

**English 291: Environmental Writing**  
**Spring 2013. Memorial 301. Wed./Fri. 10:20-11:30**

**Mark Harris**

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**Office Hours: Wed., 11:45 to 12:45 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) Cheryl Strayed, *Wild* (2012, Knopf).
- 3) Handouts provided by instructor.

**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 reason only; more than one absence, excused or unexcused, will result in an automatic lowering of your grade.

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 majority 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. Papers must be handed in at the beginning of class on the date they are due. I will accept only hardcopies – not digital submissions -- of your papers.

In order to help ensure that you come to class ready to engage in a lively and informed discussion, I am asking that you prepare a writer’s response to the assigned texts. Responses should be at least 300 words in length. I will provide you with a prompt, either in an earlier class or via Blackboard. Due dates are noted in the syllabus.

Your response is due at the beginning of class. On the right hand corner of your response, please write your name, the date the assignment is due, the title of the work you’re writing about, and a word count.

You will also write three editor’s letters and make a PowerPoint presentation on a major environmental writer. Due dates for all writings are noted in the syllabus. All assignments 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%
Presentation on 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: Muir

### **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 (Jan. 16, Jan. 18): *What is Environmental Writing? What is the "Environment"?*

- Wed. Introduction of ourselves and of the course  
Assignment of environmental writers  
Holmes selection distributed

**Thursday, Jan. 17. 6:30 – 8:00 p.m., Payne Gallery**  
**Opening of exhibition, "Sustainability in Painting"**  
**Paintings by Constance Garrow Diamond**  
**Exhibition runs from Jan. 17 – Feb. 17**

- Fri. 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*  
DUE: Writer's response

Week 2 (Jan. 23, Jan. 25): *Exploring and Understanding One's Own Environment*

- Wed. Introduction to Henry David Thoreau  
Thoreau, selection, *Walden* (AM, 9-25)  
Ray, selection, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (AE, 898-906)  
Strayed, *Wild* (part I: pp. 9-44)  
DUE: Writer's response

- Fri. Bullard, "Dumping in Dixie" (AE, 725-736)  
DUE: Writer's response

**Dr. Julian Agyeman, Jan. 29. 7:00, Prosser Auditorium.**  
**Lecture: "Understanding the Challenges of Environmental Justice in an Unequal World."**

Week 3 (Jan. 30, Feb. 1): *Workshop Week: Environmental Autobiography*

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

Week 4 (Feb. 6, Feb. 8): *The Natural World and Our Relationship to It*

- Wed. 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)  
DUE: Writer's response

- Fri. 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)  
Strayed, *Wild* (part II: pp. 47-115)  
DUE: Writer's response  
DUE: Essay #1, environmental autobiography

Week 5 (Feb. 13, Feb. 15): *The Environment – and its Human Inhabitants -- in Crisis*

- Wed. Presentation on Lois Gibbs  
Williams, from *Refuge* (AE, 739-759)  
Gibbs, from *Love Canal* (AE, 609-621)  
Steingraber, from *Having Faith* (AE, 929-938)  
DUE: Writer's response

- Fri. Presentation on Bill McKibben  
McKibben, from *The End of Nature* (AE, 718-724)  
Quammen, "Planet of Weeds" (AE, 874-897)  
Strayed, *Wild* (part III: pp.119-174)  
DUE: Writer's response

Week 6 (Feb. 20, Feb. 22): *The Science & Tech of Nature*

- Wed. Presentation on David Quammen  
Glanz, "Power, Pollution and the Internet" (handout)  
Donn, "AP: Drugs found in drinking water" (handout)

- Fri. Presentation on Sandra Steingraber  
Steingraber, from *Living Downstream* (handout)  
Optional: *Living Downstream*.  
An 85-minute documentary film based on the book is available for viewing on Blackboard  
Strayed, *Wild* (part IV, pp. 177-234)  
DUE: Writer's response

Week 7 (Feb 27, Mar. 1): *Committing to Place*

- Wed. Presentation on Wendell Berry  
Berry, "Manifesto" and "The Making of a Marginal Farm" (AE, 504-516),  
also "Stay Home" (poem) handout  
DUE: Writer's response
- Fri. Sanders, "After the Flood" (AE, 781-789)  
Kingsolver, "Knowing Our Place" (AE, 939-947)  
DUE: Writer's response

*Spring Break (Mar. 2 - Mar. 10)*

Week 8: (Mar. 13, Mar. 15) *Workshop Week: Science Writing*

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

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

Week 9 (Mar. 20, Mar. 22) *Conferences*

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

Week 10 (Mar. 27, Mar. 29) *In Defense of Nature*

Wed. Presentation on Julia Hill Butterfly  
Hill, "The Storm" (AE, 907-918)  
Khatchadourian, "Neptune's Navy" (handout)  
DUE: Writer's response

Fri. Easter recess. No class.

Week 11 (Apr. 3, Apr. 5) *Living with and in Balance with the Environment*

Wed. Presentation on Scott and Helen Nearing  
Durning, "The Dubious Rewards of Consumption" (AE, 770-780)  
Nearings, from *Living the Good Life* (AE, 318-322)  
DUE Essay #2, science writing.  
DUE: Writer's response

Fri. Colapinto, "Message in a Bottle" (handout)  
Klinenberg, "Adaptation" (handout)  
Strayed, *Wild* (part V, pp. 237-311).  
DUE: Writer's response

Week 12 (Apr. 10, Apr. 12) *Workshop Week: An Ecological History of Place*

Wed. Essay #3 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy and send digital version of essay to me.

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

Week 13 (Apr. 17, Apr. 19) *The Art of Nature*

Wed: Presentation on Andy Goldsworthy  
Viewing of video, *Rivers and Tides*

Fri: Strayed, *Wild*. Class discussion of book.  
DUE: Writer's response

Week 14 (Apr. 24, Apr. 26) *A Final Resting Ground: Natural Burial*

Wed: Presentation on Walt Whitman  
Whitman, "This Compost" (AE, 62)  
Harris, "The Natural Cemetery" (Handout)

Fri: Presentation on Natural Burial  
Essay #3, an ecology of place due at beginning of class.

Week 15 (May 1, May 3) Presentations and Wrapping Up

Wed. Presentations of Place Essay

Fri. Presentations of Place Essay  
Course evaluations