

Nicole Seymour
Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society
Sample Syllabus

**“Queer Ecologies:
Reading American Landscapes”**

English Seminar
Professor Nicole Seymour

Course Description and Objectives

This course uses ecocriticism and queer theory as its critical lenses. Through them, we will examine a variety of modern and contemporary representations of American landscapes (novels, films, TV shows, performance art, journalism, etc.). We will consider how these representations encode or oppose gender and sexual norms, as well as racial and class norms; in turn, we will consider how they condition our own experiences of American life.

In addition to producing new textual readings through the lenses of ecocriticism and queer theory, we will consider how those lenses intersect (or, sometimes, don't).

By the end of this course, you should be able to: 1) understand the methods of and major debates within ecocriticism and queer theory; 2) efficiently locate and digest the main arguments in a piece of scholarship; 3) analyze a variety of cultural texts from a critical/theoretical perspective; 4) engage intellectually with your peers; and 5) produce sophisticated academic writing that reflects your unique voice. I also expect that you already know how to do quality academic research; if you don't think that's the case, come talk to me.

Teaching Statement

I believe in building classroom communities that are both welcoming and challenging. You, the student, play a vital role in this community: your contributions help the rest of us evaluate and develop our ideas. I ask that you, in kind, be open to the examination of your own ideas. I also believe that learning should be a transformative experience for all involved; with your help, I expect to leave this course with a richer perspective than when I entered, and I hope the same will be true for you.

In light of these points, this course will be guided by its students in several ways. Every Thursday, I will turn the meeting over to one of you, who will run our discussion for approximately half the time. As a group, you will also maintain a course scrapbook on Blackboard. There, you will post articles, images, and other items related to our inquiries. (More details to follow.)



Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, 2003. From *Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America: Flora, Fauna & Survival Skills*.

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I practice an inclusive pedagogy: I value differing experiences of and perspectives on religion, sexual orientation, race, class, sex/gender, (dis)ability, and nationality, as well as different approaches to learning. I do, however, reserve the right to challenge any set of beliefs around those issues, and I welcome you to do the same. I pledge to treat all students fairly. I will not tolerate hate speech or harassment of other students inside or outside of this classroom. If you have concerns about the above, please feel free to see me at any time.

Required Texts*

All of the following are available in the bookstore.

Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* **ISBN-10:** 0486277852
Theo Colborn, et. al. *Our Stolen Future: Are We Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival? A Scientific Detective Story* **ISBN-10:** 0452274141
William Faulkner, *Absalom! Absalom!* **ISBN-10:** 0679732187
Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man* **ISBN:** 978-0816638628
Richard Powers, *Gain* **ISBN-10:** 0312429096
Defending the Earth: A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman **ISBN-10:** 0896083829

*All other readings will be posted on Blackboard and/or distributed. You must read these and bring them to class on the appropriate day (electronic device is fine).

Basic Course Requirements

- Regular attendance and participation (see below)
- At least five contributions to the course scrapbook over the semester – may include the articles that you find yourself; see details below (15%)
- Leading one class discussion (20%)
- One short paper (20%)
- One longer research paper (45%)

Attendance and Participation

I expect you to attend class regularly and contribute to discussion regularly. You will not be able to pass this course without doing so. If you have reason to think you may miss more than one or two class meetings for serious reasons such as athletic travel, a medical condition, religious observance, etc., please contact me within the first week.

General Policies

You are being held to the U of L Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, so please familiarize yourself with it: <http://louisville.edu/dos/policies-and-procedures/code-of-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html>.

The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability, please contact the Disability

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Resource Center (Robbins Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations, and then check with me to make sure I've received that info.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

IMPORTANT: You need to read all of a given text before the first day of discussion (listed below), unless otherwise specified here or in class.

Introductions

Week 1

Jan. 7 (R): Introductions and Objectives

Class trip to the library – find EITHER one recent ecocriticism article, OR one recent queer theory article; save it as a PDF and post it in our scrapbook.

Week 2

Jan. 12 (T): Introductions to Queer Theory and Ecocriticism

In-class assignment (pick one):

1. Develop an ecocritical reading of a fictional text with which you're familiar
2. Develop a queer reading of a text in your local environment (billboard, recreational space, etc.)

Part I: Landscape, Gender/Sexuality, and Race

Jan. 14 (R): Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (selections)

Greta Gaard, "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism"

Week 3

Jan. 19 (T): Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*

Jan. 21 (R): Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*

Week 4

Jan. 26 (T): William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Jan. 28 (R): William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Week 5

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Feb. 2 (T): William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Ken Burns, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, Episode 4: "Going Home" (in-class screening)

Feb. 4 (R): "Lesbian National Parks":

<http://criticalspatialpractice.blogspot.com/2007/12/lesbian-national-parks-and-services.html>

James Mills, "In Search of Diversity in Our National Parks"

<http://www.hcn.org/articles/in-search-of-diversity-in-our-national-parks>

Short paper assignment distributed

Part II: Landscape, Reproductive Politics, and Class

Week 6

Feb. 9 (T): Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (selections)

Feb. 11 (R): Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man*

Week 7

Feb. 16 (T): Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man*

Feb. 18 (R): **Short paper drafts due (returned next week; schedule an appt. to meet with NS)**

Jill E. Anderson, "'Warm Blood and Live Semen and Rich Marrow and Wholesome Flesh!': A Queer Ecocritical Reading of Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*" (start reading in class)

Week 8

Feb. 23 (T): Jill E. Anderson, "'Warm Blood and Live Semen and Rich Marrow and Wholesome Flesh!': A Queer Ecocritical Reading of Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*" (finish on your own)

Theo Colborn, et. al., *Our Stolen Future: Are We Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival? A Scientific Detective Story* (decide on your own how to "gut" this text for its major points)

Feb. 25 (R): Richard Powers, *Gain*

Week 9

Mar. 2 (T): Richard Powers, *Gain*

Mar. 4 (R): Richard Powers, *Gain*

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Giovanna Di Chiro, "Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity"

Week 10

Section Four: Landscape and Social Justice

Mar. 9 (T): Sandra Steingraber, *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood* (selections)

Defending the Earth: A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman (read "Racism and the Future of the Movement" and one other chapter)

Mar. 11 (R): Christopher Manes of Earth First! and "Miss Anthropy" AIDS controversy (discussion)

Final short papers due
Final paper assignment distributed

Week 11

NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK

Week 12

Mar. 23 (T): Jan Zita Grover, *North Enough: AIDS and Other Clearcuts* (selections)

[*Brokeback Mountain* screening TBA]

Mar. 25 (R): *Brokeback Mountain* (discussion)

Week 13

Mar. 30 (T): *Brokeback Mountain* (discussion con't.)

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (selections)

Apr. 1 (R): Ana Castillo, *So Far from God*

Synthesis

Week 14

Apr. 6 (T): Ana Castillo, *So Far from God*

Apr. 8 (R): **Final paper proposal and bibliography due (schedule an appt. to meet with NS)**

Week 15

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[Apr. 12 (M): Group viewing of *The Laramie Project* at 8 p.m. at The Playhouse]

Apr. 13 (T): Discussion of *The Laramie Project*

Apr. 15 (R): Final presentations

Week 16

Apr. 20 (T): Final presentations

Evals

Apr. 27: Final papers due at 11:30 a.m.