

**LIT 280.80 The Ecology of Literature
Draft/ Fall 2016 Syllabus & Class Schedule**

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Be sure to read this syllabus and schedule carefully, print it out, bring it to class, and refer to it throughout the semester.

OFFICE HOURS:

Tues. 3:30-5pm; Wed. 1:30-2:30pm; and many other times by appointment. (Please note: be sure to confirm an appointment time with me even during posted office hours. Otherwise I might be with another student or at the copy machine.)

DESCRIPTION:

The purpose in this course is to help you, through whatever talents and skills you bring, to think through, and write about, fundamental questions of nature and culture in modern society. That means, generally, breaking down the binary linguistic structures between those very words “nature” and “culture”—or “wilderness” and “civilization”—that shape so much of our thinking and our social structures. How can 21st-century citizens think and imagine beyond our oppositional, war-mongering, land-dominating history? Such thinking and dreaming means leaping outside the hierarchies historically constructed by modern thinking, an ideological template that serves the power structures built across the modern era since before 1492. Beyond our adversarial discourse, ultimately of “self vs. other,” more nuanced perspectives move beyond the linguistic boxes built by historical forces of domination and resistance.

If a “sense of place” drives much of literature as the “environment” drives and surrounds experience, how does literary study attend to that environment in a text? How would an “ecological” approach to literature change the way it is written or read? Literary attention to the environment of a story filters through some of the same lenses through which more common narrative elements such as character, plot, and “setting” are represented. For instance, those lenses include gender, in the feminization of the land. They include race, in the frequent identification of the “wilderness” with Native peoples. They include class, in the politics and cultural values of land ownership. We can understand stories on the land partly in terms of such lenses. How we represent the land can be as much a projection of our own “nature” or “culture” as a reflection of nature and the environment, so we have to explore those projections as we look at the land and its stories. If we begin to look at our representations of nature and of ourselves from an environmental or ecological perspective, we begin to see new dynamics in texts. How do writers from different cultures look at nature? Further, how can we apply such an environmental method to literature that is not overtly focused on “nature”? What can be gained by thinking about poems, stories, essays in ways that question their representations of the “natural” against or with the “cultural”?

A NOTE ON REQUIREMENTS, OUTCOMES, ASSESSMENTS:

The following list of activities tries to quantify your expected work. Frankly, no one can “quantify the quality” of your writing or discussion. Grading in arts and humanities courses inevitably entails subjective criteria. Because of that subjectivity, more dialogue between student and faculty can be part of the process of creating and grading humanities “performance.” Literature is a conversation. Literary criticism grows

out of conversation. I hope you come to feel that I am open for you to get to know me in the classroom and in my office. Please come see me to talk through assignments or anything else. On written work, both form and content will be graded, and explicit writing standards will be part of each assignment. Grades are based on a combination of 1) 75% written work (content & form); 2) 15% discussion questions, participation, presentations, other in-class writing; and 3) 10% attendance (max. 2 absences = one week of class time). In addition, if you have any certifiable disability that makes meeting the course requirements difficult, I will be glad to work with you on a strategy for success.

OUTCOME CRITERIA:

- 1) Familiarity with ecocritical reading of major texts and issues in international nature writing and in other genres.
- 2) Recognition of key cultural, historical, and ideological perspectives on those issues in those major texts.
- 3) Recognition of different methods -- literary and historical, artistic and social, aesthetic and ethical, textual and contextual -- for considering texts.
- 4) Engagement with themes of the course as they apply to 21st-century lives.

OUTCOME ASSESSMENTS:

- 1) **Discussion and Attendance:** I'm strict on attendance. You are grownups, and can make your own decisions, and the class runs on a combination of readings, discussions, and lectures, all of which need your participation. So I hope you are making a commitment to this conversation. Lectures and discussions both are founded on your attendance; so more than two unexcused absences (one week of classes) can drop the final grade. An excused absence generally requires a medical crisis. Notice of any absence should be given in advance when we can arrange for your make-up work. Thus the goal here is participation as both a listener and speaker in class discussions of diverse literary texts. (Verbal assessment of Criteria 1-4)
 - a. **Discussion Questions:** On Moodle, there will be a Forum for each required reading where each student posts two questions and responds to two from other students. See the Discussion Questions How-To under Class Resources on the Moodle page. Discussions are due online by 8pm *the night before* the reading is listed on the class schedule, and I will incorporate some of your perspectives into the next morning's lecture and discussion. This means you need to schedule your study time carefully to meet those 8pm deadlines. In small groups and with the full class we will discuss and do close readings on some of the readings (there's never enough time to cover all), with help from your online discussions.
 - b. **Discussion groups** and full-class discussions. Participation in discussion of daily readings will be in both small groups and the full class. The course is designed for your input. Some of the best lectures happen when there are good questions or comments from the floor. "Participation" can be both vocal and silent, both speaking and listening, but should not be all of one or the other. Discussion is one of the best ways to learn, and the class can hardly flow without you there. This pedagogy is so crucial to the course that I'll take a few more lines here to explain: Everyone's idea is important. When you speak, try to give your idea away to the group. You don't need to defend it once it's out there. And equally, when you listen, give each speaker respect. Humor helps too. We don't need to have everyone agree, but perhaps we can build a community in the classroom where each of us can feel engaged with the questions.
 - c. **Recitations:** Once during the semester, each student will recite from memory a poem or passage, or sing a song, etc., and talk briefly about how it relates to the course. Schedule will circulate for sign-up early on.

- 2) **Writing skills and critical thinking** in analyzing diverse literary texts ecocritically. (Written assessment of Criteria 1-4) Note that the UM Writing Center is open for coaching writers at all levels. Writing assignments will be a combination of reading journals, response papers, microthemes, thesis exercises, and essays, all with proper bibliographic form, plus a research paper or creative project. On the microthemes, essays, and research paper/creative project, I expect hours/days of work on rough drafts which should be turned in as hard copies along with the final draft, which is emailed to me. Generally, if you try to write the paper the day the night before, you will get a lower grade, so think of this as a writing exercise designed to help boost your skills. Proofreading is crucial as well. See handouts for more info on my grading criteria and lots of writing coaching. In addition, writing skills require an understanding of how to avoid plagiarism (see note below in “Legalities”).
- a. The final draft of your written work must be sent to my email address as a single Word.doc attachment (don't send bibliography separately). Rough drafts should be handed to me either in electronic form or handed to me hard copy in class on the due date, labeled with your name and stapled (no paper clips). My written responses to your papers will be via Word's Track Changes on the electronic copy which I will email back to you with a different file name, so keep a clean electronic copy on file in case you want to revise it. NB: every student will need to be familiar with Word's Track Changes, which is a simple editing system. If you need help with this step, I'd be glad to work with you. NB: When you email me, be sure to put the exact spelling of the class rubric, 280, at the *front* of your email's subject line.
 - b. **Response Paper:** A single-page or two-page response to a reading, focusing on any particular question or issue in Emerson's *Nature* and/or Thoreau's *Walking* that catches your mind and heart. The short essay should include a thesis statement, an “arguable analytical assertion,” not only giving your topic, but your opinion, as well. Due 9/10.
 - c. **More formal writings:** For each of the three Units there is a writing assignment: 1st Microtheme due 10/3; 2nd Microtheme due 11/4; and Essay due 12/9. All are take-home short-essays, where you can combine personal response and critical analysis, graded on content and form. Microthemes are a one- to three-page essay analysis of a question or questions on the readings. The short essay is a slightly longer version (3-5pp) of similar writing, with discussion of more examples. Both formats should quote from the text(s). Skills in thesis development and in integrating quoted citations into your argument are crucial in written work. Thus plan on a Works Cited page for each essay, with proper in-text citations and bibliographic form. Get to know the *MLA Handbook*. In addition, those skills require an understanding of how to avoid plagiarism (see Legalities below).
 - d. Here's more coaching on the writing. Too often, students write about a piece of literature without coming to a thesis, i.e., without articulating or sometimes even really knowing what they have to say about it. Focusing on literary analysis, the essays should build three elements of a workable thesis statement that goes beyond summarizing or retelling a piece of literature: 1) narrow topic 2) assertion (not description) 3) preview. Generally, a thesis is preceded (in drafts if not in the final essay) by a focused question. The goal of literary analysis is to (gently) take apart and put back together some dynamic aspect of a text, listing and labeling those parts, so that the reader may understand the text more fully and deeply and acutely, with more insight into form and/or content. Such literary criticism looks beyond *what* is said to ask *how*, *why*, or *so what?* *How* does it say what it says? *Why* is it structured as it is? & *so what* is the significance of saying and structuring it that way?

Writing about literature is one of the best ways to read it, and it indeed can intensify the pleasure of reading.

- e. **Research Paper or Creative Project** (due 12/13 &/or project presentations due tba): Consider either a 10-15pg. essay using library resources and again emphasizing thesis development and integrated citations, or an original artistic expression; for example, a short play, a painting, a collage, a set of photographs, a set of songs or an instrumental composition, etc. Artistic works must include an artist's statement (2 pages or more) explaining how the piece relates to themes of the course. Pre-work due 11/17 before Thanksgiving: a working thesis, prospectus or detailed outline, and bibliography of research project, OR a written artist's statement of the planned piece.
 - f. **Peer Editing:** study groups of 3 students will meet outside of class during each of the written essay exams. Editing others' work can be one of the best ways to develop yourself as a writer.
 - g. **Reading Journals:** By suggestion of former students, each of you will respond directly in your own journal to each of the readings: either write poems, sketches, analytical critiques, or whatever is inspired by the readings. Use a separate, dedicated notebook, or do this on computer. For each reading, on one side of a page, record the author's ideas, facts, quotes, or note other important info; on the other side, record your questions, impressions, responses, and feelings as you read. These responses might develop into discussion questions, but they may go in any other directions toward essays, poems, novels, as well. I will ask for the total of journal pages at least twice in the semester.
- 3) **NB: The Writing Center** is available to students of all abilities: LA 144, phone 243-2266, with on-site tutoring; plus writing and test-taking workshops, etc. Also online tutoring via <http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/>

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Language & Perception in a More-Than-Human World* (Chapters 5, 6, 7 optional)
- Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (selections)
- Cheryl Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (selections via Moodle)
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," "The Poet," "Thoreau"
- Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"
- N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
- Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*
- Jack Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*
- Gary Snyder, *Look Out: A Selection of Writings*
- Barry Lopez, *Light Action in the Caribbean*
- Simon Ortiz, *Out There Somewhere*

Some Legalities: Pay attention to these 8 items.

- 1) See the Cyberbear website <http://cyberbear.umt.edu/> for Important Dates such as these: last day to add/drop with refund on Cyberbear; last day to drop without refund by drop/add form; last day to withdraw. I'm open to late drops if you find it unavoidable, but Incompletes are rarely available; see next item.
- 2) Per general University policy, a grade of Incomplete is granted only for a medical emergency that interferes with the end of the semester, so plan your time carefully.

- 3) The Credit/No Credit option must be arranged at the beginning of the semester, not in retrospect toward the end. If the class is taken for Credit/No Credit option, an average grade of D- or above constitutes Credit, and a grade of F equals NCR. (This system replaces Pass/No Pass.)
- 4) Nota bene: plagiarism is not only about missing citations for quoted material. *Plagiarism is defined as using another's words or ideas or information (outside of common knowledge) directly or indirectly without citing them.* I personally feel that plagiarism abolishes the trust that underlies the teacher-student relationship. (. . . & that trust is a wonderful thing.) Some students waste their own education and my time by plagiarizing off the Internet. If they can find it online, so can I, and I have no mercy on academic deception. Consequences of plagiarism may range from ostracism to rehabilitation training, to zero credit for that assignment, to failing and being dropped from the class, to being expelled from the University. Please take this warning seriously. Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism is an affront to fundamental social and academic values, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for each student's part in sustaining academic community. To avoid this breach of trust, acknowledge all work that has influenced your thinking, using accurate bibliographic citations. The University's official warning can be found in the Catalog, which refers you to the Student Conduct Code (Academic Conduct), available on the web:
<http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321>. For more information on plagiarism, go to Plagiarism Online Handout: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html.
- 5) & is it necessary to mention that cell phones, text messaging, emailing, and Internet surfing are not acceptable in class? Laptops for notetaking are welcome, but surfing the Internet is not allowed, unless requested by the instructor in discussion. Participation does not equal distraction. There are limits to multitasking. This is one.
- 6) Departmental Assessment: The English Department's ongoing process of assessing its curriculum sometimes requires professors to read student papers to learn how students in general are progressing through the program. Thus your professor may choose a copy of one of your papers or ask for an electronic version of it to use in this assessment process. All identifying information will be removed and no evaluation of student work outside the boundaries of the course will play any role in determining a student's grade. If you do not want your work used in such a way, please inform your professor and s/he will not forward it to the Assessment Committee. Otherwise, we appreciate your tacit consent.
- 7) In addition to the departmental assessment process, this course might be involved in a university-wide assessment of the efficacy of UM's writing instruction. Thus this course might require an electronic submission of an assignment with your personal author information removed, to be used for educational research and assessment of the writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database with no link to your name. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty using a rubric that will be shared with you as part of the writing aspect of this course.
- 8) This syllabus and schedule may be subject to changes, which will be announced in class.
- 9) **[Also see Semester Schedule, below.]**

**LIT 280.80 The Ecology of Literature
Draft/Semester Schedule, Fall 2016, T/Th**

For each reading below, try to complete the text by the first day of discussion. *ER* = *The Ecocriticism Reader* with pages listed.

- Week 1 Introductions, Syllabus, Logistics, and Overview of Ecocriticism / + W&C Trek**
8/30 -- Intros: land and language. Response paper assignment discussed; due Tuesday, 9/13.
9/1 -- No class. W&C trek & readings: Emerson & Thoreau, *Nature/Walking* through next week.

- Week 2 W&C Trek & readings**
9/6 -- No class. W&C trek & read & think about *Nature/Walking*.
9/8 -- No class. W&C trek & read & think about *Nature/Walking*.

UNIT 1 – “CONCENTRATE UPON . . . THE REMEMBERED EARTH”

- Week 3 American Roots of Transcendentalism**
9/13 -- Emerson & Thoreau. Response paper due as hard copy in class, plus by email as Word.doc attachment (Subject line: 280 YourName Response 1)
9/15 -- Emerson & Thoreau, cont.; Glotfelty: “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” (Moodle); White: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (Moodle).

- Week 4 Ecocriticism & Animism / N. Scott Momaday**
**9/20 -- Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*; Silko, “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” (Moodle).
9/22 -- Momaday cont. [Western Literature Association Annual Conference, Big Sky]**

- Week 5 The Passion of Nature / Annie Dillard**
**9/27 -- Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*; Microtheme 1 handed out; due Monday, 10/3 by email.
9/29 -- Dillard cont.; Le Guin, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” (Moodle)**

UNIT 2 – THINKING LIKE A MOUNTAIN / CROSS-CULTURAL ECOZEN

- Week 6 Language & Perception in Nature/ David Abram**
**10/4 -- Microtheme 1 was due by email Monday, 10/3. Percy, “Loss of the Creature” (Moodle)
10/6 -- Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Chapters 5, 6, 7 are optional)**

- Week 7 David Abram, cont.**
**10/11 -- Abram cont.
10/13 -- Abram cont. Meeker, “The Comic Mode” (Moodle)**

- Week 8 Language & Action / Gary Snyder**
**10/18 -- Snyder, *Look Out: A Selection of Writings*
10/20 -- Snyder cont.; Selby, “‘Coming back to oneself/ coming back to the land’: Gary Snyder’s Poetics” (Moodle)**

- Week 9 Natural Epiphanies / Snyder & Kerouac**
10/25 -- Snyder cont. Microtheme 2 handed out; due Friday, 11/4, by email.

10/27 -- Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*

Week 10 Jack Kerouac, cont.

11/1 -- *Dharma Bums*, cont. Kolodny, "Unearthing Herstory: An Introduction" (Moodle)

11/3 -- Kerouac cont. ; **Microtheme 2 due tomorrow, Friday, 11/4, via email.**

UNIT 3 – CROSS-CULTURAL POST?COLONIAL, & ECO-CULTURAL

Week 11 Dominating Humans, Dominating Nature / Barry Lopez

11/8 -- Lopez, *Light Action in the Caribbean*

11/10 -- Lopez cont.

Week 12 How Forests Think

11/15 -- , *How Forests Think* (selections)

11/17 -- Kohn (selections cont.) + Roundtable discussion of research papers and projects. **Draft thesis plus prospectus and bibliography for research paper OR draft plan and artist's statement for creative project. Due in hard copy at class time & by email.** [American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Denver]

Week 13 Ethics of Erasing the Nature-Culture Divide

11/22 -- Kohn (selections, cont.); Reed, "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism" (Moodle); Savoy and Deming, "Widening the Frame" & "Afterword" (Moodle)

11/24 -- **Thanksgiving Vacation**

Week 14 American Authenticity on the Land/ Simon Ortiz

11/29 -- Ortiz, *Out There Somewhere*; & Allen, "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective" (Moodle) **Essay assignment handed out; due Friday, 12/9.**

12/1 -- Ortiz cont.

Week 15 Simon Ortiz, cont.

12/6 -- Ortiz cont.

12/8 -- Ortiz cont. Review & presentations; **(Essay due Friday, 12/9 by email.)**

Finals 12/14-20 (no classes)

12/13 -- **W&C Art Walk Presentations &/or Research Paper & drafts due by email**

12/17 -- **W&C Art Walk Presentations (& possible earlier times tba)**