

EN 506: Ecocriticism and Environmental Literature
Winter 2024, Tuesday 6-9:20, Jamrich 3100

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Office Hours: Monday 10:30am-12pm, Tuesday 12-2pm, and by appointment

Bulletin Description:

This course introduces students to the fields of ecocritical theory and environmental literatures. Students will apply ecocritical and theoretical approaches in their own research and writing projects.

Course Objectives:

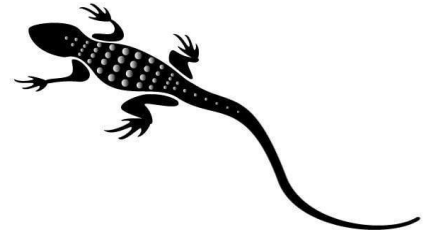
- Students will understand and apply key ecocritical concepts.
- Students will analyze the literary elements, themes, and histories of select environmental literatures.
- Students will investigate and report on pivotal developments in ecocriticism.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of course concepts by producing a final project incorporating ecocritical approaches and close-reading

Course Description:

While the consideration of literature in relation to land and environment has long been integral to literary study, in recent decades the interrelated fields of Literature and Environment, Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, and Environmental Humanities have grown exponentially. This course analyzes the relationship between literature and environmental perspectives, exploring how literary interpretations of land and animals have reflected and shaped attitudes and values. What is the relation between experience of the land and literary representation of the environment? What is the lure of the “wilderness” that has long inspired authors? How do language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications? What is the place in these swirling attitudes for Indigenous sovereignty and homeland? Where is the voice and agency of the more-than-human world?

Required Texts:

Keywords for Environmental Studies, Joni Adamson et al.
Land of Little Rain, Mary Hunter Austin
The Water Knife, Paulo Bacigalupi
Ecocriticism, Greg Garrard
The Vaster Wilds, Lauren Groff
People of the Whale, Linda Hogan
Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer
The Overstory, Richard Powers
The Deep, Rivers Solomon
The Devil's Highway, Luis Alberto Urrea



Additional readings will be made available on EduCAT.

Assignments:

Course Grade:

Response Papers 25%
Presentation 10%
Conference-Length Paper 25%
Seminar Paper 40%

Response Papers

You will be tracking your reading engagement through response papers. Each week you will be required to write a 300-500 word response to the reading you have prepared for class (exceptions will be noted on Daily Schedule). Your entry will be turned in via EduCAT prior to class. We will draw on these responses to guide our discussions.

These responses can take the form of insights or a-ha! moments, questions about passages or words that you're struggling to understand, or applications of a theory to the text. You might also read one or more of the relevant short essays from *Keywords for Environmental Studies* and use them in your response. Use them as an opportunity to reflect on the readings and your responses to them. So, make note of your questions, frustrations, inspirations, and breakthroughs. Note confusing or important words and try to work through them. Notice passages that remind you of something else (a theoretical text, a literary text or cultural production, a late-night conversation, a concept from another course and/or discipline, etc.).

These responses should work to serve *you* and your understanding of the readings and/or the class. While I do expect to see meaningful engagement with the texts themselves, *how* you engage is up to you. If there are weeks you would prefer to submit a collage or a short video or a piece of your own creative writing or some other engagement, please feel free to do so. If you do submit a more creative or unconventional entry, just make sure you explain in a paragraph or two *how/why* your submission links to the readings.

Presentation

You will sign-up for a presentation on one of the major threads of Ecocriticism. Your presentation should introduce the class to some of the main concerns of this theoretical approach and some of the major scholarly voices and/or influential texts. To do this you will need to **go beyond** what Greg Garrard or the other theorists we read in class have to say and do some research. Your presentation should be practiced and professional and should include handouts/power points/film clips where reasonable and appropriate. The entire presentation should run no more than 15 minutes and must conclude with a set of discussion questions to spark class discussion.

***A written version of your presentation can serve as that week's response paper. ***

Conference-Length Paper

You will complete a conference-length (8-10 pages, double-spaced) analytical paper that reads one of the course texts through a theoretical lens. Your paper must be engaged with current scholarship and sophisticated in its approach to the literature. An assignment sheet will be provided.

Final Project

The course will culminate in an original and critically engaged project of your own design. You may decide to write a traditional 18-25 page seminar paper, or you may select a different kind of project such as a detailed course syllabus, a poster project, a hybrid creative/critical essay, a video, or something else. Whatever you choose to produce must demonstrate clear critical thinking, research skills, and an interested engagement with course theory and discussions. We will discuss the many possibilities this assignment offers throughout the semester. Each of you will set up an appointment with me before the end of Week 12 to discuss your project.



Course Policies:

Attendance and Participation: Attendance will be recorded but not graded in this class. However, this is a graduate class and as such **YOUR REGULAR ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION ARE EXPECTED** and will have a material impact on your grade and on your understanding of the complex and difficult material we will be covering. It is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate if you miss class.

***If you miss the class when you are scheduled for your presentation, you must get in touch as soon as you know you won't be in class. Depending on the situation we can either move your presentation to Zoom or reschedule it. But if you miss your presentation without contacting me, you will earn a zero for the assignment. ***

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty: This is a graduate course and plagiarism will not be tolerated. All of the work you turn in **must** be wholly original to you, and any use of other people's ideas **must** be properly cited. Use of AI software at any stage of the drafting and

revising process is unacceptable. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and referral to the Dean of Students. Please refer to your student handbook for further information about plagiarism.

Veterans: If you are a veteran and need assistance with your benefits or are experiencing complications with your education due to military service connected issues, contact the Veteran Resource Representative in 2101 Hedgcock (227-1402 or mrutledg@nmu.edu). The Veteran Resource Representative can advocate for you before the Veterans Administration and can also help you solve any veteran specific issues you may have.

ADA: If you have a need for disability-related accommodations or services, please inform the Coordinator of Disability Services in the Dean of Students Office at 2001 Hedgcock (227-1737 or disability@nmu.edu). Reasonable and effective accommodations and services will be provided to students if requests are made in a timely manner, with appropriate documentation, in accordance with federal, state, and University guidelines.

Language and Respect: This is a course about language and expression. We may be discussing sensitive or controversial topics, and we each have different experiences and contexts that influence our perspectives. While you may find that you share experiences and perspectives with some of your classmates, you may also feel uncomfortable or disagree with certain topics discussed in class or with certain ideas or opinions expressed by others. Such differences of opinion are expected and enrich the learning environment. In order to facilitate discussion and create a supportive and professional classroom environment, we must all strive to use respectful language.

Students are invited to share their pronouns. Racist, sexist, ableist, and transphobic language are *always* unacceptable in your speaking and writing. If we encounter such language in the course texts, you need to be careful not to adopt that language in your comments in class and/or in your assignments. Using respectful language requires practice and attention – we are all constantly learning and we may make mistakes. At any point during the semester if something said in class makes you feel disrespected, excluded, or threatened please do not hesitate to send me an email and/or set up meeting.

