

EngL 8090: Whose Nature? The Environment in Humanistic Inquiry (Seminar in Special Subjects - Grad School Seminar)

Th, 3:35 pm - 6:05 pm
Amundson Hall 104
3 credits
Fall 2009
Class #55946
Section 3

Dan Philippon
Associate Professor of English
21 Lind Hall
Phone: 612-624-4209
Email: danp@umn.edu
Office Hours: Tu/Th, 1 - 2:30 pm
Web Site: <http://umn.edu/~danp>

Course Description

This interdisciplinary dissertation writing seminar will examine three aspects of advanced study of the environment in the humanities: (1) how three humanistic disciplines--literary and rhetorical studies, history, and philosophy--each address "the environment" in different ways, (2) how an emerging body of interdisciplinary work breaks these disciplinary boundaries in innovative ways, and (3) how students in the natural and social sciences can benefit from engaging humanistic approaches in their own dissertation work. The title of the course—"Whose Nature?"—is meant to summarize the overarching question that drives much of the work in the environmental humanities, which seeks to link understandings of the physical environment common to the natural sciences with questions of human identity and purpose that characterize the humanities. Readings will include two or three recent books that began as dissertations (to serve as models for student work), as well as articles that represent the different disciplinary perspectives in the humanities and their application to the natural and social sciences. Additional readings will come from students' own dissertation work, which seminar participants will be asked to workshop, much as a writing support group might do. Depending on student interest, the course may also involve visits from faculty members in related areas, a field session, and a variety of cooperative learning activities.

Course Web Site

<http://www.moodle.umn.edu/>

Objectives

What questions will the course help you to answer? How will you grow in knowledge and understanding? What intellectual abilities will the course help you to develop?

This course is intended to help you:

- identify best practices in, and outstanding models of, interdisciplinary research and writing
- expand your knowledge of your dissertation/research subject across disciplinary lines
- make progress on your dissertation in an intellectually supportive, interdisciplinary environment
- present your research topics and questions so people from other disciplines can understand them
- give and receive feedback in ways that will help you and other writers during the seminar and throughout your career
- read like a writer, not only for argument, content, and method but also for genre conventions and craft

Texts

What reading materials will help you to pursue the goals of this course?

Most of our published reading will consist of articles posted to our class Moodle site, listed above. These will primarily be secondary texts that (a) discuss theory/methods and/or (b) model how to do a scholarly analysis. However, we will also be reading these for what they can tell us about academic discourse generally, and its stylistic conventions specifically. Based on student interest, we may also read a few primary texts, so as to model how to read analytically, as well as some autobiographical writing by academics. In addition, we will be reading one book:

- Stanley Cavell, et al., Philosophy and Animal Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), ISBN-13: 978-0231145145, \$24.40 (hardcover)

Grades

How will I evaluate the nature, quality, and progress of your learning?

I will award grades in this course according to the University of Minnesota's Uniform Grading Policy:

- A: achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B: achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- C: achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
- D: achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
- F: represents failure and signifies that the work was either:
 - completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit, or
 - not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an "I" (Incomplete)

I will also award pluses and minuses, with the highest possible grade being an "A." Grades of "A," "B," "C" (including "C-") may be applied to a Graduate School degree program.

I will assign an "I" (Incomplete) only when a written agreement exists specifying when the work of the course will be completed. In most cases, the deadline for completion will be the beginning of the following semester; only in extraordinary circumstances will the deadline extend beyond this. If a student receiving an incomplete has not successfully completed the work of the course after one year, I will replace the "I" with a final A-F grade.

Grades will be assigned in terms of a percentage of possible points according to the following standards:

	B+ >= 87%	C+ >= 77%	D+ >= 67%		
A >= 93%	B >= 83%	C >= 73%	D >= 63%	F < 63%	
A- >= 90%	B- >= 80%	C- >= 70%			

I may choose to grade more generously, but I will not raise my standards above these. If at any time you have concerns about your grade, please do not hesitate to contact me. All grades are based on the quality of work submitted, not on hours of effort.

University Policies

What University policies apply to this course so that you will have a safe, productive, and fair environment for learning?

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment by or toward a member of the University community is prohibited by Board of Regents policy. Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 419 Morrill Hall.

Classroom Conduct

All students at the University have the right to a civil, productive, and stimulating learning environment. In turn, instructors have a responsibility to nurture and maintain such an environment. Lively, even heated, discussion is not disruptive behavior. Both instructors and students have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights of each other and an equally fundamental obligation to respect the instructional setting as a place for civil, courteous behavior. Students who disrupt the educational process because of discourteous, threatening, harassing, or other aggressive behavior will be removed from class.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. If you have a disability, please contact me and/or Disability Services (180 McNamara Alumni Center, [612] 626-1333 TTY/voice) to schedule an appointment with a Specialist. All requests will remain confidential. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. Any student found guilty of scholastic dishonesty in this course can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course and be reported to the University's Office for Student Academic Integrity. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, please ask.

Course Requirements

What will you be doing to pursue the goals of this course?

To succeed in this course, you must complete the following requirements, which are worth a total of 1,000 possible points. For more information on this point system, see the section on grades.

1. Attendance and Participation (100 points): The word "seminar" derives from the Latin *seminarium*, or "seed plot," a place or thing in which something is developed or cultivated. For all of us to develop our knowledge and skills with regard to our subject will require equal amounts of independent study and collaborative learning. Each week we will assemble for 2-½ hours (with a 15-minute break), bringing with us the results of our independent reading, thinking, and writing. (You should expect to read approximately 50-100 pages per week, including peer writing.) Even more than other kinds of courses, seminars are intended to be places where everyone works together to broaden our knowledge and deepen our skills. As a result, I expect only the best of what you have to offer. Your mind, your courtesy, and your sense of humor should all be operating in top form. You should be eager to learn and grow, open to constructive criticism, and willing to help and collaborate with others. Needless to say, your regular attendance and active participation are required. If you know in advance that you are going to be absent on a particular day, please let me know.

To help us get started, I would like you to submit two autobiographies of 600-900 words (approximately 2-3 pages). Neither of these will be graded but both will count toward your attendance and participation score.

- (a) The first is an intellectual autobiography, explaining who you are, where you've been, and where you're going. I am particularly interested in the intersection of your physical travels with your academic and intellectual ones. Please also explain your expectations for this class and how we can all help you fulfill them. Use this as an opportunity not only to enlighten us about your personal story but also to establish your own focus for the semester. Please post this on our Moodle "Discussion Forum" by 9 a.m. on 9/15 (Tuesday).
- (b) The second is a writer's autobiography. You may write this in any way you see fit, but here are three questions to consider as you begin (adapted from Barbara Kamler and Pat Thompson's Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for Supervision [Routledge, 2006]):
 - what adjectives would you use to describe yourself as a writer?
 - what different kinds of writing have you done over your school and professional life?
 - what types/pieces of writing have you found to be especially satisfying or difficult?

Please post this on our Moodle "Discussion Forum" by 9 a.m. on 9/22 (Tuesday). In addition, please also post a piece of writing as a Word attachment. This can any piece of writing at all, but it should be no longer than a seminar paper (15-20 pp.). It may be published or unpublished, and it may be something of which you are proud or something on which you are still working. In the body of your post, please briefly explain the context for the piece, so we know how to read it.

Other writing I may ask you to do as part of your attendance and participation score includes reviews of journals, dissertations, and books, as well as some additional personal reflections.

2. Reading Responses (200 points): Another important part of this course is the series of reading responses you will write over the course of the term, in response to our course texts. These responses will allow you share your written thoughts with other students in the class, and they could also help you to develop your own writing projects.

Each response should be 300-600 words long (approximately 1-2 pages) and should be a thoughtful, considered reaction to one or more of the texts we are reading for that week. Your reading responses should be based primarily on your own attention to and engagement with the texts, but I also encourage you to engage the responses of other students by posting follow-up responses.

Reading responses should be submitted to the “Discussion Forum” section of our Moodle site by 9 a.m. on the days indicated. Because we all need time to read and process these responses before class, late and missing responses will receive no credit. Please plan your reading accordingly. At the end of the semester, I will grade your responses according to the following scale:

- A: frequent and courteous participation, with mature and thoughtful insights
- B: above average participation and insight
- C: moderate participation and reasonable insight

3. Leading Discussion (100 points): For one class meeting, I would like you to be the “point person” for the text(s) assigned for that day. This means that you should pay particular attention to the reading and be prepared to provide some insight and commentary about it for 10-15 minutes at the start of class.

4. Workshops and Peer Editing Groups (100 points): An essential part of this course are the workshops and peer editing groups, in which you will read and comment on the writing of other students, as well as receive valuable feedback about your own writing. You will also likely need to meet one or more writing partners outside of class, either in addition to or in place of one or more class sessions.

5. Final Project (500 points): I will work individually with each of you to develop a final project appropriate to your interests and the goals of this course. This will likely be a work of approximately 30-40 pages related to your dissertation—such as a prospectus, literature review, analysis chapter, or grant proposal—but it may also take some other form, such as a review essay on a major theme of this course, similar to what you might submit for an oral or written preliminary exam, or a web-based, collaborative, or mixed-media project. Whatever the project, it must represent a publishable example of interdisciplinary study in the environmental humanities, the creation of which is a key objective of this course.

Papers

How should you write and format your papers?

Recognizing that this course will function partly as a writing workshop, I nonetheless expect your writing to be as focused, well-organized, and free of errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation as you can make it. You should also strive for brevity, clarity, and style. You may use whatever citation style is appropriate to your discipline and/or needs (MLA, APA, Chicago), but please do not mix styles or create your own citation method. All manuscripts should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and numbered in the upper right-hand corner.

Contact Me

How can you contact me to help you learn?

The best way to contact me is immediately after class; I would be happy to meet with you briefly to answer a question or to elaborate on a point made in class. To contact me at other times, feel free to call me at my office, send me email, or stop by during my office hours. If my office hours are inconvenient for you, please let me know, and we can arrange to meet at another time. Even if you do not have a specific question, I encourage you to stop by my office at some point during the semester, so that I can get to know you better as a person and so that we can talk in more detail about the subjects that interest you. The main reason I am here is to help you learn and grow, so please take advantage of this opportunity and come see me. **My contact information appears at the top of this syllabus.**

Course Schedule

How is this course structured to develop your knowledge, understanding, and abilities throughout the semester?

This schedule is subject to change, so if you miss a class you should check with a classmate for the most current information. Lecture notes, handouts, and additional readings will be available on our web site.

1. Interdisciplinary Thinking and Writing

- 9/10 **Welcome**
- 9/17 **Writing an Interdisciplinary Dissertation**
Review: Materials in Part 1 of our Moodle Site
Read: Readings in Part 2 of our Moodle Site
DUE: Intellectual Autobiography
- 9/24 **Interdisciplinary Subjects, Interdisciplinary Approaches: The Case of Food**
IAS Event: "Food From Here, For Here: Rekindling the Intimacy of Our Food System": A Talk by Margaret Adamek (125 Nolte, 4-5:30 pm)
Choose: One book on dissertation writing from the UMN Libraries to review
DUE: Writer's Autobiography, sample piece of writing (Josh Morsell absent)
- 10/1 **Writing for Academics and Other Audiences**
Read: Readings in Part 3 of our Moodle Site, writing samples submitted last week
DUE: 1-2 page (300-600 words) final project proposal

2. What is Human? What is Nature?

- 10/8 **The Environmental Humanities: An Overview**
Read: articles in Part 4 of our Moodle Site (on environmental lit/ communication, history, and philosophy, esp. pastoral)
Discussion Leaders: Sara Wellman and Vanessa Waltz
DUE: reading response, piece of writing to be workshopped (Jess, Vanessa, Joe)
- 10/15 Workshop #1
Read: writing from Jess, Vanessa, and Joe
DUE: review of book on dissertation writing from the UMN Libraries
- 10/22 **Human Natures: Environmental Justice, Ecofeminism, Queer Ecology**
Read: articles in Part 5 of our Moodle site (David Pellow, Karen Warren, Cate Sandilands, etc.)
Discussion Leaders: Michelle Garvey and Jacqueline Schiappa
Visit from Lisa Uddin
DUE: reading response, piece of writing to be workshopped (Mike, Michelle, Sara)
(Mike Stannard absent)
- 10/29 Workshop #2
Read: writing from Mike, Michelle, and Sara; a sample dissertation prospectus in Part 6 of our Moodle site
- 11/5 **Human Animals: Critical Animal Studies, Embodied Posthumanism, Sociobiology**
Read: Philosophy and Animal Life; articles in Part 7 of our Moodle site (Steven Pinker, etc.)
Discussion Leaders: Josh Mabie and Mike Stannard
Visit from Stacy Alaimo
DUE: reading response, piece of writing to be workshopped (Jacqueline, Josh)

- 11/12 **Workshop #3**
Read: writing from Jacqueline and Josh; two sample dissertation chapters in Part 8 of our Moodle site (a theory/method chapter and an analytic chapter)
(Michelle Garvey absent, Mike Stannard possibly absent)
- 11/19 **Human Actions: Globalization, Environmental Citizenship, Climate Activism**
Read: articles in Part 9 of our Moodle site (Ursula Heise, Andrew Dobson, Bill McKibben, etc.)
Discussion Leaders: Jess Prody and Joe Bartolotta
Visit from Matt Huber
DUE: reading response
- 11/26 **Thanksgiving: No class**

3. The Future of the Humanities

- 12/3 **Being Interdisciplinary Together**
IAS Event: Panel Discussion: "Imagining the River: The Mississippi Gorge" (IAS, 125 Nolte, 4-5:30 pm)
DUE: Final Projects
- 12/10 **Last Class**
Course evaluations