ENGLISH 230: Introduction to Environmental Literature

Winter 2020
MWF 2:00-2:50 (14:00-14:50) Location: Condon 360

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Office: 205 PLC Office Hours: 3:00-4:00 MWF and by appointment

Course Description:
Do we read literature differently when we read for the environment? How are environmental issues connected to colonialism, gender, class, race, and disability? What is the difference between environmentalism and environmental justice? How can different genres of texts, different types of writing, inspire environmental perspectives? How should literature and film represent environmental futures and does it matter? This course introduces key questions, topics, and texts in environmental literatures, including colonialism and Native cultures, environmental justice, toxins, extinction, posthumanism, and future visions. We will read and discuss three novels, Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*; Jeff Vandermeer, *Annilhilation*, and the U of O Common Reading text, Helena Viramontes,
Under the Feet of Jesus. The class will include a tour of the exhibit, “Resistance as Power: A Curatorial Response to Under the Feet of Jesus” at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. We will also read and discuss poetry, essays, and short films, such as the animated “Slurb” by Marina Zurkow, and the SF film “Pumzi” by Wanuri Kahiu, and Maya Lin’s digital media work, “What is Missing.”

Learning Objectives
1. Demonstrate an understanding of key topics, themes, and questions pertaining to environmental literature.
2. Analyze and interpret literary texts, within cultural contexts, using different methods.
3. Develop abilities to organize ideas within time constraints, by writing clear essay exams, with significant ideas and specific evidence.
4. Participate in class discussions and in the group presentations, in a prepared, informed, insightful, and significant manner, helping to create the content of the course.
5. Connect visual analysis with textual analysis in the Art + Text assignment and in the small group presentation on film and digital media.

Required Texts [It is important that you purchase all three novels.]
- Louise Erdrich, Tracks
- Helena Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus
- Jeff Vandermeer, Annihilation
- Other texts will be available online, through internet links and through PDFs on our class Canvas page. It is best if you can print these out, so you can read them more carefully, bring them to class, and, possibly, consult them in the exams.

Course Assessment
- Three Exams: First: 20%, Second: 20%; Third: 25% (65% total)
- Group Presentations, last week of class 8%
- Art + Text: 15%
- Participation: 12%

[Students must complete all assignments and requirements in order to pass the class]

Exams: There will be three in-class exams and no final. The exams will contain some short-answer questions, but most of the points will come from an essay. The essay portion of the exam will be open book, so it is important for you to have paper copies of the three novels and the other readings. Please bring green books and pens to the exams. Since a MWF schedule does not allow much time for exams, it is important to be
prepared for the exams and you may wish to practice writing timed essay exams. Electronic devices may not be used during the exam; they must be off and put away.

Art + Text: This essay assignment takes advantage of the art exhibit, “Resistance as Power. A Curatorial Response to ‘Under the Feet of Jesus,” created for the novel. It asks you to develop specific thematic and stylistic connections between one specific quote from the novel and one work of art in the exhibit, supporting your thesis with “close readings” of the quote and the art work. You will be required to comment on 3 other short papers there, offering positive comments and questions. This compressed essay will consist of: an engaging title; a 2-5 sentence quote from Under the Feet of Jesus; a thesis connecting the quote to one art work from the Schnitzer tour; and one paragraph (350-400 words) analyzing, interpreting, and comparing the art work and the quote in order to support your thesis. The essay should be a blend of illuminating, arguable interpretations and analysis, with close readings and evidence to back them up.

Group Presentation: The last week of class will consist of group presentations on two short films and a digital media work. You are required to attend the group planning session for your presentation and to attend all three classes during the final week.

Grading Scheme: See “Course Assessment,” above, which explains how each part of the class is weighted, in terms of the percentage of the grade. The class uses a standard grading scale, in which, A+ is 97-100, A is 94-96, A- is 90-93, B+ is 87-89, B is 84-86, B- is 80-83; etc., with Cs as 70s, Ds, as 60s, and F as 59 and below. Some of the grading mechanisms will depend on the ways that Canvas works. You must complete all of the assignments in order to pass the class. There is no extra credit. Assignments must be completed by their due dates and times. You must complete all the work to pass the class.

Incomplete Policy: Incompletes will only be considered in emergency situations. If you find yourself in an emergency that keeps you from completing the work in the course, please consult with an official U of O Advisor about your situation and then contact your instructors.

COMING TO CLASS:
ON TIME, PREPARED, WITH THE BOOK OR TEXT, AND PARTICIPATING
Punctuality: Please come to class ON TIME. It disrupts the professor and the other students when students come in late.

Preparing for and attending class: Your active, informed participation is crucial for your own ability to learn and for the success of the course. The class is primarily a discussion class in which the students themselves create much of the content and determine the quality of the class. Carefully prepare for each class period by doing the reading in a rigorous and inquisitive manner. Keeping your own journal or notebook would be very helpful. Every day that you come to class you should have something valuable to say. You will learn more, enjoy the course more, and perform better on your written work if you actively participate in class. Attending class means that your mind is actually in class with us. You need to be mentally --not just physically--here. So if you are sleeping, checking email, looking at websites, texting, or otherwise not paying attention, etc., you may be asked to leave. Those behaviors not only signify that you are not really in class with us but they also detract from the ability of the other students to learn. Also, you need to bring the appropriate texts and materials to class. This is crucial for English classes. I will not grade on attendance per se, but attendance will affect the participation grade. And if you miss class you will miss the lectures and discussions that happen that day. [Attendance is absolutely required, however, for each of the three exams, for the art tour, for the planning session on the small group presentations, and for small group presentations the last week.]

Participation. The participation grade will be determined by a holistic assessment of the quality and quantity of each student’s contributions to the class discussions, including the quality of their presentations. Participation grades may range from A to F, from 100 to 0. Please note that participation may affect your final grade! Please see the boxes below for a list of some of the things that affect your participation grade.

Taking Notes. You will do better in the class if you mark up your novels, poems and other hand outs, actively reading by interpreting, analyzing, making connections, and raising questions. Having a notebook in which you write out ideas, interpretations, and questions before class, take notes during class, and reflect after class, will help you understand and remember the material, help you brainstorm ideas, and help you with the exams.

Reading on your phone or other electronic devices: Even though many of you will be skilled at reading on your phone or other electronic devices, I would strongly encourage you to read paper copies of the books and poems and to interact with them by using a pen. This will enable you to focus and think more deeply and will provide you with a crucial resource for the exam—your annotated texts. You may not use electronic devices
during the exam. The course encourages you to develop high level critical and creative modes of thinking and learning.

THINGS THAT RAISE PARTICIPATION GRADE
- Come to class on a regular basis, missing very few, if any, classes.
- Come to class on time, with the book or other required reading for that class period.
- Come having read the texts carefully, bringing ideas, interpretations and questions.
- Participate in class discussions, small group work, etc. in a knowledgeable, engaged, and productive way. Listen to other students.
- Be civil and thoughtful and respectful.
- Make the most of your education!

THINGS THAT LOWER PARTICIPATION GRADE
- Missing classes. Coming in late.
- Failing to bring the book or other to class/ not having read the book or other texts.
- Not really being present in class, because one is sleeping or electronic devices.
- Not participating while in class.
- “Participating” with comments that are irrelevant, unproductive, uninformed by the reading or lectures, rude, or disrespectful.
- Students who are not prepared for class, who are sleeping, who are not respectful or who are on electronic devices will be asked to leave in order that other students’ education will not suffer.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

Communication with the Professor: Please be sure to check your U of O email and Canvas for announcements. The best way to contact me is through email: salaimo@uoregon.edu. I do not have a phone in my office but you can leave a message with the English Department if you’d like. But email is best. Please do not contact me through Facebook regarding anything having to do with this class.

Office Hours: Feel free to talk with me during my office hours: MWF 3-4:00 and by appointment. Note: although I will usually be in my office during those times I may have to attend meetings, graduate student defenses, etc. Please email me to confirm that I will be in my office or to arrange an appointment at another time. My office is 205 PLC.
Writing Tutors: Writing Tutors at the Knight Library: https://engage.uoregon.edu/subjects/writing/ https://engage.uoregon.edu/services/ Writing Associates Tutoring, English: https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu

Environmental Studies, offering majors and minors: https://envs.uoregon.edu/undergrad/about/; Events: https://envs.uoregon.edu/event/

Student Sustainability Center: “The Student Sustainability Center (SSC) is a collaborative space for student-led initiatives that foster equity, environmental vitality, and economic well-being in the present and future. Through our efforts, we help students develop the skills, strategies, and networks necessary to work towards their vision of society.” https://emu.uoregon.edu/sustainability

Multicultural Center (MCC): https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/mcc

LGBTQIA Student Organizations: https://dos.uoregon.edu/lgbt-orgs

Counseling and Crisis Line: Life can be hard! College can be stressful. And environmental topics can be disturbing. Please take good care of yourself and get help and support when you need it!: https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu Call 541 346 3227.
Official University of Oregon Policies

Accessible Education - (see https://aec.uoregon.edu/best-practices-faculty for more information) "The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu."

Academic Misconduct - (See https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct for more information) "The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism."

Inclement Weather: "It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Canvas and by email. Updates on inclement weather and closure are also communicated in other ways described here: https://hr.uoregon.edu/about-hr/campus-notifications/inclement-weather/inclement-weather-immediate-updates"

Academic Disruption due to Campus Emergency: "In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in this course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should immediately log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. Students are also encouraged to continue the readings and other assignments as outlined in this syllabus or subsequent syllabi."

Reporting Obligations: "I am a [designated reporter/student-directed employee]. For information about my reporting obligations as an employee, please see Employee Reporting Obligations on the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC) website. Students experiencing any form of prohibited discrimination or harassment, including sex or gender-based violence, may seek information and resources at safe.uoregon.edu, respect.uoregon.edu, or investigations.uoregon.edu or contact the non-confidential Title IX office/Office of Civil Rights Compliance (541-346-3123), or Dean of Students offices (541-346-3216), or call the 24-7 hotline 541-346-SAFE for help. I am also a mandatory reporter of child abuse. Please find more information at Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect."
**Schedule**

*As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course.* –Dr. Alaimo

PDFs are available on Canvas.

**Introductions**

**Week One. January 6-10**

M: Nature and animals in literature: anthropocentrism, encounter, translation? Discuss poems by Emily Dickinson, Mary Oliver, and Les Murray in class. [Handouts given in class; PDF on Canvas]

**Part I. Wildness, Colonization, and Indigenous Environments**

W: Short lecture. Discuss Henry David Thoreau, excerpt from "Walking" [PDF] and Mary Austin, "The Walking Woman" [PDF].

F: No class. Dr. Alaimo will be at a conference.

**Week Two. January 13-17**

M: Short lecture. Discuss Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*, chapters 1, 2, 3.

W: " " chapters, 4, 5.

F: " " chapters, 6, 7.

**Week Three. January 20-24**

M: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday—no class. Please read this very short essay for the holiday: [https://grist.org/article/what-the-environmental-justice-movement-owes-martin-luther-king-jr/](https://grist.org/article/what-the-environmental-justice-movement-owes-martin-luther-king-jr/)

F: **First Exam**

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**Part II. Toxins and Environmental Justice**

**Week Four. January 27-31**

M: Lecture: Toxins, Risk Culture, and Environmental Justice

“Principles of Environmental Justice” [PDF]

W: Excerpt from Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* [PDF]; Excerpt from Audre Lorde, *Cancer Journals* [PDF]

F: Short Lecture: Latinx Environmentalisms. Chapter one, Helena Maria Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*

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**Week Five. February 3-7**

M: Viramontes, chapters 2 and 3

W: Viramontes, chapters 4 and 5

F: Excerpt from Susanne Antonetta, *Body Toxic* [PDF]

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**Week Six. February 10-14**

M: **Second Exam**

W: Tour of “Resistance as Power. A Curatorial Response to ‘Under the Feet of Jesus.’” Please meet in the entry of the Jordan Schnitzer museum, where the tour of this special
exhibit, focused on Viramontes’ novel, the Common Reading at U of O, will begin. You may wish to take photos (no flash) of this exhibit.

Part III. Extinction, Posthumanism, and Environmental Futures

F: Short Lecture. Discuss: Eli Clare, “Meditations on Natural Worlds, Disabled Bodies, and a Politics of Cure” [PDF] and “Gender Transition” [PDF]

Week Seven. February 17-21

M: Art + Text Assignment Due [Essay should be posted *before* class. Then, read and comment on at least 3 essays during class time.]


F: Brenda Schaugnessy, “There Was No Before (Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles),” from The Octopus Museum [PDF]

Week Eight. February 24-28

M: Jeff Vandermeer, Annihilation, chapters 1-2

W: chapters 3-4

F: chapter 5-end

Week Nine. March 2-6
M: Third Exam

W: Workshop: Analyzing and interpreting film and digital media. [Or an open day to adjust for any emergency cancellations of class]

Part IV. Visual + Digital Media: Presentations

F: Watch or engage with the film or digital site you signed up for before class and come to class with your own analyses, interpretations, contexts, and questions. Plan presentations in class, with your group. [Do not miss this class!]

Week Ten. March 9-13


F: Presentations: Marina Zurkow, “Slurb” (2009), 17 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k_jY7xCpyY

No final exam. Happy Spring!