

Hon: English 399—Literature, Culture, & Environment
Hon: Sociology 470 Environmental Sociology

Spring 2007
TR 2:20-3:40
CH 121

Dr. Wes Berry
CH 20D (745-5770)
Hours: 11-2 TTh, MWF by appointment

Required Books: Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*
Lester R. Brown, *Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress & a Civilization in Trouble*

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, *Missing Mountains*
Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World*
Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*
Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*
Bill McKibben, *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
Terry Tempest Williams, *The Open Space of Democracy*

Description & Goals:

In this seminar, we will study a variety of written and visual texts from a multidisciplinary perspective. Our primary objective is to think critically about literature, human institutions, and environmental issues. Because understanding environmental/ecological issues requires cross-disciplinary study, our inquiries will take a generalist approach to such “fields” as philosophy, religion, agriculture, and economics—with a primary focus on literature and studies of human organization (sociology). Guest speakers from these fields will enrich—and probably complicate—our readings. Active and informative field trips will include some of the following: a spelunking tour of Mammoth Cave, a weekend trip to the Tremont Institute in the Smoky Mountains, and a visit to a “green” farm near Scottsville. Students work on research projects according to interest; these projects may include field explorations within your community.

Requirements:

Regular and prompt attendance	Active Participation in Class & Field Trips
Reading all assigned texts	Discussion Leading / Presentation
“Eco-Logs” (assigned periodically)	Research Project

Grades:

Participation & Discussion Leading	40%
Eco-Logs	30%
Research Project	30%

Participation: I value greatly your active participation (the 40% above reflects how much I value it). I believe the best learning occurs when we try to express our thoughts to a community of listeners. You will learn more if you are a regular contributor to classroom discussions, especially if your comments are informed by your textual studies.

Because you are diligent scholars, I have omitted my usual “pop” reading quizzes from this course. I’m trusting you to read carefully because you hunger for knowledge. Because I have omitted the reading quizzes, I’m assigning a larger value to participation. If you prepare for class by reading well, then your thoughtful preparation should be revealed by excellent participation.

NOTE: I value **democratic** participation in class. *In the ideal classroom, every person contributes.* One or two well-chosen comments or questions per week from many students is preferable to multiple comments from a few students. We can learn much from each other, if we open our minds and hearts and attend to the multiple voices in our presence. These “voices” include those of the writers and film makers whose works we’ll read and discuss.

Participation Assessment:

A= Excellent attendance record; in class on time; regular informed contributor to discussions; asks fruitful questions

B=Same as an “A,” but contributes to class discussions semi-regularly; asks helpful questions

C=A few absences/tardiness; occasionally contributes to class discussions; attempts to answer teacher's questions;

OR contributes regularly when present, but absences make consistent participation impossible

OR excellent attendance, but hardly ever contributes to class discussions

D=Excessive Absences/Tardiness

OR good attendance but never contributes to class discussions and fails to answer questions when called on

F=Worse than "D," if you can imagine; fails to submit assignments, doesn't read assignments, etc.

Absenteeism: I don't expect it to be a problem in this class, but please know that I detest chronic tardiness and absenteeism. If you have some problem that makes punctuality difficult, then you need to speak with me pronto.

Late Work : I dislike accepting assignments after the due date, but will consider accepting late work with an appropriate point deduction, usually 10 pts. for each 24 hours late. **I won't accept assignments by email.**

Phones and Professionalism: Turn off all electronic gadgetry (pacemakers excluded) before entering the classroom. Contact me in advance if you have problems fulfilling course requirements. Get to class and submit assignments on time. Practice professional courtesy. I strive to be fair and reasonable in working with you and assessing your performance.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services, DUC A201, 270-745-5004. Per university policy, please do not request accommodations directly from the professor without a letter from the OFSDS.

Field Trips: Each student should participate in at least one field trip and complete the accompanying writing project. I welcome participation in multiple field trips. However, I know some of you have weekend responsibilities that may complicate your participation. We'll have advance sign ups for these trips so you can plan accordingly.

How to be rewarded intellectually and with high marks:

1. Read assignments diligently before walking into each class.
2. Attend class and voice your opinions about what we read.
3. As you read, take notes in the margins of your books. Mark images, sentences, & passages you think are important. Ask about what you don't understand.
4. Begin early on writing & research projects. Give yourself time to revise before submitting for

assessment.

Course Calendar

Unit 1: Ecologic Crisis: Reality or Propaganda?

Jan 23 Course Expectations and Introductions

* Rush Limbaugh, "The Environmental Mindset"

Jan 25 * John Berlau, Ch. 4 of *Eco-Freaks: Environmentalism Is Hazardous to Your Health!* (2006)

* James Howard Kunstler, "Making Other Arrangements" from *Orion* (Jan./Feb. 2007)

<<http://www.orionmagazine.org/pages/om/07-1om/Kunstler.html>>

* Elizabeth Kolbert, Ch. 7 & 8 of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (2006) + "Chronology"

Film: *An Inconvenient Truth* (Viewing & discussion at end of class in CH 125)

Unit II: Philosophy and Religion

Jan 30 * Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis"

<<http://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>>

* Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation" <

www.crosscurrents.org/berry.htm>

- Feb 1 * Gary Snyder, "Buddhism & the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture"
* La Duke, Winona. "Voices from White Earth"
<http://www.schumachersociety.org/publications/laduke_93.html>
* "The Leadership Imperative: An Interview with Oren Lyons" by Barry Lopez (*Orion* Jan. 2007)

Feb 1 7:00 p.m. CH 125 Poetry Reading by Ann Fisher-Wirth, current president of ASLE: Association for the Study of Literature and Environment

Feb 2 Coffee Hour with Ann Fisher Wirth (I hope you can come.) (time and place to be decided)

Feb 6 Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Feb 8 Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Unit III The Economies of Plants and People

Feb 13 *Missing Mountains* (selected readings) + "Bioregional Quiz"

Feb 15 Guest Teacher: Sociology Prof. Doug Smith on Community and Regional Issues

Film: *Sludge* (an Appalshop production)

(Note: Since you have no reading assignment for this day, please read ahead on *Plan B 2.0*)

Feb 20 Recap of Professor Smith's visit & *Sludge*

Lester R. Brown, *Plan B 2.0* (Ch. 1-6)

Feb 22 Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World*

Guest Teacher: Professor of Economics (tentative)

Unit IV The Ecology of Eating

Feb 27 Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

Mar 1 Pollan (continued)

Kentucky Honor's Roundtable Weekend (I encourage you to participate by sharing your research & writing.)

Mar 6 Pollan (continued) + Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating"

Mar 8 Pollan (continued) + Ken Midkiff, *The Meat You Eat* (introduction and conclusion)

Mar 13-15 Spring Break

Mar 20 Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*

Mar 22 Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*

Mar 23 or 24 Field Trip: to Andrew Habegger's "Green" Farm & "Eco Gardens CSA" (Community Supported Agriculture), Scottsville, KY

*** We will visit a Mennonite community; please dress modestly and leave cameras and cell phones at home.**

Unit V: Science and Technology: Our "Posthuman" Future?

Mar 27 Bill McKibben, *Enough*

Mar 29 (continued)

Mar 30-April 1 Field Trip to the Tremont Institute (Environmental Education Center) at GSMNP

Apr 3 Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

Apr 5 (continued)

Unit VI Where Do We Go Now? Part I: Transforming Culture

- Apr 10 Gary Snyder, "Four Changes, with a Postscript"
Lester Brown, II. The Response: Plan B (Ch. 7-11)
Apr 12 Lester Brown, III. An Exciting New Option (Ch. 12-13)
Presentations of Student Research

Unit VII: Where Do We Go Now? Part II: Democracy & Community Action

- Apr 17 Terry Tempest Williams, *The Open Space of Democracy*
Apr 19 Film: *Oil on Ice*
Presentations of Student Research

Unit VIII Where Do We Go Now? Part III: Education / Parenting/ Recreation

- Apr 24 David Orr, "Ecological Literacy"; "The Critical Role of Higher Education"
Presentations of Student Research

Apr 26 Richard Louv, from *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*
Edward Abbey, "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks"

Apr 27-28 or 28-29 (whatever days work best for most students)

Field Trip: Techno-Minimalist Overnight Camping and Spelunking at Mammoth Cave NP

- May 1 Presentations of Student Research
May 3 Presentations of Student Research [research projects due]

May 7-11 Instead of a final exam, we'll hold a final gathering that will include the remaining presentations of student research and reflections on what we've experienced in the course.

Research Projects: Students will complete one project chosen from the following options. You may also design your own project. Each project should culminate in a 10 pp. paper that will be helpful to you in your broader studies. For example, if you plan to apply to graduate schools to study literature after you receive your B.A., then you should write a 10+ pp. literary analysis that demonstrates theoretical sophistication. Other academic fields have unique expectations for advanced research, and I will work with you to shape a meaningful project.

- 1) Research various world religions and rank them according to their ecological visions, paying attention to both sacred texts and the lifestyles of religious people. This project will be appropriate for religious studies majors or minors.
- 2) Interview selected public school teachers to investigate how the school curriculum fosters ecological literacy. Write an assessment of your findings. Write a proposal for instituting an environmental education project in a public school, and share this information with the teachers you interviewed. This project is appropriate for students majoring in education.
- 3) Take a child on a walk in a "natural" setting for 2-3 hours and write a creative nonfiction essay about the experience. Examine the child's responses, and also your own. This project is appropriate for English majors focusing on creative writing, or elementary education majors.
- 4) Interview a professional in one of the following occupations and find out how his/her business addresses conservation, including waste management and energy use. Then write a post-interview evaluation of the business's level of ecological responsibility to send to the person you interviewed, and include in the evaluation one proposal for reducing the business's ecological footprint. Possible businesses/occupations: food service, health and human services, home construction, architecture, banker,

stock broker. This project is appropriate for various majors, including agriculture, education, economics, and business.

5) Research the nexus of gender and ecology, and write an analytical essay on the topic. This project is appropriate for women's studies majors and minors. If you are interested in learning more on this topic, come speak with me. The possibilities for research are too numerous to explain here.

6) Write a "Bioregional Biography," in which you explore answers to questions on the "Bioregional Quiz." This project is appropriate for all of us; however, the resulting paper won't help you very much if you need a writing sample for graduate school. I'd recommend this project to creative writing majors, who could fashion a cool piece of creative nonfiction about the experience.

7) Write an ecocritical analysis of a text. Literature majors should focus on literary texts. Film studies majors may focus on visual texts. Marketing majors may choose from numerous media, including print and audiovisual advertisements. I will accept interdisciplinary studies, of course, as long as the project is helpful to your present enthusiasms and educational goals.

8) History majors: I recommend that you consult with your history mentor (I hope you have one) to learn what type of project will complement your education and address the nexus of history and ecology. One cool project could be a history of environmental attitudes as revealed by editorial cartoons in newspapers / and or popular magazines.

9) Sociology majors: We'll consult with Doug Smith about appropriate projects. 10) And so forth.