

Course Information

ENGL 5360 - Topics in American Literature: Nature Writing and the Environmental Humanities

Instructor: James Finley - james.finley@tamusa.edu

Meeting: Mondays, 5:30 pm - 8:15 pm, Hall 203

Student hours: M 4:30 pm - 5:30 pm, Hall 328, and by appointment

Course Description

This course will explore representations of nonhuman environments in American literature, focusing on both canonical environmental writings and texts that innovate within and break from that tradition so as to consider new ways of living amidst ecological crisis. Throughout the semester, we will consider how American writers have represented the environment, particularly in relation to capitalism, imperialism, food, industrialism, science, health, indigeneity and traditional ecological knowledge, race, gender, spirituality, and climate change. This course will also consider some developments within ecocriticism and the environmental humanities and we will examine how to do this sort of work on a range of materials so that your future scholarship teaching, or other sorts of work can account for, and be accountable to, the more-than-human world.

Learning Objectives. At the end of the course, students will have:

1. developed a rich understanding of how nonhuman environments have been represented in American literature;
2. gained familiarity with ecocriticism and environmental humanities;
3. become more confident in doing interdisciplinary work;
4. and composed a series of written pieces about literature and the environment.

Books

Keywords for Environmental Studies, edited by Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow (New York: New York University Press, 2016) - [library e-book](#)

Walden and Civil Disobedience, by Henry David Thoreau (Penguin, 1983), 9780140390445

Ceremony, by Leslie Marmon Silko (Penguin, 2006), 978-0143104919

Parable of the Sower, by Octavia Butler (Grand Central, 2000), 978-0446675505

Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place, by Terry Tempest Williams (Vintage, 1992), 978-0679740247

Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry - pdfs on Blackboard

Luz at Midnight, Marisol Cortez (Flower Song, 2020), 978-1953447951

The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature, J. Drew Lanham

Course Design and Assignments

Discussion board posts: By 3:00 pm on Mondays when we meet, please post to the discussion board about something from the readings that you found interesting. I ask that you share a paragraph that (1) begins *today I want to talk about*. . . (2) includes a quotation from the assigned reading (if there are more than one readings, please focus on just one for your post, though you're welcome to reference others), and (3) explains in some depth what sort of ideas, questions, connections, conclusions, etc., come from reflecting on the quotation and the topic you've identified. Writing these paragraphs will help you to prepare for class and have something to contribute while also giving you many (small) rough drafts for longer writing in the future. I will read these before we meet

and will build my plans around them. Posts will be graded out of 2 points and will receive full credit if there is an example from the reading and some engagement with the content you have identified.

Mid-Semester Reflection: This assignment asks you to reflect on a series of prompts and consider how your thinking about the material has developed and deepened over the course of the semester.

A full description will be posted to Blackboard.

Final Project: The final project can be an essay or a sustained investigation in another form of a text or topic from this class. A full description will be posted to Blackboard.

CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Readings not in the assigned books will be available through Blackboard or linked to the Library website.

DATE	READINGS / ASSIGNMENTS DUE
M 01/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermonja R. Alston, "Environment," in <i>Keywords</i> • Noel Castree, "Nature," in <i>Keywords</i> • Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, and Colin N. Waters, "Anthropocene," in <i>Keywords</i> • Karla Armbruster, "Nature Writing," in <i>Keywords</i> • Greg Garrard, "Ecocriticism," in <i>Keywords</i> <p>Discussion board 1</p>
M 02/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Parable of the Sower</i> <p>Discussion board 2</p>
M 02/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teena Gabrielson, "The Nature of Gender," in <i>The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities</i>, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Stephanie Foote (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 56-69. • Stephanie LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre," in <i>Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times</i>, edited by Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (Penn State University Press, 2017), 220-38. <p>Discussion board 3</p>
M 02/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Walden</i>
M 02/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jedediah Purdy, "Natural Utopias," in <i>After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene</i> (Harvard University Press, 2015), 116-52. • Michelle C. Neely, "Radical Minimalism: Walden in the Capitalocene," <i>The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies</i> n.s. 26 (2018): 144-50. <p>Discussion board 4</p>
M 03/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refuge</i> <p>Discussion board 5</p>
M 03/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature," in <i>Material Feminisms</i>, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Indiana University Press, 2008), 237-64. <p>Discussion board 6</p>
M 03/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems - tbd <p>Discussion board 7 Midsemester reflection</p>
M 03/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ceremony</i> <p>Discussion board 8</p>

M 04/07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Luz at Midnight</i> Discussion board 9
M 04/14	Visit from Marisol Cortez
M 04/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Home Place</i> Discussion board 10
M 04/28	TBD
M 05/05	Draft of final project due
M 05/12	Presentations / Workshop
W 05/14	Final Project due

Student (Office) Hours: If you would like assistance with an assignment, if you have questions about a reading or something we covered in class, or if you have concerns about anything related to this class, I encourage you to come to my office or sign up for a phone call or Zoom meetings. Student Hours are not only for instances when you are struggling with the class, though I will certainly do my best to help you in those instances. More broadly, I welcome the chance to talk more about something we covered, or to hear about how you are thinking about something from our class connecting to another class, or anything where I may be of assistance. I have dedicated 4:30 - 5:30 pm on Mondays for our class, but I am able to meet (or speak by phone or Zoom) at other times if this window does not work for you. Please email me to schedule an appointment.

Communication: Please call me Dr. or Professor Finley. My pronouns are he/him. I will occasionally send messages to you via email, so please try to check your University email at least once a day. (And please check that messages from Blackboard aren't flagged as Spam.) I will do my best to respond to your emails quickly. You can leave messages on my office phone, but the best way to contact me is through email. If you are having trouble accessing your email, please [contact the IT help desk](#).

Course Material, Academic Freedom, and Students' Rights. The materials and activities in this class were developed based on my subject-matter expertise and align with norms and best-practices in the discipline you are learning. As the Student Handbook states, "students will be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views in any course of study and to withhold judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled." As an instructor, I will respect the rights enumerated in the handbook: "These rights include respect for personal feelings; freedom from indignity of any type, freedom from control by any person except as may be in accord with Texas A&M University-San Antonio, and conditions allowing them to make the best use of their time and talents toward the objectives which brought them to this University." I ask that you respect the rights of your classmates to learn and have a positive experience in this class. As the handbook further explains, "students are expected at all times to recognize constituted authority, to conform to the ordinary rules of good conduct, to be truthful, to respect the rights of others, to protect private and public property, and to make the best use of their time toward an education." I ask that you, accordingly, respect my intellectual property and not share materials from our class with those outside of the university community and that you respect academic freedom, which presumes that "teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject." Should you have a problem with any of the materials in this course, please reach out to me for an explanation of why these materials are disciplinarily legitimate and to discuss strategies for completing the work in a manner that is acceptable to you and that meets

course objectives. I ask that you do so before or after class and not disrupt the learning experiences of others if you have any objections.

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Support Services in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210, or at (210) 784-1335 or visit <https://www.tamusa.edu/index.html> or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services.

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2').

For more information and self-help resources, please visit www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling

Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>.

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Download the SafeZone App for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned

to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as e-portfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on “Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center” to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://bit.ly/WLDCCenter>.

Meeting 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 (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources they may possess.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to communicate, in advance if possible, and special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment, drill requirements, disability accommodations). You are also encouraged to visit the Patriots’ Casa in-person room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student’s GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as “F” grades and will impact the student’s GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have

experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant students that would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition and that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K).

Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an

individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, [Student Code of Conduct](#), on our website, University Catalog and to comply with them, as well as federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide an environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notification.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the [Student Code of Conduct](#).