

## **English 291: Environmental Writing**

### **Fall 2010. Memorial 301. 8:55-10:05**

**Mark Harris**

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**Office Hours: Wed., 10:15 to 11:15 and by appointment**

### **Course Description**

This workshop-based course focuses on North American writing about nature and the environment. Through writing, class discussion and other assignments, we will reflect on our changing relationship with the environment and consider what that engagement has meant for the natural world and its human inhabitants. Reading and commenting on other students' work is required.

The objectives of this course are:

- To introduce you to major nature/environmental writers in Western literature and to study how those authors use language to present the natural world and the environmental issues of their day.
- To consider the changing human relationship with the natural environment.
- To produce thoughtful and well-researched writing about the environment.
- To engage in regular workshops to discuss and critique the work of your peers.

### **Required Texts**

- 1) Bill McKibben, ed., *American Earth* (2008, Library of America).
- 2) Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man* (2009, Picador).
- 3) Handouts provided by me.

### **Attendance and Academic Honesty**

Your attendance and active participation are crucial, for both the success of this course and for your final grade. You may be excused from one class session for a legitimate academic, medical, or emergency reasons only; more than one absence, excused or unexcused, will result in an automatic lowering of your grade by one-third.

Any work you submit for this course must be your own. See the College's Academic Honesty policy in the Student Handbook on this issue.

If you need special accommodation to participate in this course and/or access the classroom, please contact Learning Support Services and/or Disability Support Services.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

You will write three major works for this course. They will account for the lion's share of your final grade. The papers should be roughly between 1,000 to 1,500 words in length (about 3.5 to 5 pages, double-spaced). Please include a word count on any piece of writing you produce for this course. Include all previous drafts, peer responses, and revisions when you submit your final

paper. Our class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays. Your three major papers are due on Fridays, by noon. Please slip your paper under my office door. I will accept only hardcopies – not digital submissions -- of your papers.

You will also write five responses to our readings, three editor's letters and one report on a major environmental writer. Due dates for these works are noted in the syllabus and must be handed in at the beginning of that day's class.

In assigning a grade to your work, I will consider the following: a) the strength of your argument and the effectiveness with which you communicate it, b) elements of style and grammar, and c) the extent to which you consider and incorporate useful comments from your workshop peers and from my edits to your early drafts. Work turned in late will automatically be given a lower grade.

The evaluative weight of the various assignments for this course, for grading purposes, will be as follows:

Essays 1-3	50%
Writer's responses to assigned reading (minimum 300 words)	25%
Written and oral presentation of a major writer	10%
Editor's letters (minimum 300 words)	10%
Participation in class discussion	5%

### **Blackboard**

I have set up a shell for this course on Blackboard, a virtual classroom where we can carry over discussions from class and begin new ones. I'll also post additional materials, announcements, comments, and the like here, so please check in to Blackboard at least once a day. I would also encourage you to post your own comments and start discussion threads yourself. You must enroll in Blackboard to participate ([blackboard.moravian.edu](http://blackboard.moravian.edu)). The password you'll need to enter is: Thoreau

### **Conferences and the Writing Center**

We will hold formally scheduled conferences during week 9. However, you are welcome -- and encouraged -- to schedule an individual conference or conferences with me at any time. I also strongly urge you to take advantage of the helpful feedback offered by the Writing Center tutors at any stage in your writing process. Writing Center hours will be posted during the second week of the semester.

## Schedule of Readings (subject to change)

Week 1 (Aug. 30, Sept. 1): *What is Environmental Writing? What is the "Environment"?*

- Mon. Introduction of ourselves and of the course  
Assignment of environmental writers  
Halma & Oplinger, Holmes selections distributed  
In-class writing
- Wed. Muir, from *My First Summer in the Sierra* (AE, 98-104)  
Jacobs, from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (AE, 359-364)  
Holmes handout, from *Suburban Safari*  
Halma & Oplinger handout, "The Geological History" of the Lehigh Valley

Week 2 (Sept. 6, Sept. 8): *Exploring and Understanding One's Own Environment*

- Mon. Labor Day. No class.
- Wed. Introduction to Henry David Thoreau  
Thoreau, selection, *Walden* (AM, 9-25)  
Beavan, *No Impact Man* (chapters 1-2: pp. 3-33)  
Ray, selection, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (AE, 898-906)  
Writer's response #1 due.

Week 3 (Sept. 13, Sept. 15): *Workshop Week: Environmental Autobiography*

- Mon. Essay #1 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy and send digital version of essay to me.
- Wed. Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts. Editor's letters due to writers and to me.

Week 4 (Sept. 20, Sept. 22, Sept. 24): *The Natural World and Our Relationship to It*

- Mon. Presentation on John Muir  
Muir, "A Wind-Storm in the Forests" (AE, 89-97)  
Murray, "The Wilderness" (AE, 113-116)  
Beston, "Orion Rises on the Dunes" (AE, 205-208)  
Douglas, from *The Everglades* (AE, 260-264)  
Nelson, from *Heart and Blood* (AE, 860-873)
- Wed: Presentation on R. Crumb  
Marsh, from, *Man and Nature* (AE, 71-80)  
Pinchot, "Prosperity" (AE, 172-180)  
Crumb images, "A Short History of America" (AE, 590-594)  
Beavan, *No Impact Man* (chapters 3 & 4: pp. 35-72)

**Wednesday Sept. 22. 7:00 p.m., Dana Lecture Hall**  
**Lecture: "Birds and the Balance of Nature"**

- Fri. Essay #1, environmental autobiography, due by noon, in my office.

Week 5 (Sept. 27, Sept. 29): *The Environment – and its Human Inhabitants -- in Crisis*

Mon Presentation on Lois Gibbs

Williams, from *Refuge* (AE, 739-759)

Gibbs, from *Love Canal* (AE, 609-621)

Steingraber, from *Having Faith* (AE, 929-938)

Wed Presentation on Bill McKibben

McKibben, from, *The End of Nature* (AE, 718-724)

Quammen, “Planet of Weeds” (AE, 874-897)

Beavan, *No Impact Man* (chapter 5, 73-105)

Writer’s response # 2 due.

Week 6 (Oct. 4, Oct. 6): *The Science of Nature*

Mon. Presentation on David Quammen

Horn, “Sea of Trash” (handout)

Donn, “AP: Drugs found in drinking water” (handout)

Wed. Presentation on Sandra Steingraber

Steingraber, from *Living Downstream* (handout)

“Living Downstream,” audio clip, *Living On Earth*, May 21, 2010

On-line trailer, *Living Downstream* ([www.livingdownstream.com](http://www.livingdownstream.com))

Beavan, *No Impact Man* (chapter 6, 107-140).

Writer’s response #3 due.

Week 7 (Oct 11, Oct. 13): *Committing to Place*

Mon. Columbus Day. No Class.

Wed. Presentation on Wendell Berry

Berry, “Manifesto” and “The Making of a Marginal Farm” (AE, 504-516),  
also “Stay Home” (poem) handout

Sanders, “After the Flood” (AE, 781-789)

Kingsolver, “Knowing Our Place” (AE, 939-947)

Writer’s response #4 due.

Week 8: (Oct. 18, Oct. 20) *Workshop Week: Science Writing*

Mon. Paper #2 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy and send digital version of essay to me.

**Tuesday, Oct. 19. 7:30, UBC Room**

**Movie: *Taking Root. The Vision of Wangari Maathai***

Wed. Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts. Editor's letters due to writers and to me

Week 9 (Oct. 25, Oct. 27) *Conferences*

Mon. – Wed. Individual conferences with me. Required for this conference: research plan (in writing), plus rough preliminary outline for Essay #3.

Week 10 (Nov. 1, Nov. 3, Nov. 5) *In Defense of Nature*

- Mon Presentation on Julia Hill Butterfly  
Hill, "The Storm" (AE, 907-918)  
Khatchadourian, "Neptune's Navy" (handout)
- Wed Video: *Butterfly*, dir: Doug Wolens
- Fri. Essay #2, science writing, due by noon, in my office.

Week 11 (Nov. 8, Nov. 10) *Living in Balance with the Environment*

- Mon. Presentation on Scott and Helen Nearing  
Durning, "The Dubious Rewards of Consumption" (AE, 770-780)  
Nearings, from *Living the Good Life* (AE, 318-322)

**Tuesday, Nov. 9. 7:30, UBC Room**

**Movie: *A Sea Change***

- Wed. Colapinto, "Message in a Bottle" (handout)  
Lydersen, "Green Living: Off the Grid Families Pioneer Sustainable  
Energy Lifestyles" (handout)  
Beavan, *No Impact Man* (chapter 7, 141-162)  
Writer's response #5 due.

Week 12 (Nov. 15, Nov. 17) *Workshop Week: An Ecological History of Place*

- Mon. Essay #3 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy and  
send digital version of essay to me.
- Wed. Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts  
Editor's letters due to writers and to me

Week 13 (Nov. 22, Nov. 24) *The Art of Nature*

- Mon: Presentation on Andy Goldsworthy  
Viewing of video, *Rivers and Tides*
- Wed: Thanksgiving break. No class.

Week 14 (Nov. 29, Dec. 1, Dec. 3) *A Final Resting Ground: Natural Burial*

- Mon: Presentation on Walt Whitman  
Whitman, "This Compost" (AE, 62)  
Harris, "The Natural Cemetery" (Handout)
- Wed: Beavan, *No Impact Man* (chapters 8 - Epilogue, 163-224)
- Fri. Essay #3, an ecology of place, due by noon, in my office.

Week 15 (Dec. 6, Dec. 8) Presentations and Wrapping Up

- Mon. Presentations of Place Essay
- Wed. Presentations of Place Essay  
Course evaluations