human race may have gotten itself to the edge of the abyss but also how it might pull itself back for many more decades of humanness. Jon Stewart's *Earth (The Book): A Visitor's Guide to the Human Race*, a humorous illustrated encyclopedia for grown-ups, will be our cornerstone text; non-fiction books *Eating Animals*, by Jonathan Safran Foer, and *Zeitoun*, by Dave Eggers, shall involve the class with cultural issues and environmental issues.

As a participant in the new Universities Studies Program, this course will investigate one of three Quest I Signature Questions. As the subtitle of our syllabus indicates, our class will in part be devoted to intercultural Knowledge and Competence.

Our Signature Question: *How do people understand and bridge cultural differences?*

**Intercultural knowledge and competence** is the understanding of one's own culture as well as cultures beyond one's own; the recognition of the cultural values and history, language, traditions, arts, and social institutions of a group of people; the ability to negotiate and bridge cultural differences in ways that allow for broader perspectives to emerge; and the skill to investigate a wide range of world views, beliefs, practices, and values.

## **Sustainability and Civic Engagement**

The broad "human inventory" nature of our course will also lead us to dabble in the Signature Questions of other new UW Oshkosh courses and their students, questions you yourself may officially encounter in other courses as you continue in the University Studies Program:

**How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?** Sustainability is about working towards a future in which all human beings can enjoy a decent quality of life— good health, economic security, membership in strong and inclusive communities...

**How do people understand and engage in community life?** Civic knowledge consists of an awareness and understanding of the various political and social processes that impact the nature and quality of life in local, state, national, or global communities...

## **Course Objectives**

- Strengthen one's knowledge of human history, achievement, and folly.
- Develop an understanding of one's place in the human community, how messed up that community can often be, and why there may be no turning things around – and/or how the mess can be addressed.
- Sharpen one's awareness of the rules and biases of one's own culture and an understanding of elements important to other cultures.
- Interpret one's own intercultural experiences empathetically from more than one worldview and act supportively in relation to the feelings of another cultural group.
- Ask complex questions and seek out answers regarding multiple cultural perspectives.
- Initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others while suspending value judgments in the course of these interactions.
- Practice synthesizing different sources using critical thinking to put together proposals for ways by which humankind can reverse self-destructive behaviors.
- Build confidence in the ability to write clearly and intelligently in a variety of situations, with awareness of purpose, audience, and context.
- Value the power of language in spite of – and perhaps because of – the inevitability of a finite existence.

## **Your Liberal Arts Education Begins Here...**

This course is part of the foundation of your liberal arts education - but don't let that word "liberal" scare you (or thrill you) unduly. "Liberal" here means "generous." As you move toward a major upon which you can build a professional career, your instructors are going to show you a generous lode of other stuff that you really ought to wade into if you want to be more engaged in the whole human being thing. We're not going to *tell* you what to think; we're going to *show* you how to come up with your own opinions - and how to perhaps feel free to reassess your views, as new stuff comes to light (particularly in terms of the three Signature Questions).

Why a Liberal Arts education now, just when your life was beginning to look like it was yours to run? Because there are far more facets to what your life can be than those you and the people you already know have agreed upon. Open that window and have a look. Step through the door and take an intellectual stroll or two. See what happens when you meet a strange idea and take the initiative to introduce yourself. Whether you become a human resource manager, an accountant, a teacher, or a nurse, you will one day be a college graduate with knowledge of and experience with a healthy sampling of that vast legacy of intellectual and creative human endeavor.

### **WikiQuests**

Academic communities define better learners as those who can understand complex, unfamiliar material quickly and respond to it in clear, well-reasoned writing; those who can apply their learning to diverse situations; those who can think analytically as well as creatively; and those who can act ethically and self-reflectively. This course serves these goals by asking you to be a critical thinker by seeking out and absorbing a variety of sources. In several WikiQuests, Wikipedia will be the preferred Internet doorway to topics, and other sources about those topics, about which you will begin knowing very little.

Jon Stewart's sophomoric and picture-laden joke book *Earth* looks at a whole lot of things that have occurred on our planet since even before the beginning of recorded history. Many tidbits in *Earth* are relevant to the three Signature Questions of the University Studies Program. Composing the book as if it were a user's guide for aliens who land on our planet just after the human race has vanished from it, Stewart and his panel of humor writers crack wise and just about every turn. Many of their jokes require that students have knowledge of what happened in the world prior to Wikipedia showing up and not quite getting it wrong. In a series of four WikiQuests, students will investigate a term key to the understanding of a joke, and then they will analyze why the joke is funny. With each subsequent WikiQuest, a new element to documented research Writing will be added, until the fourth WikiQuest (which will involve some aspect of the Signature Question), students will have learned secondary source utilization, graceful quotation integration (including a block quotation), and Modern Languages Association-style Works Cited page use. In the final WikiQuest, no indication of Wikipedia's existence is allowed (and students may have by then learned to skip the visit to this Swiss army knife of research options).

### **The Analytical Book Report**

In your Book Report we travel back to a simpler time for a project that will require you to do what your parents did: Visit the library! Admittedly misnamed with a grammar school cliché, this analytical paper will require you to select a book (whether fiction or non - but one you have not read before) that meets our Signature Question head on. In some way, that book must address how people understand and bridge cultural differences. Once you have read your book, you will research other pertinent sources to synthesize a point of view and recommendation regarding a specific facet of the intercultural concern.

### ***Eating Animals and Zeitoun***

All members of the class will read two books and write a response to be submitted on D2L. In *Zeitoun*, we will read about how God practiced our extinction by wreaking havoc on a major American city, and how a human governmental system response persecuted one of that city's residents who stayed behind to help his fellows. In *Eating Animals*, we will learn the meat growing industry, the goal of which is to feed an ever-growing human population with the flesh of animals that, in most cases, live short and miserable lives in the service of that goal. Bon appétit!

### **The Crisis Paper Project**

The final writing project, the "Crisis? What Crisis?" paper, will require you to investigate one of the many ways by which the human race as we know it is projected to be retired. After making clear the nature of the crisis, you will be required to indicate how the human race can get out of this particular fine mess, or set our minds at ease with a reasoned argument convincing us that "everything's fine." This project will involve two separate credit versions, the second of which will involve an expansion of ideas and research.

### **The ePortfolio**

The UW Oshkosh ePortfolio provides the opportunity for students to document and connect their learning throughout their college education. Students may reflect upon their learning related to that assignment, and include that reflection with the uploaded "learning artifact." For our course, you have a choice of two Signature Question-related projects to preserve: The final WikiQuest or the Analytical Book Report.

### **"Experience the Difference"**

Although interested parties other than myself will be planning, organizing and scheduling these out-of-class opportunities for you to experience other cultures, I have given them a name by which we can refer to all of them. I will attend as many of these events as possible if you promise to do the same. We will discuss them informally in class and more formally (and for measurable participation credit) on D2L.

## **Learning Resources**

UW Oshkosh provides its students with many tools to achieve. Here is a link to the campus resource page: <http://www.uwosh.edu/home/resources>. The Center for Academic Resources will help set you up with a tutor: [www.uwosh.edu/car](http://www.uwosh.edu/car). The Writing Center will help you learn to develop and polish your writing: <http://www.uwosh.edu/wcenter/>. The Reading Study Center will help you improve text-oriented study habits: <http://www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter>. In the Polk Library, Ted Mulvey - [mulveyt@uwosh.edu](mailto:mulveyt@uwosh.edu) - is an Information Literacy Librarian ready to help you navigate sources as you put together research papers (we will likely meet him as a class when we have our scheduled Library Research Skills Seminar.) Be smart: Use these tools!

## **Visit My Office, Meet My Toys**

Years of research and effort have gone into the toy collection that adorns the many books on the shelves in my office at Radford 310. Feel free to inspect them, but please do not touch them. You will all see my toys by the end of the eleventh week of the semester when you come in for a scheduled conference with a partner from class. If you do not want to wait until that conference week, just drop in during my scheduled office hours, or make an appointment. You need not have a question about the class. We might just talk about movies, or football, or Reality TV and Cable Dramas. I will also ask you (perhaps for the third time) where you are from.

## **MAP-Works**

"Making Achievement Possible" is what that MAP stands for. Early in the semester, you will receive an email from [map-works@uwosh.edu](mailto:map-works@uwosh.edu) inviting you to take a survey that is all about you. You will receive a report with suggestions on how to go out achieve your goals. Advisors, hall directors, peer mentors, and instructors will use your MAP-Works survey results to help you. Feel free to stop by my office with these results and we'll see what directions you might take.

## **Peer Mentor**

As a part of this course you will have access to a seasoned UW Oshkosh student to help guide you on your education path. The peer mentor will attend campus events with us, answer questions you have about UW Oshkosh, and help you with MAP-Works. Our mentor is Abraham Lincoln and you can reach him at [student@uwosh.edu](mailto:student@uwosh.edu).

## **Early Alert**

After the third week of class, you will receive a grade for your overall progress in this course and each of the courses you are taking in your first semester. This process is called "Early Alert." You will receive this information in an email during the 5<sup>th</sup> week of classes. Early Alert is designed to help you evaluate your study skills and your class attendance so that you know if you are on the right track. If you need to make some changes, there are resources available to support your academic success. These Early Alert grades are not permanent and will not appear on your transcript.

## The First Assignment

In addition to attendance, your Early Alert grade for our class will be based on an assignment in which you will be writing about a topic about which you are an expert: Yourself! After your instructor does the two things he does best (show a film clip and tell an anecdote from his own life), you will write about a similar situation from your career thus far here on the planet. The writing will happen first under some pressure in the classroom and then develop into a polished piece of writing submitted to a D2L dropbox - all within the semester's first two weeks!

## Workload Breakdown and Grading Percentages

### Intercultural Work

5	Response to <i>Zeitoun</i>
5	Response to <i>Eating Animals</i>
5	Intercultural WikiQuest (WikiQuest 4)
<u>15</u>	<u>The Book Report (Analysis of an Approved Intercultural Tome)</u>
<b>30</b>	

### Other Writing

15	First three WikiQuests
15	Daily Writing (includes Diagnostic essay in first two weeks)
5	Crisis Paper I
<u>20</u>	<u>Crisis Paper II</u>
<b>55</b>	

### Non-Writing

10	Participation
<u>5</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
<b>15</b>	

### Totals

30	Intercultural Work
55	Other Writing
<u>+ 15</u>	<u>Non-Writing</u>
<b>100</b>	

## Required Texts

- Eggers, Dave. *Zeitoun*. New York: Random House, 2009.
- Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Eating Animals*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009.
- Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008.
- Stewart, John. *Earth (The Book): A Visitor's Guide to the Human Race*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010.

## Course Policies

**Attendance:** Your presence in this class is expected; consequently, attendance constitutes 5% of your final grade. For every hour you miss, this percentage of your grade will decrease one full letter grade. After six hours worth of absences, you cannot receive a grade higher than a C for the entire course; nine hours worth of absences will result in your failing the course outright.

**Late Assignments:** Assignments are due at the beginning of class; late assignments will not be accepted without penalty. If not turned in at the time due, your assignment may be penalized one full letter grade (a B+ is lowered to a C+). For each additional day the assignment is late, its grade will be reduced by another letter. Quizzes and other in-class exercises cannot be made up. *No assignments will be accepted via e-mail attachments.* If (and only if) you know you will miss a class, work can be turned in ahead of time.

**E-Mail:** Although no assignments will be accepted via e-mail attachments, feel free to use e-mail to communicate with your instructor. Specific questions are encouraged, but please do *not* send drafts of papers with the expectation that your instructor will read it over the night before it is due and correct its flaws for you. NOTE: Some assignments may be required via D2L channels (i.e., dropboxes and discussions).

**Daily Writing:** Whether out-of-class (in which case work must be typed) or in class (use a pen!), you will be asked to respond to a variety of writing stimuli. Also in this category, low-impact quizzes and tests will be administered to help you check to see that you're getting the most out of the reading portion of the course. *Daily writing assignments, readings, and class activities do not always appear on the Course Plan!* Quizzes and in-class writing cannot be made up.

**Participation:** As in many college composition courses, much of what we learn will come from the sharing of ideas among ourselves. Participation in discussions is expected; the frequency and quality of your contributions – particularly in small group projects – will be considered in the calculation of your final grade.

Apart from participation in classroom discussion and activities, your D2L participation in online discussions and responses to "Experience the Difference" intercultural opportunities will be accounted for in the participation component.

**Documentation and Paper Format:** The four papers submitted for this class shall conform to Modern Language Association style. A Works Cited page will be required for each paper.

**Plagiarism:** Do not hand in somebody else's work as your own. When you write a documented report, cite the source of any material you have taken from your reading using Modern Language Association documentation style. In this course, you shall learn to protect yourself from unintentional plagiarism. Intentional plagiarism will have dire consequences on your course grade.

## Course Plan

### Week One                      September 4 - 6

Wednesday 4: Course Introduction  
Friday 6: Diagnostic Essay (in-class version)

### Week Two                      September 9 - 13

Monday 9: Stewart, Chapter 1, "Earth"  
Wednesday 11: Foer, pages 3-77  
Friday 13: Stewart, Chapter 2, "Life"  
Diagnostic Essay (D2L dropbox version)

### Week Three                      September 16 - 20

Monday 16: WikiQuest 1  
Wednesday 18: Foer, pages 78-115  
Friday 20: Stewart, Chapter 3, "Man"

### Week Four                      September 23 - 27

Monday 23: Stewart, Chapter 4, "The Life Cycle"  
Wednesday 25: Foer, pages 117-148  
Friday 27: WikiQuest 2  
Research Skills Seminar (meet at Polk Library lobby)

### Week Five                      September 30 - October 4

Monday 30: Chapter 5, "Society"  
Wednesday 2: Foer, pages 149-199  
Friday 4: Stewart, Chapter 6, "Commerce"

### Week Six                      October 7 - 11

Monday 7: Stewart, WikiQuest 3  
Wednesday 9: Foer, 201-267  
Friday 11: Stewart, Chapter 7, "Religion"

### Week Seven                      October 14 - 18

Monday 14: Stewart, Chapter 8, "Science"  
Wednesday 16: Book Report Proposal due  
Friday 18: In-class writing about Foer's *Eating Animals*

### Week Eight                      October 21 - 25

Monday 21: Stewart, Chapter 9, "Culture," "Afterword," and Appendices  
Wednesday 23: Eggers, pages 3-49  
Friday 25: WikiQuest 4 (with Intercultural focus)

## Course Plan, continued

### Week Nine                      October 28 – November 1

Monday 28: Eggers, pages 50-116  
Wednesday 30: Book Report Workshop  
Friday 1: Analytical Book Report due

### Week Ten                      November 4 - 8

Monday 4: Research Paper Workshop  
Wednesday 6: Eggers, pages 116-170  
Friday 8: “Crisis” Research Paper Proposal due

### Week Eleven                      November 11 - 15

C O N F E R E N C E S

### Week Twelve                      November 18 – 22

Monday 18: Eggers, pages 173-202  
Wednesday 20: Research Paper Workshop  
Friday 22: Eggers, pages 205-268

### Week Thirteen                      November 25 – 26

Monday 25: “Crisis? What Crisis?” Research Paper (version 1)  
T H A N K S G I V I N G   B R E A K

### Week Fourteen                      December 2 - 6

Monday 2: Eggers, pages 269-290  
Wednesday 4: Eggers, pages 293-325  
Friday 6: In-class writing about Egger's *Zeitoun*

### Week Fifteen                      December 9 - 13

Monday 9: *Zeitoun* response due in D2L dropbox  
Wednesday 11: Writing Workshop and Class Yard Sale  
Friday 13: “Crisis? What Crisis?” Research Paper (version 2)