

## **FYS 100 FFF: Nature, Environments, and Place in American Thought (Spring 2014)**

T/R 11-12:15  
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Office hours: Tues. & Thurs. 3:30–5:00

### **General Overview:**

This course focuses on the way Americans have constructed ideas of nature, attached values to certain environments, and invested meaning in particular places. We will consider how Americans in the past and today conceive of divisions between the “natural” and man-made, wilderness and civilization, and material reality and human consciousness. We will also analyze the way in which people layer meaning over space and shape land in order to affect social change. Students will engage in humanistic inquiry concerning humans’ interaction with their environments by looking to our surroundings, historical documents, and students’ own perceptions and creative potential. This course has a major digital project component – using a dedicated NeatLine/Omeka exhibit platform – which students will build throughout the semester. By the end of the course students will have curated unique exhibits and contributed to a digital map that further explores ways in which humans understand and engage with nature, environments, and place. The digital exhibit belongs to the students and its success depends upon each student’s thinking, creativity, cooperation, and planning. These are useful skills that will contribute to your college experience in many other fields and disciplines. At the end of the course, students will reflect upon the process of building the digital exhibit and what we can learn about our own relationships to environments and places based on your class experiences.

This class is a three-credit class. As such, the expectation is that students will spend three hours in class per week and a minimum of six hours of work outside of class each week for fifteen weeks; thus this class requires a minimum of 135 hours of required work by students.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. Demonstrate a firm understanding of major intellectual trends in environmental thought in the United States
2. Critically assess the historical value, bias, and perspectives of a wide range of mediums, including text, painting, maps, digital exhibition, and film
3. Consider the ways and the extent to which the natural world is created and/or defined by ideology and dynamic use
4. Develop digital literacy and the oral and written skills vital to scholarly analysis and exchange

**Required Readings:** The assigned readings should be completed by the date they are listed on the syllabus. Always bring the readings with you to class, along with your notes. All readings on

the syllabus will be available in digital form on Sakai. If money is not an issue, I strongly recommend you print out and bring the paper copies to class rather than using your computer during class discussion. Do purchase from the bookstore: Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*.

**Assignments:** Please see individual assignment descriptions for further details. Assignments are due on the date and time listed on the syllabus schedule.

Participation and In-Class Activities	20%
Intellectual Approaches (3 pp)	10%
3 Thematic Essays (2 pp each)	30%
Nature Contemplation	
<i>Desert Solitaire</i> analysis	
Reynolda House Art	
Curated Group Photo Essay (500 words)	10%
Place Study (5–7 pp)	15%
Paper draft	
Place Study peer critique	
Place Study website post	
Group Documentary Film	10%
Conduct interview	
Provide release forms	
Upload edited final version	
Reflection Essay (3–4 pp)	5%

**Participation and In-Class Activities:** This course is discussion based. Dynamic, engaged participation and attendance are required in every class session. More than one unexcused absences in the semester will severely reduce your overall course grade. An excused absence will only be granted on three conditions: 1) you must take part in an official university-sponsored sporting event; 2) you suffer from an illness of some kind; 3) the death or illness of a family member. *All events must be documented.*

Participation includes active listening, asking questions about reading material, responding to ideas of your classmates, completing reading assignments, engaging in intellectual debates, completing in-class writing assignments, and cooperating with peers on group assignments.

**Intellectual Approaches:** In this short (3 pp) paper, synthesize the major approaches to environmental thought. What are the major debates and differences in approach? What are some of the assumptions that environmental thinkers share? Focus primarily on the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller, Nash, and Cronon, although you may choose to incorporate examples from Ehrlich and Turner as well. The assignment will be assessed according to: 1) clarity of writing (avoid grammatical errors and overly-complicated prose); 2) accurate explanation of environmental ideas; and 3) analysis of material. This should not be simply a descriptive exercise, so make sure you make clear and original points in the paper.

**Thematic Essays:** Each 2-page essay will explore a different approach to representing nature. The first essay requires students to write creatively about the natural world based on a contemplative experience. For the second essay, students will analyze Abbey's writing about Utah landscapes. After a class visit to view select artworks at the Reynolda Museum, students will write the third essay analyzing narratives of the environment as presented in landscape art.

**Curated Group Photo Essay:** Working in groups of four, students will collect and post at least four photographs on the Neatline site. The photographs should illustrate or communicate an idea or particular theme (e.g. criticism of human/nature divide) and the connection should be explained with minimal (but effective) text of about 500 words. The photographs may be collected from Digital Forsyth and other databases or taken by students.

**Place Study, Peer Critique, and Website Posts:** First each student will write a research paper analyzing a place on or near campus, ideally but not necessarily related to the theme in the curated photo essay. Using ideas from readings and class discussion, analyze the way in which your chosen site is culturally constructed, socially utilized, and/or exerting influence on human behavior or in the world. How are the ideas about nature, civilization, or humans' place in the world represented in your site? How does the campus environment reflect human behavior, social values, and expectations? Each student will offer a thoughtful 1-page critique of two of their peer's place studies. Once each student has received feedback, they must link their revised place study to the NeatLine site as a new page and add images. In addition, each student will contribute to the site's digital map by identifying the location of the place study.

**Group Documentary Film:** In groups of four, students will produce a 3-minute multimedia presentation using photographs and field interviews with individuals involved in environmental or preservation work in the Piedmont. Interview subjects will be contacted based on each group's thematic focus. Each interview subject must sign a release form. The edited film will be added to the NeatLine exhibit.

**Reflection Essay:** Students will reflect on their intellectual experience of both thinking and doing: how did digitally and visually representing "nature" on the class website connect to the readings, written assignments, and discussion in class?

**Late Papers, Drafts, and Grade Disputes:** Papers are due at the end of class. I do not grant extensions but will accept late papers. The penalty for late papers is one grade per day late, beginning at the class start time. As a courtesy, because printers fail and computers crash, you may email your paper to me to have the security of turning it in before class. You then have 24 hours to bring me a hard copy. Your paper copy must match your emailed version exactly.

I am willing to look over paper drafts if I receive your draft (by email or hardcopy) at least 48 hours before the assignment is due. Please feel free to take your essays to the writing center for additional assistance. I welcome discussions about my comments on graded papers. Such conversations will clarify areas for improvement and help you improve on future assignments.

**Electronic Devices:** Phones must be turned off and put away during class. Even technology use that is noiseless – such as furtively text messaging during class – is distracting and such practices will have a negative impact on your participation grade. I may collect phones during some exercises; notify me before class if you anticipate an emergency during classtime.

**Special Needs:** If you have a disability that may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (758-5929) within the first two weeks of the semester. Additionally, please meet with me as soon as possible so I can make appropriate accommodations.

**Academic Honesty:** Plagiarism, or representing another person’s ideas as your own, will not be tolerated regardless of circumstances. It will result in a failing course grade and possible disciplinary action. For questions about plagiarism and suggestions on how to avoid it, visit the library’s guide at <http://zsr.wfu.edu/research/guides/plagiarism.html>

### Class Schedule

#### Week 1 Introduction to Place and “Nature”

Jan. 14

Jan. 16



David Glassberg, “Place and Placelessness in American History”



Gretel Ehrlich, “The Solace of Open Spaces”



Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier”

#### Week 2 Transcendentalism and Romanticism

Jan. 21



Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*

Jan. 23



Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*



Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*

#### Week 3 Nature Writing: Analytical and Contemplative Approaches

Jan. 28



Roderick Nash, “The Value of Wilderness”



William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”

- INTELLECTUAL APPROACHES ESSAY DUE

Jan. 30



Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Field Trip: Outdoor / Walking Meditation

#### Week 4 Nature Writing: Ecology and Ethics

Feb. 4



Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*



Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

- NATURE CONTEMPLATION PAPER DUE

Feb. 6



Wendell Berry, “Damage” and “Healing”

Week 5 Preservation and Social Critique

Note: February 11, 4-5 PM in ZSR 404: Margaret Smith lecture “American Ski Resort”

Feb. 11  Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, xi-38, 128-150

Feb. 13  Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 39-59, 232-249, 264-269  
• DESERT SOLITAIRE ANALYSIS DUE

Week 6 Representing Nature: Photography

Feb. 18 Interpreting Photography

Feb. 20 Workshop: curating photo essays (with Chelcie Rowell)

Week 7 Representing Nature: Landscape Art

Feb. 25  Angela Miller, “The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art”

Feb. 27 Reynolda House of American Art

Week 8 Visualizing Place: Mapping

March 4  Dolores Hayden, “Urban Landscape History”  
Homework exercise: draw your own “cognitive map” of campus  
• ART PAPER DUE

March 6 Discussion of photo essays and place study (workshop with Chelcie Rowell)  
• CURATED GROUP PHOTO ESSAY DUE

SPRING BREAK MARCH 8-16

Week 9 Constructed Places: Parks, Gardens, and Landscaping

March 18  Aaron Sachs, *Arcadian America*, 257-270.  
 David Schuyler, “Ideology of the Public Park”

March 20  Margaret Smith “Reynolda: A Rural Vision in an Industrializing South”  
Tour of Reynolda lawn, formal gardens, and village

Week 10 Social Places and Cultural Geographies

March 25  Jane Jacobs, “Sidewalks” and “Parks” in *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)  
 J.B. Jackson, “The Stranger’s Path” (1957)

March 27  Keith Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape”

Week 11      Places of Memory and the Politics of Preservation

- April 1      Sustainability and heritage garden tour of Old Salem
- Apr. 3      Discussion: Old Salem gardens and preservation  
Workshop: Digitizing the place study with Chelcie Rowell
- PLACE STUDY DRAFT DUE

Week 12      Interviews

- Apr. 8      Workshop: Preparing for and conducting field interviews
- GROUP CONTRACT DUE
  - PLACE STUDY CRITIQUES DUE

Apr. 10      **No class** / field interviews

Week 13      Films

- Apr. 15      Workshop: Indexing audio and building a narrative with photographs
- Apr. 17      Workshop: Digital film editing with Barry Davis
- FINAL PLACE STUDY POSTED TO SITE

Week 14      Thinking Through Technological Solutions to Environmental Challenges

- Apr. 22      Film: “Chasing Ice”
- FINAL FILMS DUE
- Apr. 24      Discussion of “Chasing Ice” and students’ documentary film screening
- Practice presentation for Humanities Institute

April 25: Humanities Institute presentation 3-5 PM (Reynolda 301)

Week 15      Conclusions and Looking Forward

- Apr. 29       Elizabeth Kolbert, “Recall of the Wild” *New Yorker*
- REFLECTION PAPER DUE