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Office Hours: Mon. 2-3:30pm (or by appt.)

Time: Mon. & Wed. 10am; 11am
Location: Sever 101

Course website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/36855>

Syllabus

Humans, Nature, and the Environment

Expository Writing 20.222; 20.223 Spring 2018

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

Deforestation, overpopulation, pesticide use, toxic oceans, endangered species, global warming. How are we to make sense of the many environmental problems facing the Earth today? Although the sciences provide a factual account of environmental threats and ways of countering them, scientific facts seem not to be enough, since artists, writers, filmmakers, and even scientists find themselves turning again and again to their imaginations to respond to the environmental predicaments of industrial society. They may be doing what English Romantic poet Percy Shelley powerfully described 200 years ago as an essentially human and creative impulse: “to imagine that which we know.” How, then, have creative minds imagined – in essays, books, and movies – the very idea of nature, the place of humans in it, and their power to change the environment? In this course, we will consider both the possibilities and the problems that writers and filmmakers have imagined about human interactions with the natural world. We begin with the nineteenth century, when Romantic writers were urgently contemplating the meaning of nature in an age of increasing industrialization.

Unit #1 Essay Assignment (close analysis of a single text)

Speaking a Word for Nature: Thoreau’s “Walking”

In Unit #1, we will read “Walking,” one of Thoreau’s seminal essays – seminal because it encapsulates the author’s complex philosophy of nature. We will also go for a walk at Walden Pond, visiting the state park on a class field trip. “Walking” touches on many of the themes (such as the dynamic relationship between humans and nature) of his

longer memoir, *Walden*, and introduces many of the ideas (such as the value of “wildness”) so central to the environmental movement today. As a literary essay, “Walking” is a highly-stylized piece of prose with a complex structure, full of literary allusions, metaphors, striking images, philosophical ideas, and spiritual longings. In Essay #1, you will argue for an interpretation of “Walking,” a work that begs for interpretation – it’s a complex and challenging text that is open to being read in many different ways. Your *evidence* for your interpretation will derive from both your reading of the essay as a whole as well as your more focused close reading of particular paragraphs and sections. Your final essay should be about **4-5 pages**. What matters is that you find something that interests you in “Walking,” some aspect of the essay that allows you formulate a strong, coherent position you’re prepared to argue. The ideas you offer in Essay #1 should be your own, informed by your analysis and by questions we develop during discussion. No outside sources are required, and you should not consult any (especially the internet).

Unit #2 Essay Assignment (comparative analysis of two texts)

Arguments over the Environment: Carson’s *Silent Spring* & Lovelock’s *The Revenge of Gaia*

In Unit #2, you will read selections from two urgently argued books by writers who are both scientists and environmentalists. The first, *Silent Spring* (1962), had a huge impact when it was published. It helped establish the modern environmental movement and is now regarded as a classic of environmental literature. Carson’s skills as a nature writer are at times strikingly manifest and her connections to Thoreau are several. (Carson, for instance, used to keep a copy of Thoreau’s *Walden* by her bedside.) The second, *The Revenge of Gaia* (2006), sees Lovelock return to his Gaia hypothesis (named after a primal ancient Greek deity, a feminine personification of the Earth, which he first put forward in the seventies) with increasing urgency given the threatened state of the Earth. Essay #2 asks you to engage in a comparative analysis: to compare the two books and develop an argument about how they relate to each other. With this essay, which should be **7 pages** in length, you will continue the goals you had with Essay #1: to engage in close analysis of each text; develop and state a clear thesis with something at stake; and make an argument that you support with textual evidence. Added to those goals are counterargument, comparative analysis, and working with contextual sources.

Unit #3 Essay Assignment (analyzing a film in context/researching and using multiple sources)

Documenting the Human Animal

Having considered a literary essay in Unit #1 and two strongly argued books by scientists in Unit #2, we'll now move from the medium of print to that of film in Unit #3 where the *central* text is a documentary movie. At the same time, we'll broaden our arguments by including a vaster universe of sources: other scholars' writings about the films, theoretical essays about film, essays that offer cultural context or disciplinary perspective, film reviews, and interviews with the directors etc. One of the challenges of this essay is to work with multiple sources, creating a context within which to write about the film you choose. Another challenge – and also a great opportunity – is that you'll work more independently in this essay: choosing one of the two films (either *Grizzly Man* or *Blackfish*) settling on a topic and research question, finding sources on your own (then evaluating them, selecting them, integrating them into your own writing), setting up a scholarly "conversation" which you will enter in your own writing etc. You have the chance to take this essay in pretty much any direction that interests you (either within the broad themes of the course or within another context, allowing you to argue something of consequence about one of the films), shaped by your own intellectual inquiry. **Page length: about 10 pages.**

Some of our writing goals in this course will change unit by unit, as you take on the particular challenges of several important versions of the academic essay. Other goals will remain our focus throughout the whole of the course: developing your sense of what you do well and challenging yourself to grow as a writer; expanding your repertoire and practice of revision techniques; and increasing the complexity and originality of your analysis as well as the effectiveness and elegance of your prose. One of the most exciting things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops; you don't "arrive" at being a good writer, but rather you continually becomes one. With these goals in mind, we begin with three important premises:

- Good writing is a *recursive* process: you will develop and write preliminary response papers and essays, which we will discuss in conference and for which you will receive feedback from your fellow writers; you will then revise those essays, giving your analysis time to evolve and grow more complex.
- Your writing will improve most when you possess clear ideas about what *you* want to accomplish in each assignment: what aspects of the writer's craft matter to you, and how you want to grow and improve. This class asks you to be thoughtful and *self-reflective* about your writing process: to question and evaluate your own work in each assignment (in your Cover Letters with each essay) and in the course as a whole (in your end-of-semester Writer's Letter).
- While inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned – in other words, when you

have dedicated *sustained effort to the process* of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising.

II. HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Required Texts and Materials

→ Please note: the “texts” (including both books and movies) you need to purchase for the class are few in number, but you will be expected print out a great deal of pages for this class, so be sure that your printer cartridge or printing account is ready for the high volume. Moreover, as far as the books go, please purchase only the editions listed, so that we will all be on the same page during discussions in class.

- “Walking,” Henry David Thoreau (available as a handout in class, and as a PDF on the course website). The version of the essay we’re using is from *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, Norton Critical Edition, 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 2008. ISBN-10: 0393930904.
- *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson (available on Amazon). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. ISBN-10: 0618249060.
- *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*, James Lovelock (available on Amazon). New York: Basic Books, 2007. ISBN-10: 0465041698.
- *Grizzly Man*, directed by Werner Herzog (available on Amazon for digital download or on DVD; possibly available on Netflix).
- *Blackfish*, directed by Gabriella Cowperthwaite (available on Amazon for digital download or on DVD; possibly available on Netflix).
- *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*, available online at <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/>

If you don’t already have one, you need to own a reliable dictionary to use in this and other Harvard courses – it will serve you well; the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is one that I would recommend. You should also have access to a writing handbook when questions of grammar and style arise; *Webster’s New World Student Writing Handbook* (fifth edition) is a good one.

Electronic Devices Policy

Ordinarily, laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices are strictly not allowed in class. There may be a few days in Unit 3 when they are necessary for research purposes, in which case I will let you know in advance. As a rule, you should expect to print out any materials that I send to you or post on the course website, and then bring these paper copies with you to class. Regarding cellphones, please turn them off (and don’t leave them on vibrate) and keep them in your bags for the duration of class.

Communication

The course works best when we treat it as a semester-long conversation about your writing. To make that conversation possible, there are a few important things to remember:

- **Conferences:** In each unit of the course, you will submit response papers, a Draft, and a revised essay. After you have submitted your Draft, we will meet to discuss my feedback, which I will have sent to you beforehand (either the night before or the morning of your conference – the schedule is very tight, please note). These conferences are our chance to work together closely on your writing and to focus your work toward the Revision of your essay, and they are most worthwhile when **you** are the one guiding them. My job during conferences is to talk through your ideas and clarify my feedback, and I'll be in the best position to do this job when you come to our conference prepared. My job during conference is *not* to give you a to do list that will translate into an "A" on your Revision. Not only would that approach undermine the holistic nature of persuasive writing, it would also undermine one of the most important goals of Expos: to help you go from writing as a student for "the expert" to writing as the expert for your colleagues, that is, as a *teacher*.

Being prepared includes having reviewed your essay, considered your questions, and begun to think about revision possibilities and strategies before we meet. You should bring a copy of your Draft (with my marginal feedback and feedback letter) with you to our conferences, and you should plan on taking notes. Experience has shown that the most effective conferences last about 20 minutes, so the slots for each conference will be a cozy 25 minutes long. Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, missed conferences may not be rescheduled.

Due to the jam-packed nature of the week between Drafts and Revisions, I will unfortunately *not* be able to provide feedback for "second Drafts" leading up to your final Revision; however, by the time you are revising your Drafts you *will* have received a number of stages of feedback and can *by all means* make appointments with the Writing Center if you would like to.

- **Office hours:** In addition to our formal conferences, you are of course free to come see me during office hours about your developing ideas; please sign up for a 15-minute slot using the Canvas course website. If the scheduled office hours conflict with other requirements in your schedule, please contact me about setting up another time to meet.
- **Email:** Rather than take up our class time with announcements and administrative arrangements (and there will be many of them), I will

try to use email to communicate much of that information. As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check your email daily. You are responsible for the information I send you, including the feedback to your Drafts and Revisions (which are easy enough to overlook on an iPhone). Likewise, I make sure to check my email once every weekday for questions from you. Please note, however, that unless prior arrangements have been made, you should not assume that I will check email later than 9.00pm. I can answer most questions within 24 hours, except over the weekend.

Class Participation

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in the class; you learn much more from formulating, articulating, and questioning your own thoughts than from simply listening to what others have to say. Our time together is largely devoted to discussion and small-group work. Therefore you are responsible for being in class, prepared, and on time, each time we meet. Being prepared for class means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assignments for our class, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussions about the rhetoric of the environment: that is, the complexity of our relationship with the natural world which is made all the more complex when it is mediated by language. With this in mind, I do hope that each of you is, over the next few months, linguistically attuned to the ways in which these debates about the environment are being conducted in the media, popular culture, and everyday discourse.

Grades

The majority of your grade comes from your three essays, according to the following breakdown: Essay #1 = 20%; Essay #2 = 30%; Essay #3 = 40%. The standard for each essay also becomes more demanding as we progress (since you are building on certain fundamental skills and techniques with each successive essay). The remaining 10% of your grade represents a serious measure of your completion of preliminary exercises (including Drafts and response papers), your constructive participation in class discussion and conferences, your commitment to attending section and arriving on time, and the care with which you respond to fellow students' work. Please be advised that final grades are indeed final.

Attendance and Lateness

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. It is an official program-wide policy that if you are absent without medical or religious excuse more than **twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. On your **second** unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your peril.

You are expected to let me know promptly if you have missed or will miss a class; you remain responsible for the work due that day and for any new work assigned. Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In those circumstances, you

should contact me before class (or within 24 hours); you may need to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Freshman Dean. Please note that absences because of special events, such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts **are not** excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences, letting me know in advance. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you must directly petition the Director of Expository Writing, who will grant such a petition only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly at seven minutes past the hour (that is, “Harvard time”). It is your responsibility to get to the room prior to the start of class. For persistent lateness you will be subject to a grade penalty.

III. WRITTEN WORK

Submitting Essays

Drafts and Revisions are to be submitted to the Canvas course website. The attachment must be in Microsoft Word file format. If you use word processing software such as Pages, for example, please be sure to save your work in a Word format and make sure that no formatting errors occur in the process. This will help minimize potential compatibility issues when we are sharing our writing with one another. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you send is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent the essay will be subject to a late penalty. *Note: Unless you have made prior arrangements to do so, please do not email me your essays—that unfortunately creates a whole series of potential glitches in the feedback loop. If your essay is late, please submit it to the course website and then send me an email letting me know that it's been posted.*

Deadlines

For many class meetings, you will have a response paper due or some other reading or writing exercise that is designed to help you develop the essay for that unit. Our work together in class will also often be based on those assignments. For those reasons, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time. Of course, even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances can arise – therefore each student in this section is allowed **ONE** 24-hour wildcard extension on a response paper, Draft, or Revision during the semester. To use that 24-hour wildcard extension without penalty, you must: contact me before that deadline; submit the late work to the course website; email me once you've submitted the essay; and be on time with the other work due on that day as well. Otherwise, the work will be counted as late. And beware: taking that one-day extension can mean that you're crunched for time at the beginning of the next unit.

Other than that wildcard extension, all deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I do not grant further extensions. Essay Drafts or

Revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized a third of a letter-grade on the final essay for each day they are late. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you should contact me right away, and may be required to produce a note from UHS; in the event of a family emergency, you should contact me right away, and you may be required to ask your dean to contact me by email or phone. In addition, please contact me as soon as possible so we can work out an alternative schedule.

Revision

Because of the emphasis this course places on the process of revision, the schedule is designed to allow you as much revision time per essay as possible—at least a week after the Draft is due, and usually at least five days after your Draft conference. Since you'll have a significant span of days in which to revise, the expectations for this aspect of your work in the course are high.

Completion of Work

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, it is an official program-wide policy that *you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course*, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you fail to submit at least a substantial Draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The letter will specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial Draft of the essay by this new date (unless you have documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.

Collaboration

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we'll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

Writing Center

At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing Drafts, approaching Revisions – you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's Web site at <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

A final note... Please send me an email when you have finished reading the syllabus. If you have any questions or concerns about the course, please let me know, and I'll either address them in an email response or in class at the beginning of our next session. **Even if you don't have any questions or concerns, please send along an email** – just so I know we're on the same page about the upcoming semester.