

English/Environmental Studies 291: Environmental Writing
Spring 2015.
Memorial 301. Tues./Thurs. 10:20-11:30

Mark Harris

Office (Zinzendorf 302)

610-954-8375 (wk) 610-954-8413 (home)

E-mail: harrism@moravian.edu

Office Hours: Thurs., 11:45 to 12:45 and by appointment

Course Description

This workshop-based course considers North American texts about “nature” and the “environment,” both wild and built. Through writing, class discussion and other assignments, we will reflect on our changing relationship with our surroundings and consider what that engagement has meant for the planet and its human inhabitants. Reading and commenting on other students’ work is required.

The objectives of this course are:

- To introduce you to some of the major nature/environmental writers in the Western canon and to study how those authors use the written word to present the natural world and the environmental issues of their day.
- To consider our changing relationship with the natural and built environment.
- To produce thoughtful and well-composed 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.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability must contact Ms. Elaine Mara, assistant director of academic support services for academic and disability support, at the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Note to English Majors: In preparation for creating an English Major Portfolio in your senior capstone seminar, please save both digital and hard copies of your work for this class, including drafts with peer and instructor comments.

Assignments and Evaluation

You will write three major works for this course. They will account for the bulk of your final grade. The first two should be roughly between 1,000 to 1,500 words in length (about 3.5 to 5 pages, double-spaced), the third up to 2,000 words. To ensure that your papers receive the care and attention they deserve, I am asking that you visit the Writing Center before handing in your work. I will not read your paper before a Writing tutor has reviewed it with you (and, per Writing Center policy, has notified me of your visit). Please include a word count on any piece of writing you produce for this course. Include all previous drafts, peer responses, comments from your Writing Center tutor, and revisions when you submit your work. 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.

So that you come to class ready to engage in lively and informed discussion, you will need to prepare a writer's response to our assigned texts. Responses should be at least 300 words in length. I will provide you with a prompt, either in class or via Blackboard. Due dates are noted in the syllabus. Your response is due at the beginning of class.

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.

Much of your work for this course will be done outside of class. In addition to your ongoing reading and writing, you'll need to set aside time to view one full-length film/documentary, attend one outside event (such as a reading, lecture, performance, etc.), read all of your peers' essays online, and in week 14 participate in our class field trip to Green Meadow, a natural cemetery in nearby Fountain Hill. You will, of course, write a brief review for each. I have noted in the syllabus a few opportunities to meet this requirement, but I will alert you to others as I learn of them, both at Moravian and at venues throughout the Lehigh Valley. I will also distribute a list of environmental films for your review. Finally, you'll need to devote at least two hours sometime during the last quarter of the semester to visit and study a particular environment in preparation for your last essay on the ecological history of a place.

In assigning a grade to your written 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 your command of grammar, and c) the extent to which you consider and incorporate useful comments from your workshop peers, editor, and Writing tutor, as well as 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%
Editor's letters (minimum 300 words)	10%
Responses to outside events (films, lectures, field trip, etc.)	5%
Presentation on a major writer	5%
Active 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 materials, announcements, comments, and the like here, so please check in to Blackboard at least once a day. I encourage you to post your own comments and start discussion threads yourself. You must enroll in Blackboard to participate (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 10. However, you are welcome -- and encouraged -- to schedule an individual conference or conferences with me at any time. And don't forget to avail yourself of the help available at the Writing Center, whose tutors I am requiring you to consult for each of your major essays.

Schedule of Readings (see pages below)

This schedule includes references to movies and documentaries that relate to the day's readings. You are not required to view these, but remember that you are required to view and review ONE film this semester. For a description of those movies/documentaries, see the document, Environmental Films, under Content in Blackboard.

Schedule of Readings (subject to change)

Week 1 (Jan. 20, Jan. 22): *What is Environmental Writing? What is the "Environment"?*

- Tue. Introduction of ourselves and of the course
Assignment of environmental writers
Holmes selection distributed
- Thu. Muir, from *My First Summer in the Sierra* (AE, 98-104)
Holmes handout, from *Suburban Safari*
DUE: Writer's response #1

Week 2 (Jan. 27, Jan. 29): *Exploring and Understanding One's Own Environment*

- Tue. 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 #2
Optional documentary, *Into the Wild*
- Thu. Cone, "Dozens of Words for Snow. None for Pollution"
DUE: Writer's response #3
Optional documentary, *When The Levees Broke*

Week 3 (Feb. 3, Feb. 5): *Workshop Week: Environmental Autobiography*

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

Week 4 (Feb. 10, Feb. 12): *The Natural World and Our Relationship to It*

- Tue. Presentation on John Muir
Muir, "A Wind-Storm in the Forests" (AE, 89-97)
Nelson, from *Heart and Blood* (AE, 860-873)
DUE: Writer's response #4
Optional documentary, *The National Parks, Vol. 1*
- Thu. 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 #5
DUE: Essay #1, environmental autobiography
Optional documentary, *Crumb*

Week 5 (Feb. 17, Feb. 19): *The Environment – and its Human Inhabitants -- in Crisis*

- Tue. 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 #6

***DamNation* (2014, 93 minutes)**

Feb. 17, Tuesday. 7:00, Snyder Room (HUB)

This powerful documentary film odyssey across America explores the change in America's attitude from pride in big dams as engineering wonders to the growing awareness that the country's future is bound to the life and health of its rivers.

Thu. 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 #7

Optional viewing, *Chasing Ice*

Week 6 (Feb. 24, Feb. 26): *The Science & Tech of Nature*

Tue. Presentation on David Quammen

Glanz, "Power, Pollution and the Internet" (handout)

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

Thu. Presentation on Sandra Steingraber

Steingraber, from *Living Downstream* (handout)

Strayed, *Wild* (part IV, pp. 177-234)

DUE: Writer's response #8

Optional viewing, *Living Downstream*

Week 7 (Mar. 3, Mar. 5): *Committing to Place*

Tue. 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 #9

Optional viewing, *Wendell Berry & Gary Snyder*

Thu. Sanders, "After the Flood" (AE, 781-789)

Kingsolver, "Knowing Our Place" (AE, 939-947)

DUE: Writer's response #10

Spring Break (Mar. 9- Mar. 13)

Week 8: (Mar. 17, Mar. 19) *Workshop Week: Science Writing*

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

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

Week 9 (Mar. 24, Mar. 26) *In Defense of Nature*

- Tue. Presentation on Julia Butterfly Hill
Hill, "The Storm" (AE, 907-918)
Optional viewing, *Butterfly*
- Thu. Khatchadourian, "Neptune's Navy" (handout)
DUE: Writer's response #11

Week 10 (Mar. 31, Apr. 2) *Conferences*

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

Week 11 (Apr. 7, Apr. 9) *Living with and in Balance with the Environment*

- Tue. Presentation on Scott and Helen Nearing
Durning, "The Dubious Rewards of Consumption" (AE, 770-780)
Nearings, from *Living the Good Life* (AE, 318-322)
Hill, "Living with Less. A Lot Less" (handout)
DUE Essay #2, science writing
DUE: Writer's response #12
- Thu. Colapinto, "Message in a Bottle" (handout)
Klinenberg, "Adaptation" (handout)
Strayed, *Wild* (part V, pp. 237-311).
DUE: Writer's response #13

Week 12 (Apr. 14, Apr. 16) *Workshop Week: An Ecological History of Place*

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

Week 13 (Apr. 21, Apr. 23) *The Art of Nature*

- Tue. Presentation on Andy Goldsworthy
Schama, "The Stone Gardener" (handout)
Brunton, "Q&A with Andy Goldsworthy" (handout)
Viewing of video, *Rivers and Tides*
Optional viewing, *Waste Land*
- Thu. Strayed, *Wild*. Class discussion of book.
DUE: Writer's response #14
Optional viewing, *Wild*

Week 14 (Apr. 28, Apr. 30) *A Final Resting Ground: Natural Burial*

- Mon. Field trip to Green Meadow Natural Burial Ground (Fountain Hill)
- Tue. Presentation on Walt Whitman
Whitman, "This Compost" (AE, 62)
Harris, "The Natural Cemetery" (Handout)
- Thu. Presentation on Natural Burial

Essay #3, an ecological history of place, due at beginning of class.

Week 15 (May 8) *Presentations and Wrapping Up*

Fri. Presentations of Place Essay