

## WR 353 Writing About Places—Sample Course Syllabus

For Cat II

This course is planned to start in Ecampus, but it may also be taught on campus as well.

***NOTE to prospective Ecampus students:** This sample syllabus is intended to provide students who are considering taking this course an idea of what they will be learning. A more detailed syllabus will be available on the course Blackboard site for enrolled students and may be more current than this sample syllabus (February 2013).*

**WR 353 Writing About Places** (3 credits; 90 hours of learning in Ecampus)

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Office hours: TBD – Virtual Office, Skype

**Prerequisite:** WR 121 English Composition

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

#### **WR 353. WRITING ABOUT PLACES (3).**

Utilizing personal experience and research, students study, discuss, and practice the conventions of writing about place from a global and local perspective for various audiences. Involves reading contemporary authors of place-based writing, informal and formal writing assignments, research assignments, multimedia presentations, lectures, group and online activities, and a final portfolio.

**PREREQS:** WR 121

### **COURSE INFORMATION:**

*If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are.—Wendell Berry*

*Of all the memberships we identify ourselves by the one thing that is most forgotten, and that has the greatest potential for healing, is place. We must learn to know, love, and join our place even more than we love our own ideas.—Gary Snyder*

*Home for us is not the place we were born, or that perfect somewhere else we used to dream of, but the place where we are—the place we stay long enough to begin to see. We know it imperfectly, not mindfully enough. But here we begin, and when we start over in another place we'll take what we know of this place with us, we'll begin this much closer to home.—John Daniel*

In today's highly interconnected global world, the ability to work with diverse students, colleagues, and communities is vital. In order to communicate effectively with others, particularly those from other countries and cultures, we must understand not only where they come from but where we come from. This course is designed to help you in that understanding, using place not only to ground us in our mutually entwined dialogues but to provide a jumping off point into new explorations of other places and selves, including our many own.

The definition of “place” for this course is deliberately broad: it includes both global and local, national and international, natural and human-made landscapes in wilderness, rural, suburban, and urban contexts, as well as the various systems within these, encompassing all the objective forms of a place—living and non-living, human and non-human—and, just as importantly, the subjective psychological, or inner, experiences associated with the places in our lives.

This is not strictly a travel writing course or a nature writing course, though we will certainly examine examples of both travel writing and nature writing. Whether you have traveled or studied abroad or at home, you will find ways to think and write about your experiences of places in the world. Specifically, we will practice the following:

We will learn how to write about those places important to us by closely examining and utilizing such elements as history, geography, language, and culture (through personal experience and research) in order not just to write more effectively about the places in our lives but also to better understand ourselves and our place in the wider global world.

We will consider the journalistic five W's, plus one: *Who* (people or non-human agents), *What* (action or events), *Where* (place), *When* (chronology), *Why* (motive), and finally *How* (the underlying machinations that tie all of the above together, and the discerning of which is a key function of critical thinking).

And, through close reading of the assigned texts, we will consider the various techniques used by established writers to convey a sense of place, as well as the roles place plays in their writing, ultimately adapting and utilizing these strategies in our own writing.

Some of the questions we will explore in this course include the following:

- How does writing about place relate to nature writing? Travel writing? Personal narrative? Literary journalism?
- Does how we define a genre affect how we read and write a work in that genre?
- What are some of the reasons it might be important to write about place?
- What does it mean to have a relationship with a place? How have our relationships with place changed over time?
- Do the places we inhabit or visit affect how we view the rest of the world, others, ourselves? If so, how?
- Do the places we inhabit affect how we communicate with each other?
- “Place,” “space,” “environment,” “landscape,” “country,” “culture,” etc.—what are the differences, commonalities, and connections between these terms? Does using different language change how we view or experience a place?
- Do men and women view or experience place differently? Do people of different ethnicities or nationalities? If so, what are the implications of this?
- How do social, economic, and cultural forces influence our concept of place? How does this in turn influence how we act toward the places (and people) in our lives?

Ultimately, it is hoped that you will find a sense of being home in the places you write about—wherever they may be, and however far they may be from your actual place of birth or regular residence—and that in knowing *where* you are through your writing, you will come to better understand *who* you are.

## LEARNING RESOURCES:

**Hardware:** Computer with fast internet connection; headset to record narration for presentations; speakers/headset to listen to audio presentations.

**Software:** Word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation (slide) software capable of saving and sending in .doc/docx-xls/xlsx-PPT/PPTx; .rtf; and/or PDF formats.

For free versions try Zoho Notebook, Glogster, or Prezi for presentations; for voice, consider Audioboo.fm, Voicethread, or Fotobabble.

*NOTE to prospective students: Please check with the OSU Bookstore for up-to-date DVD, course packet, and textbook information for the term AND SECTION in which you enroll (<http://www.osubookstore.com/> or 800-595-0357). If you purchase course materials from other sources, be very careful to obtain the correct ISBN.*

### **SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS:**

- *Wildbranch: An Anthology of Nature, Environmental, and Place-based Writing*, eds. Florence Caplow and Susan Cohen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010)
- *Antarctica: Life on the Ice*, ed. Susan Fox Rogers (Palo Alto: Travelers' Tales, 2007)
- *The Far Corner: Northwestern Views on Land, Life, and Literature* by John Daniel (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009)
- A publication of your choice that focuses strongly on a particular place (for approval) for Unit 5
- Articles and handouts I will prepare and disseminate on Blackboard, etc.

In addition to these books and anthologies, we will also read more widely from literary journals, magazines, digital/online publications, websites, and blogs in order to understand and appreciate contemporary writers whose work focuses on place and the many (and varied) venues in which their work appears.

### **OPTIONAL/RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS AND MATERIALS:**

- Any relevant title from the Best American Series. Two recent publications include *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2012*, eds. Dan Ariely and Tim Folger (New York: Mariner Books, 2012), and *The Best American Travel Writing 2012*, eds. Jason Wilson and William T. Vollmann (New York: Mariner Books, 2012)
- *Lonely Planet's Guide to Travel Writing* by Donald George, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Lonely Planet)
- *On Writing Well: 30th Anniversary Edition* by William Zinsser (New York: Harper Perennial)
- *Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E. B. White, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1999)
- *MLA Handbook*, 7th ed. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009)
- A good "collegiate" dictionary (either print or CD-ROM)
- A suitable writing journal (notebook)

Find textbooks for this course at the OSU Beaver Store (current term only). For questions related to course materials, contact the OSU Beaver Store.

### **LEARNING GOALS AND OUTCOMES:**

**Outcomes specific to WR 353:** You will be successful when you can demonstrate the ability, at the 300-level, to

- Write feature-length pieces (articles, essays, travelogues, etc.) that accurately, compellingly, and in a multidimensional way present or interpret particular places for various audiences.
- Choose content, form, language, voice, style, and rhetorical strategies appropriate to various publications and their audiences.
- Adapt and utilize the strategies of successful contemporary place-based writers, including appropriate documentation styles. This class uses MLA style.

- Research—find, evaluate, integrate, and synthesize in an ethical manner the necessary information (both primary and secondary sources) for completion of a project, including visual enhancements (charts, graphs, photographs, images, etc.) to supplement text, when appropriate.
- Workshop, revise text, respond effectively to peers' work in progress, participate in collaborative learning activities, and consistently contribute to the ongoing course dialogue.

**Blackboard:** This course will be delivered via Blackboard, your OSU online learning community, where you will interact with your classmates and with me. Within the course Blackboard site you will access the learning materials, tutorials, and syllabus; discuss issues; submit assignments; take quizzes; email other students and the instructor; participate in online activities; and display your projects. To preview how an online course works, visit the Ecampus Course Demo. For technical assistance, Blackboard and otherwise, see <http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/services/technical-help.htm>.

You need to have frequent access to the internet; check your ONID email and Blackboard several different times a week to keep current.

### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

You will be expected to read the assigned material and prepare written responses to it as assigned, which along with quizzes and regular informal assignments designed to focus on specific aspects of writing about place will constitute 10% of your final grade. Your first major assignment will be a personal reflection about a place important to you (10%). In addition, you will be required to produce a research project on place-based media (15%), two original feature-length pieces of place-based writing (20% and 25%, respectively), and a review of a publication focused strongly on place (10%). Finally, there will be a final portfolio due (10%), a thoughtfully constructed and comprehensive collection of your writing throughout the term in which you will be expected to revise your major assignments a final time and write a reflective essay summarizing what you learned and how that is incorporated in your work.

<b>Overview of Assignments:</b>	
Unit 1: Personal Reflection About Place	100
Unit 2: Place Media Round-up Project	150
Unit 3: Short Feature Essay/Article (w/ Annotated Bibliography)	200
Unit 4: Long Feature Essay/Article	250
Unit 5: Place-based Publication Review	100
Informal Writing (homework, quizzes, etc.)	100
Final Portfolio	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>

### COURSE POLICIES:

**Late Assignments:** All assignments are due at the *time specified on Blackboard* and will be submitted on the link into Grade Center. Any assignment turned in after that time will be considered late. You have up to one week from the due date in which to turn in any late assignment, with a 15% penalty to your grade for that assignment. After one week, the assignment will be recorded with a grade of zero. We simply have too much to do in an extremely short period of time, and this policy is designed to keep you from falling hopelessly behind in class.

**Incompletes:** As a rule, all assignments must be turned in by the final class session. An incomplete may be assigned on an individual basis only under the most extreme or unusual of circumstances.

**Ethical Conduct:** Students are expected to act professionally in class, whether that is on campus or online, arriving on time and being polite. Behaviors that are disruptive to learning will not be tolerated and will be referred to the Student Conduct and Mediation Program for disciplinary action. In keeping with federal law, behaviors that create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating environment based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, marital status or sexual orientation will be referred to the Affirmative Action Office.

Cheating, in any form, is not tolerated at Oregon State University. Any plagiarism or use of someone else's writing, work, information, or ideas without proper citations including copy/paste that lacks required quote marks—intentional or accidental—may result in an F in the class and a written report filed with the Dean's office for further disciplinary action. Students may not recycle your own work from other classes.

**Link to Statement of Expectations for Student Conduct:**

[http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/rules/oars\\_500/oar\\_576/576\\_015.html](http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/rules/oars_500/oar_576/576_015.html).

**Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities:** Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098.

**SIMPLIFIED SAMPLE SCHEDULE:**

Weekly homework (HW) will include but is not limited to written responses to assigned readings, assignments focused on specific aspects of writing about place, discussion board postings, brainstorming activities, peer review workshop comments, and research assignments. Some assignments may involve group activity. Quizzes, which may be unannounced, are not reflected below.

**Week 1:** Introduction to course and concepts, begin Personal Reflection About Place, readings, HW 1

**Week 2:** Personal Reflection About Place due for workshop, readings, HW 2

**Week 3:** Begin Place Media Round-up Project, readings, HW 3

**Week 4:** Place Media Round-up Project due, readings, HW 4

**Week 5:** Research, begin Short Feature Essay/Article, Annotated Bibliography due, readings, HW 5

**Week 6:** Short Feature Essay/Article due for workshop, readings, HW 6

**Week 7:** Begin Long Feature Essay/Article, readings, HW 7

**Week 8:** Long Feature Essay/Article due for workshop, readings, HW 8

**Week 9:** Begin Place-based Publication Review, readings, HW 9

**Week 10:** Place-based Publication Review due for workshop, readings, HW 10, class wrap-up

**Finals week:** Portfolio w/ reflective essay due

**SAMPLE SCHEDULED READINGS:**

**Week 1:** Paul Grindrod's essay "Des Ta Te: A Love Story" and Jennifer Barton's essay "To Liv" (from Part I: Intimacy) in *Wildbranch: An Anthology of Nature, Environmental, and Place-based Writing*

**Week 2:** Glenda Cotter's essay "Migrations" (from Part I: Intimacy) and Susan Futrell's essay "Prairie Skin" (from Part II: Speaking of Place) in *Wildbranch: An Anthology of Nature, Environmental, and Place-based Writing*

**Week 3:** Rachel Shaw's essay "Settling" (from Part II: Speaking of Place) and Simmons B. Buntin's essay "A Pure Color" (from Part IV: On Perceiving and Knowing) in *Wildbranch: An Anthology of Nature, Environmental, and Place-based Writing*

**Week 4:** Maureen Sullivan's essay "Jupiter Came Down on Tuesday" and Scott Russell Sanders' essay "For the Children" (from Part V: For the Children/For the Future) in *Wildbranch: An Anthology of Nature, Environmental, and Place-based Writing*

**Week 5:** Karen Joyce's essay "The Day It Rained Chickens" and Jim Mastro's essay "Lost in the Storm" in *Antarctica: Life on the Ice*

**Week 6:** Susan Fox Rogers' essay "The Secret of Silence" and Lucy Jane Bledsoe's essay "How to Find a Dinosaur" in *Antarctica: Life on the Ice*

**Week 7:** William L. Fox's essay "Leaving the Ice" and Guy G. Guthridge's essay "Maverick Among Scientists" in *Antarctica: Life on the Ice*

**Week 8:** John Daniel's essays "A Word in Favor of Rootlessness" and "In Praise of Darkness" (from Part I: Loose on the Land) in *The Far Corner: Northwestern Views on Land, Life, and Literature*

**Week 9:** John Daniel's essays "A Place in the Rivered Land" (from Part II: Oregon Rivers) and "'Creative nonfiction' and the Province of Personal Narrative" (from Part III: Writing Life) in *The Far Corner: Northwestern Views on Land, Life, and Literature*

**Week 10:** John Daniel's essays "The Mother of Beauty" and "A Word in Favor of Rootedness" (from Part IV: The Wages of Mortality) in *The Far Corner: Northwestern Views on Land, Life, and Literature*

**This course is offered through Oregon State University Extended Campus. For more information, contact: Web: [ecampus.oregonstate.edu](http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu) Email: [ecampus@oregonstate.edu](mailto:ecampus@oregonstate.edu) Tel: 800-667-1465**