ENGLISH 230: Introduction to Environmental Literature

Fall 2021.TR 2:00-3:20
Location: 245 LIL

Dr. Alaimo, Professor of English, Core Faculty Member, Environmental Studies
salaimo@uoregon.edu
https://www.stacyalaimo.com

Office Hours: 1-2 Tuesday and Thursday, in person, in Office: 205 PLC (please wear a mask over your nose and mouth in this small space). If you are sick or have symptoms that could be covid, do not come to office hours in person. Email me and we can zoom.

Course Description: This course introduces key questions and topics in U.S. environmental literature and the environmental humanities more broadly, including wilderness, colonialism and Native cultures; race, environmental justice, and toxins; extinction, the anthropocene, posthumanism, and future visions. We will read and discuss three novels, Louise Erdrich, Tracks; Helena Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus; Jeff Vandermeer, Annihilation, along with poetry, essays, and short films, the animated “Slurb” by Marina Zurkow, the SF film “Pumzi” by Wanuri Kahiu, along with Maya Lin’s digital media work, “What is Missing.” There will be three exams, submitted on Canvas. The paper encourages students to extend their understanding of the potential cultural impact of narratives to analyze or create modes of public environmental advocacy. Class time will be a mix of lecture, small group discussion, impromptu presentations, and large group discussion. I am excited to be able to finally have class in person and meet all of you!

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, concepts, and questions.
3. Develop abilities to compare and contrast literary works in response to a question, developing your own original and significant ideas, and supporting with evidence. Learning to develop your ideas and revise your essays in such a way as to be clear, organized, convincing, precise, and concise--packing the most illuminating content into the word limits.
4. Participate in class discussions, in an informed and productive manner, helping to create the content of the course, and developing oral communication skills.
5. Apply your understanding of how narratives can do cultural work by analyzing the narratives of an environmental advocacy organization, or by creating your own narrative intended for environmental advocacy.

Required Texts  [Please purchase all three novels, ideally paper versions.]

- 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 to print these out, so you can read them more carefully and bring them to class.

Course Assessment

- Three Exams: First: 20%, Second: 20%; Final: 25% (65% total)
- Paper and Response: Environmental Advocacy Narratives: 25%
- Participation: 10%

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

Exams: There will be three exams, including the final. The exams will contain some short-answer questions, but most (if not all) of the points will come from an essay that responds to a question by analyzing, interpreting, and comparing the readings. The exams will be posted and submitted on Canvas.

Environmental Advocacy Narratives: This essay assignment encourages you to extend your understanding of how stories work, moving from inside our literature class to an engagement with or contribution to, real-world environmental advocacy. The essay has three options: 1) a professional option in which you analyze the effectiveness of the narratives of a particular environmental organization and then suggest narrative
strategies for that organization; 2) a creative nonfiction option in which you write your own personal narrative that overtly or less obviously advocates for a specific environmental issue; and 3) a creative fiction option in which you write a story, play, or poem from the point of view of an animal, plant, or fungus. The (imagined) audience for the first option consists of the leaders of that environmental organization as well as its supporters. For the second and third options, the audience is a particular online magazine or social media platform, to which you can (actually!) submit your piece. The essay will be submitted on Canvas, where 4 classmates will comment upon it. You will be required to comment on 4 essays by your classmates there, offering positive comments, productive suggestions, and questions.

**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.

**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.

**Hooray! We can finally have class in person!**

**Paper copies of the novels:** Even though many of you are quite skilled at reading on your phone or other electronic devices, I would strongly encourage you to read paper copies of the novels and annotate them by using a pencil (old school)! This will enable you to focus and think more deeply and will provide you with a crucial resource for the exam—your annotated texts. The course encourages you to develop high level critical and creative modes of thinking and learning—a deep engagement—different from our terribly distractible, surface-surfing, internet minds.

**Preparing for and participating in 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 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. Be sure to bring the appropriate texts and materials to class. This is crucial for English classes because we analyze and interpret specific passages from the literature, arguing about their meaning and significance.

**Attendance/Participation:** Attendance is not graded per se, but attendance affects the participation grade as well as overall learning and performance. If you are actively participating you are helping to create the actual content of the class. Your ideas, interpretations, analyses, and questions are crucial for the class. If you do miss a class, there is no need to tell me why you were absent, since there are no excused absences, because I don’t grade attendance per se. While lecture outlines (Power Points) will usually be posted on Canvas, the experience of class discussion and small group work cannot be replicated. The participation grade will be determined by a holistic assessment of the quality and quantity of each student’s contributions to the class discussions. Participation grades may range from A to F, from 100 to 0. Please note that participation may affect your final grade!

**THINGS THAT RAISE PARTICIPATION GRADE**

- Come to class on a regular basis. Come to class on time, respecting our work.
- Bring the book or other required reading to class, having read the texts carefully, bringing ideas, interpretations, connections, and questions.
- Participate in class discussions, small group work, etc. in a knowledgeable, engaged, and productive way. Listen to other students. Help keep the discussion significant.
- Provide productive comments and questions when peer reviewing the paper.

Please note that this is NOT a virtual or online course. It is an in-person class for both the professor and the students. The professor cannot make this an online course.

**In case the professor has an emergency:** If the professor is sick, quarantined, or cannot make it to class for some reason, please keep up with the readings and assignments. We may have class online on Zoom, or class may be cancelled. Please check your university email and our class Canvas account for instructions.
If you, the student, have an emergency: There is no need to inform me why you missed class or will be missing class since I don’t require attendance per se. And it is not possible for me to summarize an hour and a half long class in one email. Please follow all university procedures for anything covid-related, and/or talk with your academic advisor, and get help from counseling services. If you have to quarantine or isolate—and you have reported this to the university-- and would like me to set up zoom for you to participate, please email me, with documentation.

Official University of Oregon Policies and Resources

**Accessible Education** - (see [https://aec.uoregon.edu/best-practices-faculty](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.”

[Usually AEC sends faculty an official notice. Because that notice is usually quite general, meant for all sorts of classes with all sorts of policies, I may email you for clarification as to which parts actually fit this class. Since the essay exams will be limited by the word count, not the time it takes to write the exam, accommodations that provide extra time shouldn’t be necessary. And since there is no attendance policy per se, that should not be an issue either, except in cases where the accommodations exempt the the student from all attendance and participation. If that is the case, I will not count participation in the final grade. You may still wish to attend, however, since it is difficult to do well on the exams without being in class. Feel free to let me know how you think the AEC instructions pertain to the specific policies and procedures in this class. Dr. Alaimo]

**Academic Misconduct** - “The University Student Conduct Code (available at [conduct.uoregon.edu](https://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](https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism).”

[I take plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct very seriously. Any time you use someone else’s ideas or words without giving them credit it is plagiarism. You must cite your sources properly. Dr. Alaimo.]

**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
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.”

[Yes—always keep up with the reading and the assignments, no matter what happens. If I need to cancel class or move class to Zoom, I will let you know as soon as I can. Check your campus email and Canvas accounts. Dr. Alaimo]

**Reporting Obligations.** The following is the recommended minimum language to include on syllabi: “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.”

**UO COVID-19 Regulations & Prevention -**
(see https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/regulations and https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/prevention#if-sick-stay-home for more information)

"The University of Oregon (UO), in accordance with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, Oregon Health Authority, and Lane County Public Health requires faculty, staff, students, visitors, and vendors across all UO locations to use face coverings when in UO owned, leased, or controlled buildings. This includes classrooms. Please correctly wear a suitable face covering during class. Students unable to wear face coverings can work with the Accessible Education Center to find a reasonable accommodation. [The instructor will need to receive this AEC documentation to allow someone to be exempt from our community mask requirement.] Students refusing to wear a face covering will be asked to leave the class. Face coverings are not required for fully vaccinated instructors, provided there is 6 feet of distance to others and that all others in the class are masked.

For full guidelines, which are subject to change, see the UO’s face covering regulations.

Students should obtain wipes available outside of classrooms before they enter class and use them to wipe down the table and seat they will use.

Please conduct regular symptom self-checks (https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/regulations#self-check-procedures) and do not come
to class if you are experiencing symptoms. I will work with you to make sure you can stay caught up with the class. Use this self-check log: [https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/sites/coronavirus1.uoregon.edu/files/2020-08/self-monitoring.pdf](https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/sites/coronavirus1.uoregon.edu/files/2020-08/self-monitoring.pdf) to track your symptoms.

In addition, familiarize yourself with these exposure scenarios and guidelines to determine if you should come to class after suspected exposure to someone with the virus. [https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/covid-exposure](https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/covid-exposure)

![Here are the dos and don'ts of wearing a mask.](image)

Mental Health and Wellness "Life at college can be very complicated. Students often feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in their life. If you're facing such challenges, you don't need to handle them on your own—there's help and support on campus. As your instructor if I believe you may need additional support, I will express my concerns, the reasons for them, and refer you to resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I care and that help is available. Getting help is a courageous thing to do—for yourself and those you care about. University Health Services help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates. Find out [https://www.benidormseriously.com/face-masks-spain-questions-and-answers](https://www.benidormseriously.com/face-masks-spain-questions-and-answers)"
more at health.uoregon.edu/ducknest. University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at counseling.uoregon.edu or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).

[Life is especially hard right now—please get the support and help you need. And learn some strategies and practices for mental and physical health. Dr. Alaimo]

Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support. This UO webpage includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support: https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/food/

Accommodation for Religious Observances: The university makes reasonable accommodations, upon request, for students who are unable to attend a class for religious obligations or observance reasons, in accordance with the university discrimination policy which says “Any student who, because of religious beliefs, is unable to attend classes on a particular day shall be excused from attendance requirements and from any examination or other assignment on that day. The student shall make up the examination or other assignment missed because of the absence.” To request accommodations for this course for religious observance, visit the Office of the Registrar’s website (https://registrar.uoregon.edu/calendars/religious-observances) and complete and submit to the instructor the “Student Religious Accommodation Request” form prior to the end of the second week of the term.

[See “Attendance/Participation,” above. Attendance per se, is not required, so there are no excused absences. Focus on participating productively most of the time.]
I may adjust this schedule, if necessary. PDFs are available on Canvas. Please read all the literature before class, bringing a copy to class, with interpretations, ideas, and questions.

Part I. Wilderness, Colonization, and Indigenous Environments

Week One. Sept. 28 + 30

Tuesday: Introductions.

Thursday:

- John Muir, excerpts from Our National Parks [PDF], Chapter 1 and Chapter 10, pages 1-14, and 98-107
- Mary Austin, “The Walking Woman” [PDF]
- “The Wilderness Act” of 1964 [PDF]
- Rebecca Solnit, “John Muir in Native America” [PDF]

Week Two. October 5 + 7

Tuesday: Short lecture. Discuss Louise Erdrich, Tracks, chapters 1-4.

Thursday: Tracks, chapters, 5-7.

Week Three. October 12 + 14

Tuesday:

- Finish Erdrich, Tracks, chapters 8 and 9
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Preface” and “Sky Woman Falling,” [PDFs] from Braiding Sweetgrass.
Thursday:  First Exam. See instructions on Canvas. No class, no office hours.

Part II. Toxins and Environmental Justice

Week Four. October 19 + 21

Tuesday:

- Lecture: Toxins, Risk Culture, and Environmental Justice
- “Principles of Environmental Justice” [PDF]
- Excerpt from Rachel Carson, Silent Spring [PDF]
- Excerpt from Audre Lorde, Cancer Journals [PDF]

Thursday:

- Short Lecture: Latinx Environmentalisms
- Helena Maria Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus, chapters 1-3

Week Five. October 26 + 28

Tuesday: Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus, chapters 4 and 5

Thursday:

- Excerpt from Susanne Antonetta, Body Toxic [PDF]
- Beyond Toxics, Environmental Justice: https://www.beyondtoxics.org/work/environmental-justice/

Week Six. November 2 + 4
Tuesday: **Second Exam.** See instructions on Canvas. No class, no office hours.

Thursday: Day off to write paper. No class. Optional meeting with professor to discuss paper.

**Part III. Extinction, Posthumanism, and Environmental Futures**

**Week Seven. November 9 + 11**

**Tuesday:** Paper Due. See Assignment in Canvas. No class. Comment on each other’s papers.

**Thursday:** No Class. Veteran’s Day Holiday

**Week Eight. November 16 + 18**

**Tuesday:**
- Brief lecture

**Thursday:**
- *Annihilation*, second half
- Interview with Vandermeer, “Rewilding your Lawn in the Anthropocene” [PDF]
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, In the Footsteps of Nanobozho: Becoming Indigenous to Place.” [PDFs] from *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

**Week Nine. November 23 + 25**

**Tuesday:**
• W. S. Merwin, “For a Coming Extinction” [PDF] and “To the Wires Overhead,” [PDF]; Jeffrey Yang, “Coelacanth,” “Riftia,” [PDF]; Jorie Graham, “Deep Water Trawling” [PDF]

Thursday:  Thanksgiving Break!

Week Ten. November 30 + December 2: Environmental Futures

Tuesday:

• Ted Chiang, “The Great Silence” [PDF];
• Brenda Schaughnessy, “There Was No Before (Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles),” from The Octopus Museum [PDF]

Thursday:

• Explore before class; show us one path during class:
  Maya Lin, “What is Missing,”  https://whatismissing.net/home;

Watch and discuss in class:

• Marina Zurkow, “Slurb” (2009), 17 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k_jY7xCPYY
• Wanuri Kahiu, “Pumzi” (2009), 21 minutes  https://vimeo.com/46891859

Final Exam: 12:30 Monday, December 6th

[Please remember to fill out the student evaluations of the class. Thank you!]