What is “nature?” “the environment?” “ecology?” As writers, how do we express our understanding of these ideas? How do we engage the natural world, and how does that engagement affect our writing?

Beyond this, how does our writing affect the natural world? As humans of the early 21st century, how does our language drive our actions in relation to the environment?

How are these very terms problematic? How do they limit, deform, or constrain our relations with the natural world?

This course will explore these questions through the framework of a diverse selection of readings and a writing workshop in which students will be asked to generate their own creative work.

Learning Goals:

1. Generating creative work. Our first goal in this course is simple: write. This course is writing-intensive, and will only work if everyone is committed to lots and lots of writing. Do you need to have written before? NO. Do you need to identify as a writer? NO. Does your writing need to be “good?” NO. (What’s “good” mean anyway?) Do you need to be open to writing regularly over the course of the semester and sharing that writing with the workshopping community we will develop together? ABSOLUTELY.

2. Exploring the field of nature writing/ecopoetics. We will be doing a lot of very varied reading over the course of the semester in order to become acquainted with how others have written about nature/the environment/ecology. It will not be unusual to have to read a book a week. Some of it will be enjoyable. Some of it will be challenging. In order for this course to work, you must be committed to actively engaging with the readings and come prepared to discuss them.

3. Developing your own approach to engaging nature/the environment/ecology as a creative writer.
Assignments:

1. **Journal:** Weekly visit to the same place: Once a week, spend one half-hour in a space of your choosing. Sit quietly and still for fifteen minutes, simply observing. Spend the next fifteen minutes journaling/freewriting about what you see/feel. These will be submitted to the professor twice during the semester for grading.

2. **Short pieces with Writer’s Statement in Small Groups:** For every week you ARE NOT submitting work to be workshopped, you will submit to your small group a short piece (either 2-3 pages of prose or 1 to 3 poems). These pieces are meant to be generative, that is, they can be rough/first drafts where you are trying out a given technique or exploring certain concepts, with the idea that you might return to them in your longer pieces. As part of this assignment you will write a short writer’s statement (no more than half a page), explaining what you were trying to accomplish in this piece. Other students in your small group will critique your piece and offer a response of no more than half a page (100 words or so).

3. **Workshop pieces and Writer’s Statement:** You will submit to the professor and to your class-mates one week before your workshop date, a long piece (7-10 pages of prose or 4-6 poems) that you consider “finished” or at least “polished.” Along with your creative work you will also submit a 1-page writer’s statement explaining how you see your work engaging with “nature” or “the environment” or “ecology” and relate it to one text we have so far discussed. In order for your class-mates to have enough time to properly read and critique your piece, IT MUST BE SUBMITTED NO LATER THAN 1 WEEK BEFORE YOUR WORKSHOP DATE. Late submissions WILL LOSE ONE GRADE PER DAY.

4. **Workshop Responses:** You will be responsible for reading and critiquing each workshop piece. This will include marginal comments in the text and a one-page letter to the writer. In the workshop, you will be expected to participate in the class discussion of the piece. YOU MUST SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS TO THE WRITER AND TO ME BY THE END OF THE CLASS IN WHICH THE PIECE IS WORKSHOPPED. LATE RESPONSES WILL LOSE ONE GRADE PER DAY.

5. **Oral Presentation:** You will be responsible for leading discussion of the readings for a given week by giving the class your analysis of the piece/pieces assigned for that week and asking questions to generate class discussion.

6. **Portfolio and Writer’s Statement:** Your final project will be to submit a portfolio of “finished” work, preferably including at least some work that has been workshopped during the course and which has been revised with class comments taken into account. This portfolio will be composed of 20-25 pages of prose or 12-15 poems. Along with this creative portfolio, you will submit a 5 page writer’s statement that explains how your work engages
with “nature” or “the environment” or “ecology.” To do this you will need to discuss your work in relation to two works we read in the course.

**Booklist:**
Reilly, Evelyn. *Styrofoam.*
Teare, Brian. *Companion Grasses.*
Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge.*
Kapil, Bhanu. *Humanimal.*

and selections of other texts provided on Blackboard.

**Grading:**
- Participation/Attendance: 10%
- Journals: 10%
- Short Pieces: 15%
- Workshop Pieces: 20%
- Workshop Responses: 15%
- Oral Presentation/Discussion Leader: 10%
- Final Portfolio: 20%

**Attendance Policy:**
Students will be allowed two unexcused tardinesses of no more than 15 minutes and one unexcused absence. After this, their final grade will be dropped one level (i.e., an A- will drop to a B+). Because of the amount of reading material covered and out of respect for the fellow writers in your class, it is imperative that you come to class on time, ready for discussion of the works read for class – both assigned reading and workshop pieces.

**Conferences:**
Students will meet with the professor for 2 15-minute conferences over the course of the semester. The first will be to get better acquainted with students’ interests. The second will be to check in on progress towards the final portfolio.

**Schedule:**
**Week 1:**
- Tues, Aug. 30:
  - Class overview, syllabus review.
  - In-class writing exercise.
- Thurs, Sept 1:
Writing workshop exercise.

**Week 2:**
Tues, Sept 6:
Reading: Thoreau, H.D. “Walking.” [BB]
        Carson, Rachel. *Under the Sea-Wind.* Ch. 1, pp. 9-21 [BB]
        Dillard. *Teaching a Stone to Talk.* selections. [BB]

Thurs, Sept 8:
Workshop

**Week 3: CONFERENCE #1**
Tues, Sept 13:
Reading: Reilly. *Styrofoam.*

Workshop

Thurs, Sept 15:
Workshop

**Week 4:**
Tues, Sept 20:
Reading:
        Intro. (pp. xli-lxv) and selections from *Ecopoetry Anthology:*
        Niedeker. pp. 74-77
        Olson. pp. 91-98
        Graham. pp. 286-291
        Hillman. pp. 320-326
        Hirshfield. pp. 327-330
        Snyder. pp. 491-499
        okpik. p. 415

Workshop.

Thurs, Sept 22:
Workshop.

**Week 5:**
Tues, Sept 27:
Reading: Abram. *Spell of the Sensuous.* Chs. 1 and 2 (BB)
Dungy. “Tales from a Black Girl on Fire, or Why I Hate to Walk Outside and See Things Burning” [BB]

Workshop.

Thurs, Sept 29:
Workshop.

**Week 6:**
Tues, Oct 4:
Reading: Leopold. “Land Ethic” from *Sand County Almanac.* [BB]
Snyder. “The Etiquette of Freedom” and “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking” from *The Practice of the Wild.* [BB]
Snyder. “Smokey the Bear Sutra.” [BB]
Workshop.

Thurs, Oct 6:
Workshop.

**Week 7:**
Tues, Oct 11:
Reading: Kimmerer. *Braiding Sweetgrass.* TBD [BB]
Hurd. *Stirring the Mud.* TBD [BB]
Savoy. *Trace.* TBD [BB]
Nabhan, *Cross-Pollinations.* TBD [BB]
Workshop.

Thurs, Oct 13:
Workshop.
**Turn in Journals**

**Week 8: Fall Break**

**Week 9:**
Tues, Oct 25:
Reading: Evernden. “Beyond Ecology.” (BB)
Derrida. *The Animal That Therefore I Am.* Intro. and Ch. 1 (BB)
Workshop.

Thurs, Oct 27:
Workshop.
**Week 10:**
Tues, Nov 1:
Reading:  
  Johnson. *Creaturely*  
  Kapil. *Humanimal.*  
  Magi. “Ecopoetics and the Adversarial Consciousness...” in *Ecolanguage Reader*

Workshop.

Thurs, Nov 3:
Workshop.

**Week 11: CONFERENCE #2**
Tues, Nov 8:
Reading:  
  Skinner. “Thoughts on Things: Poetics of the Third Landscape” in *Ecolanguage Reader.*  
  Roberson. “City Eclogue: Words For It,” in *The Ecopoetry Anthology.* pp. 448-449

Workshop.

Thurs, Nov 10:
Workshop.

**Week 12:**
Tues, Nov 15:
Reading:  
  Teare. *Companion Grasses.*  
  Spahr. selections from *Well Then There Now.* [BB]  
  D’Aquino. selections from *fungus skull eye wing.* [BB]

Workshop.

Thurs, Nov 17:
Workshop.

**Week 13:**
Tues, Nov 22:
Reading:  
  Solnit. selections from *Infinite City.* [BB]  
  Mendieta. selected video works. [links on BB]  
  Finlay. selected sculptures. [BB]  
  Vicuña. selections from *Spit Temple.* [BB]  
  Collis. *decomp.* [BB]  
  Goldsworthy. *Rivers and Tides.* {link on BB}
Workshop.

**Thurs, Nov 24**  
Thanksgiving Break

**Week 14:**  
Tues, Nov 29:  
Reading:  
Williams. *Refuge* (first half)

Workshop.

Thurs, Dec 1:  
Workshop.  
**Turn in journal.**

**Week 15:**  
Tues, Dec 6:  
Reading:  
Williams. *Refuge* (second half)  
Workshop.

Thurs, Dec 8:  
Group work on portfolios.

**Portfolios due by midnight of 12/16**