

ENGLISH 266: SCIENCE AND LITERATURE
INTO THE WOODS: LITERATURE AND NATURE

FALL 2011



Dr. Margaret O'Shaughnessey
Office: 501 Greenlaw
Phone: 962-4039
Email: meo@email.unc.edu

Office Hours: 11-12 MWF and 1-2 MW
Classroom: 222 Greenlaw
Class time: 12-12:50 MWF

TEXTS

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*
Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*
Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*
John Terres, *From Laurel Hill to Siler's Bog: Walking Adventures of a Naturalist*
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*
Bruce Barcott, *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw*
Edward O. Wilson, *Anthill: A Novel*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

English 266 integrates a traditional literature class with an APPLES service-learning experience in order to foster a real-life connection between books and the natural world. We will, for example, be walking along the very same paths walked by John Terres in his book *From Laurel Hill to Siler's Bog: Walking Adventures of a Naturalist* and developing Thoreau-like observation skills as we ramble around Mason Farm, our version of Walden. We will also be learning, through direct observation, all about the North Carolina Piedmont ecosystem. In contrast to most English courses, much of the course material is nonfiction rather than fiction; many of the writers are scientists, foresters, and naturalists whose ideas have influenced American thought and public policy. The writers selected for the course exhibit a strong fusion between the sciences and the humanities. Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, John Terres, and Edward O. Wilson, for example, are highly trained scientists noted for their ability to captivate lay audiences through vivid writing. Bruce Barcott's *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* is an example of investigative journalism on an ecological issue. Blending history, science, politics, religion, and philosophy into finely crafted language, all these writers provide readers a fresh way of perceiving the world.

Three inter-related components of the course should provide a range of perspectives to enhance both the classroom and service experiences during the semester:

Literature: For the traditional classroom part of the course, we will read works by writers who were also gifted scientists and social historians. We will discuss both the timeless, artistic aspects of these authors' writings as well as the historical and scientific contexts which inspired them.

Field Study: Our community partner in this project is the North Carolina Botanical Garden, and our laboratory will be the Mason Farm Biological Reserve and an adjacent property, both maintained by the Botanical Garden. Our project will be to create a tree inventory and map of wooded areas of the Reserve. Working in groups of five, students will identify, catalogue, measure, and map the tree species in one of the larger wooded areas. We will also conduct a "bio-blitz," recording and photographing other flora as well as fauna in this area (i.e., turtles, frogs, beetles, birds, spiders). This carefully collected data will be useful to the Botanical Garden as a way of measuring and understanding how a Piedmont forest grows and changes, and to students as an introduction to the landscape of the North Carolina Piedmont.

Technology: With the help of hand-held Garmin GPS recorders and digital cameras, we will create detailed maps and presentations of the life we find in our wooded tracts on Mason Farm. Our findings will be presented to the Botanical Garden in both print and digital formats. To assist you in this research project, you will be working with a Graduate Research Consultant, Christine Urbanowicz. The GRC Program is sponsored by the Office for Undergraduate Research (www.unc.edu/depts/our). I encourage you to visit this website to see other ways that you might engage in research, scholarship and creative performance while you are at Carolina. Christine's email address is cu@unc.edu.

What will link these three areas together are the writing assignments. In lieu of the literary analysis papers traditional in an English class, students will participate in Discussion Forums, respond to each others' writings, and create a collection of essays to be presented to the Botanical Garden at the end of the semester.

COURSE READINGS AND WRITING

There are seven texts for the course as well as shorter readings posted on Sakai under the heading Resources. These shorter readings are noted on the syllabus as Course Readings: CR. We will discuss these readings and texts in class, but you will also be writing about them (as well as your field experiences) in two formats: a Visible Thinking Journal* and Peer Responses.

- A. Visible Thinking Journal:** Because writing facilitates thinking, you will record your thoughts, questions, and queries about the course material (both in class and in the field) in a weekly two-page (500-word) journal entry. Length here is important. Make sure your entry is a full two pages. You are not writing a mini-paper here. You do not have to create a beginning, middle, and end to the journal entry. There is no need to propose a thesis and support it. You are not writing a summary of what you have read. Instead, you should write your responses or thoughts about the course material for that week. Is there anything you do not understand? only half-understand? really like about the material? Can you see connections between what you are doing outside the classroom in the field and the concerns and experiences of the writers we are reading? You may write the entire two pages on a single topic, or you may take up a number of topics. Although you are not being graded on your writing style, grammar, or punctuation, you should keep your reader in mind.

Each Monday[†] by class time, you will post your journal entry on Sakai's Forum. (See the ANNOUNCEMENTS page for instructions) The audience for these journals is your fellow students. In fact, you may wish to think of the journal as more of an opening to a discussion with them. To facilitate this discussion, the class will be divided into Discussion Groups of three students per group. After a month, I will change the groups so that you have a chance to converse with two other students. Then, after another month, I will change them again.

- B. Peer Responses:** Each week you will write a two-page (500-word) response to the journal entries of the two other students in your group. These responses should be posted on Discussion Board by class time Friday.[‡] As with the journal, you do not have to concern yourself with writing a formal essay. Simply continue the conversation that has been started.

I will read all of these postings and grade them according to the following scale

- Very good:** reflects a careful reading and thoughtful, interesting engagement with the topic or material; shows a willingness to grapple with issues raised in the readings and in other students' writings
- Good:** makes some strong points connected with the reading, issue, or topic, but may not take ideas out of a comfort zone.
- OK:** Satisfies the length requirement, but does not actually say much
- Short:** May have some good ideas, but does not satisfy length requirement
- Weak:** Does not reflect engagement or understanding of the material; may not meet the length requirement

- C. Formal Essay:** By the end of the semester, each field study group of five students will present (after some consultation with me) a polished collection of reflective essays on the relationship between the course and their experiences with the Mason Farm project. Each group should select an editor who can make sure all the essays are in the same format and who can help select which photographs to include.

* This term was coined by conservation biologist Julie Reynolds.

[†] Note: some weeks the entries are due on a Wednesday, usually because of holidays such as Labor Day. Be sure to consult the syllabus for the correct date.

[‡] As noted above, the day sometimes varies. Be sure to check the syllabus.

We will collect all the essays into a book to be presented to the Botanical Garden and to the APPLES program.

- D. Time Log:** Each week students should write up an account of how the additional three hours they put into the course. This might be an account of the walking tour of campus trees, what you did at Mason Farm, your progress with tree identification. Aim for about a 250 word (1 page) description. The log is under the Forum heading.

GRADING

Visible Thinking Journal	25%
Peer Responses	25%
Service Learning	20%
Group Project	20%
Participation	10%

Explanation of grading for Visible Thinking Journal[§]:

1. For a B-: produce a sufficient number of weekly journal entries in the manner requested
2. For a B: #1 plus evidence of engagement with the material, a willingness to open up and deal with difficult aspects of the material or experience
3. For a B+: # 1 and #2 plus demonstration of significant improvement from beginning of semester to end.
4. For an A-: #1, #2, #3 plus demonstration of intellectual imagination
5. For an A: #1, #2, #3, #4 in the extreme

For each missed entry, your grade will drop half a letter grade: for example from a B+ to a B.

Explanation of grading for Peer Responses: Same as for the Visible Thinking Journal

Explanation of grading for Service-Learning:

Each week you should submit to me a brief account of how you spent your service-learning hours. Post this information on the Forum heading WEEKLY TIME LOG for the appropriate week. By mid-to-late semester, you will be spending time at Mason Farm on the mapping project. Before then, you need to learn how to identify trees. You can do this by completing some specific tasks:

1. Using the book *Noble Grove: A Walking Tour of Campus Trees*, complete all four of the walking tours (McCorckle Place Walk, Spencer Walk, Polk Place Walk, Davis Library Walk). You might want to take one of the guidebooks provided to your group along with you (*Field Guide to the Piedmont* and/or *Identifying Trees*) for additional tips on how to identify trees. You might take each tour more than once until you feel confident that you know what the trees are. At the end of September I will set up a tree-identification quiz in Battle Park to determine how well you have mastered your botanical skills.
2. Visit the Botanical Garden. Since the Garden is our partner in this project, each student needs to understand its mission and sample its resources. Plan to spend several hours there, either all at once or on several visits.

[§] Writing and grading strategy method suggested by George Gopen's September 2005 article in the *Writing Across the Curriculum Journal*.

3. Explore some of the natural areas and greenways around Chapel Hill. There are trails in Battle Park (as well as many trees to identify) and a greenway at Bolin Creek. What do such areas offer to an urban area?

As with the journal and the peer responses, if you put in the required hours, you should certainly earn a B for this part of the course. The more intellectual engagement you show in these activities, the higher your grade will be.

Explanation of grading for the Group Project: The goal for this section of the class is to provide the raw data on the tracts at Mason Farm for presentation to the Botanical Garden. Co-operation and co-ordination among group members will be critical here in order to have a final product. This product will include not only the map and detailed information connected with it, but also the formal essay you write about the experience.

Explanation of the Participation grade: Participating consistently in all the aforementioned parts of the course, including classroom discussion, should assure any student of a B. A higher level of enthusiasm and involvement will earn the student an A.