ENGL202. Environmental Literature

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Course Description: A study of texts from various periods and locations and in various genres and media that focus on the relationship of human beings to the rest of the natural world. Topic varies from section to section.

Topic of this syllabus: The literary art of environmental politics—America and beyond.

Course Description:
The primary goal of this course is to introduce the theory and practice of environmental writing through the study of primary texts from both American and Anglophone literature from around the world, using the approach generally known as eco-criticism. Class discussion will focus on readings from primary texts supplemented by samples from the critical literature. The main idea is to arrive at an understanding of the art of environmental politics in two senses: 1. To engage works of art that offer insights into environmental values—mainly literary essays, poems, and stories, but also works in other media, such as journalism, science writing, film, music, photography, television, and even ads and bumper stickers; and 2. to consider environmental politics as an art in itself—art in the way that Aristotle talked about it. The course will cover environmental writings from the Romantic Period to the present and include the works of Thoreau, Whitman, Carson, Abbey, Dillard, Silko, Ghosh, and Sinha.

Primary Texts:
Bill McKibben, ed., American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau
Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony
Amitav Ghosh, The Hungry Tide
Indra Sinha, Animal’s People

Learning Objectives:
By the end of the course, students should be able to
1. Identify and articulate key ideas, authors, and texts in environmental literature.
2. Explain how cultural differences affect reading, writing, interpretation, and other forms of communication.
3. Apply appropriate methods and key ideas to the analysis or criticism of written texts, as well as images, films, cultural practices, or other forms of communication and art.
4. Apply appropriate methods to the improvement of their original writing and other communication practices, including visual communication.
5. Employ the basic elements of communication by competent use of grammar, diction, and standard usage; perform revision and editing of papers as needed.

6. Interpret texts and construct explanations and arguments in writing (composing papers with a thesis, supporting evidence, appropriate documentation, and other elements of good academic writing).

7. Apply creativity and critical insight in writing, discussing and illustrating key ideas.

Core Curriculum Objectives:

Critical Thinking Skills (CTS): The course will enhance critical thinking skills through consistent reading and class discussion of key ideas in environmental writings.

Communication Skills (CS): The course enhances communication skills through small and large group discussion of, writing about and providing visual illustrations of ideas, issues, questions, and themes central to course reading and/or writing.

Personal Responsibility (PR): The course will teach personal responsibility by enhancing students understanding of how to ethically use sources to craft a persuasive argument/answer to an essay question.

Social Responsibility (SR): The course enhances social responsibility by providing students with a cross cultural understanding of how history, region, and broader social forces have shaped environmental writings.

Evaluation of Core Objectives

CTS: The evaluation of critical thinking skills will be based on exams and class participation and may include written work. Exams will be designed to allow students to demonstrate their ability to evaluate and synthesize key ideas from the assigned reading. Class room discussion will focus on helping students better understand the nuances and complexities of environmental writings.

CS: The course will help students learn how to develop a greater understanding of environmental writings that may involve guided writing assignments in which they will receive feedback, exams in which students will be expected to effectively convey key ideas from the course succinctly and clearly, and class room discussion and presentation of illustrations in which students will learn how to express questions and thoughts about the subtleties of each text under examination.

PR: The evaluation of personal responsibility will be based upon an assignment in which students will be expected to ethically cite another person’s work in crafting an answer or essay response to a specific question. The instructor will offer concrete examples of how to paraphrase ideas and integrate in text citations in order to construct a persuasive argument.
SR: The evaluation of social responsibility will be based upon an end-of-the-
semester short writing assignment in which students will be asked to reflect upon
how their knowledge of literatures from previous historical periods and world
cultures outside of their own has changed in light of the new information that they
now possess. Students will be expected to demonstrate how key insights from the
course have helped broaden their understanding of how history, culture, and
philosophical outlooks have shaped environmental writings.

Writing Assignments:
Students will produce a 500-word response paper (about 2 pages double spaced) on the
readings at regular intervals, for a total of 8 short paper grades, each worth 5 points (total
of 40% of the course grade). For these 2 page assignments students will be asked to
thoughtfully respond and even interrogate the issues and broader questions raised by the
reading.

Students will also produce a research paper (10-15 pages) on a topic of their choice,
worth 40 points (or 40% of the course grade). Students will be graded on coherence,
prose, grammar, and their ability to ethically cite sources in crafting an argument.

The cumulative final exam will account for the remaining 20 points (20% of the final
course grade) and will be made up of short and long answer questions which will
cover reading and lecture material. On the final exam students will be asked to
reflect upon how their knowledge of environmental writings from previous
historical periods and cultures outside of their own has changed in light of the new
information that they now possess. Students will be expected to demonstrate how
key insights from the course have helped broaden their understanding of how
history, culture, and philosophical outlooks have shaped environmental writings.

Standard Letter Grading Scale:

A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = <60

Attendance: All students are expected to complete readings before the class period in
which they will be discussed. University rules related to excused and unexcused absences
are located on-line at http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule007.

Week/Topic | Readings
---|---
1. Introduction | Readings on Eco-Criticism, select secondary sources (available on course web site) CTS, CS
2. Romantic Nature Writing | Readings from American Earth CTS, CS
3. Romantic Nature Writing | Readings from American Earth CTS, CS
4. Early Conservation Lit | Readings from American Earth and secondary sources
5. Nature and Science Writing  Readings from *American Earth*  CTS, CS
6. Reform Environmentalism  Readings from *American Earth* and secondary sources  CTS, CS
7. Deep Ecology  Readings from *American Earth* and secondary sources  CTS, CS
8. Eco-Feminism  Readings from *American Earth* and secondary sources  CTS, CS
9. Research Papers  *Workshop Week*. Part of this course will be devoted to teaching students how to ethically cite sources in constructing a persuasive argument. Students will also be given concrete examples of how to paraphrase an other person’s work and how to integrate text citations. CTS, CS, PR.
10. Social Ecology  Readings from *American Earth* and secondary sources  CTS, CS
11. Environmental Justice  *Ceremony* and secondary sources  CTS, CS
13. Environmentalism of the Poor  Readings from *Animal’s People* and secondary sources  CTS, CS
14. Review  *Animal’s People* and review  CTS, CS

**Final Cumulative Exam:**
On the final exam students will be asked to reflect upon how their knowledge of environmental writings from previous historical periods and cultures outside of their own has changed in light of the new information that they now possess. Students will be expected to demonstrate how key insights from the course have helped broaden their understanding of how history, culture, and philosophical outlooks have shaped environmental writings. CTS, CS, SR

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