

Rhetoric and Earthly Coexistence

CAS 84: First-Year Seminar
Fall 2020 • MWF 10.10 – 11.00 a.m.

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Overview

How should we dwell upon the earth? In an age of human-caused climate change, no challenge is more pressing. In this seminar we will explore a range of rhetorical discourses which seek to answer this question, from Aldo Leopold's "The Land Ethic" to Elizabeth Stephens' and Annie Sprinkle's "Ecosexual Manifesto," from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* to Greta Thunberg's speech at the U.N. Climate Action Summit, from image events staged by radical environmental activists in the 1970s and 1980s to recent nonviolent demonstrations staged by indigenous peoples. Careful reading and discussion will illuminate how these and other rhetorical discourses powerfully shape our thoughts and feelings about the practice and prospects of earthly coexistence.

Virtual Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, we will gather thrice a week for fifty minutes via Zoom. Be sure to log on to the Zoom call by 10.10 a.m. (EST) on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Several times this fall, we will not be meeting synchronously on Fridays. My hope is that we can combat video fatigue in this way. When we are not scheduled to meet on a Friday, you will have off-screen work to finish, so you should reserve the time for course work.

As in a face-to-face seminar, I expect you to attend and participate regularly. It is your responsibility to arrive on time and with the necessary audio-visual equipment. Should you need an accommodation, it is your responsibility to communicate your needs to me as soon as possible so that I can help you.

Office Hours

Due to the pandemic, I will unfortunately be unable to host in-person office hours. This should not deter you, however, from seeking out such opportunities for informal discussion. Such conversations are one of the joys of higher education. Please email me directly at barnett@psu.edu to schedule a time to chat.

Communication

University email will be the primary means of communication for this seminar. You should check your university email at least daily during the week. When emailing me about this course, please include "CAS 84" in the subject line so that I can prioritize your message. Emails should be professional in both their composition and tone.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this seminar can expect to:

1. gain an appreciation and understanding of the rhetorical means by which writers, speakers, activists, artists, and other actors—including some more-than-human actors—shape our thoughts and feelings about what it means to dwell upon the earth;
2. draw on communication and rhetorical theories and concepts to analyze, critique, and evaluate human and more-than-human discourse;
3. practice and refine their critical thinking, writing, and oral presentation skills;
4. become better acquainted with the intellectual resources available to them as Penn State students.

Graded Work

FYS Engagement. As a first-year seminar in the College of Liberal Arts, this course involves first-year engagement activities. The purpose of these activities is to introduce you to your responsibilities as part of the University community as well as the learning tools and resources available to you at Penn State. One class period will be devoted to talking with an advisor. You will also attend a virtual open house at the University Library and complete modules on academic integrity, Penn State Learning, health and wellness, and financial literacy. You can earn up to *10 points*.

Participation. You are expected to attend and participate in all the class sessions. Participation means preparing for class by reading or viewing the required materials, actively contributing to class discussions by asking questions or sharing your thoughts, taking part in small-group conversations, and submitting assignments on time. You can earn up to *10 points* for participation.

Think Pieces. Five times this fall you will prepare and submit a 500-word (roughly two double-spaced pages) “think piece” responding to a question or prompt. The aim of these short writing assignments is to focus your thinking on concepts of significance for the work of earthly coexistence. You should approach these assignments with both seriousness and curiosity. They are good practice for the Midterm Exam. You can earn up to 5 points on each think piece, for a total of *25 points*.

Midterm Exam. In week eight, you will prepare two short essays (about 500 words each) in response to prompts provided at the beginning of the week. Your responses should be clear, concise, and precise. These are exercises in the economy of language. The midterm exam is also an opportunity for you to demonstrate your grasp of course material and your ability to apply concepts to texts. You will have from Monday, October 12 at 10.10 a.m., until Friday, October 16 at 11.59 p.m., to prepare and revise your responses. You can earn up to *10 points* for each essay.

Final Presentation. In week 16, you will deliver a 4-minute presentation derived from your term paper (which means you need to have your term paper drafted at this

point!). Your job in this presentation is to succinctly yet compellingly make your argument in front of me and your peers. Your presentation should be professional in tone, scholarly in character, well-rehearsed, and organized. Think of this presentation as an opportunity to get feedback before you submit your term paper. You can earn up to *5 points* on the presentation.

Term Paper. The culminating project is a 2,000-word term paper on a topic of your choice. You should select a rhetorical text, performance, or process to analyze, and make use of at least two of the scholarly resources we have studied in class. You are free (and encouraged) to draw on additional research, though this is not required. The term paper should present a clearly articulated argument through thoughtful and well-organized prose that is pedagogical in nature. I am more than happy—truly!—to chat with you about your term paper topic and even read a draft of your work before you submit it. I am here to help you and want you to succeed. Just be sure to reach out to me in advance. You can earn up to *30 points* for the term paper.

Policies

Grading. Your work in this course will be graded with points and then converted, at the end of the semester, into a letter grade according to the following scale:

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|----|-----------|--------------|
| A | 95-100 | Exceptional |
| A- | 90-94.9 | |
| B+ | 87.9-89.9 | |
| B | 83.3-87.8 | Strong |
| B- | 80-83.2 | |
| C+ | 75-79.9 | |
| C | 70-74.9 | Satisfactory |
| D | 60-69.9 | Poor |
| F | 0-59.9 | Inadequate |

Attendance. This is a seminar, which means we will spend substantial amounts of time discussing course materials. In order to gain from these discussions, you need to be both present and actively engaged in the day-to-day work of the course. There are, of course, times when attendance is simply not possible. To accommodate those instances, you may miss three meetings without penalty. Should you miss more than three class meetings, your participation grade will drop one point per additional absence. If you need to miss class because of a religious holiday or official university business (e.g., travel for university athletic event), you must provide those dates to me at the beginning of the semester in order to remove the absence from your record.

Late Work. Work should be submitted by the scheduled deadline. If this is not possible for a compelling reason (e.g., you are very sick), please contact me in advance to discuss an extension. Grades for late work will be reduced by one letter grade each day after the deadline. For example, an “A” paper turned in two days late will become a “C” paper.

Academic Integrity. I expect you to produce original work that you are proud of and willing to defend. Think for yourself and write your own papers. Anything less than this is

unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Assignments that are plagiarized will receive a grade of zero and will be reported to university officials. This is non-negotiable, and any assignment that has been plagiarized cannot be “made up.” Familiarize yourself with the College of the Liberal Arts’ [policies on academic integrity](#) and do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions about whether your work violates these policies *before* you submit your assignments.

Additional Resources

Writing Center. If you need or desire help with your writing, contact the [Penn State Writing Center](#) to schedule an appointment. They won’t edit your paper for you (and please don’t ask them to!), but they will help you craft a more coherent, better organized paper.

Student Disability Resources. If you experience a disability that affects your ability to access any aspect of this course, work with the [Student Disability Resources](#) office to determine any appropriate academic accommodations. Once you present me with an accommodation letter from the SDR, we will work together to ensure that you have the resources you need.

Counseling and Psychological Services. Your personal and mental wellbeing are crucial to your academic success. The [Center for Counseling and Psychological Services](#) provides a variety of services including crisis intervention; individual, group, and couples counseling; and psychiatric services. To access these services, call CAPS at (814) 863-0395. If you are in immediate crisis, call the Penn State Crisis Line at (814) 229-6400 or text “LIONS” to 741741. Both are available 24/7.

Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response. You have a right to learn in an environment free of sexual and gender-based harassment and misconduct. If you experience sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, you may contact the [Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response](#). Please note that I am required to report any information that leads me to suspect someone has experienced or perpetrated acts of sexual or gender-based harassment.

If you are experiencing any kind of hardship and need support, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me. I cannot solve all—or even most—problems, but I can probably point you in the direction of someone who can help you. You can also find additional resources [here](#).

Schedule

Week 1: Liberal Education

- Aug. 24 Introductions
- Aug. 26 Cronon, “‘Only Connect’: The Goals of a Liberal Education”
- Aug. 28 Discussion: Learning goals

Week 2: Dwelling on Dwelling

- Aug. 31 Kimmerer, “*Wisgaak Gokpenagen*: A Black Ash Basket”
- Sept. 02 Barnett and Gore, “Dwelling in the Anthropocene”
- Sept. 04 Offline activity: Complete and submit **Think Piece 1** by 5.00 p.m.

FYS Engagement: Complete Academic Integrity Module by Sept. 6 at 11.59 p.m.

Week 3: A Mind-Altering Experience

- Sept. 07 Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”
- Sept. 09 Lee and Ahtone, “Land-Grab Universities”
- Sept. 11 Advising Presentation (link will be provided)

Week 4: Human-Nature Relations

- Sept. 14 Oravec, “Conservationism vs. Preservationism”
- Sept. 16 Kingsnorth and Hine, “Uncivilization” ([link](#))
Asafu-Adjaye et al., “An Ecomodernist Manifesto” ([link](#))
- Sept. 18 Offline activity: Complete and submit **Think Piece 2** by 5.00 p.m.

FYS Engagement: Complete Library Open House by Sept. 30 at 11.59 p.m.

Week 5: Cultivating Care for the Earth

- Sept. 21 Killingsworth and Palmer, *Ecospeak* excerpt
- Sept. 23 Leopold, “The Land Ethic”
- Sept. 25 Discussion: Updating the land ethic

FYS Engagement: Complete Penn State Learning Module by Sept. 27 at 11.59 p.m.

Week 6: Raising Suspicions

- Sept. 28 Waddell, “The Reception of *Silent Spring*”
- Sept. 30 Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow”
- Oct. 02 Offline activity: Complete and submit **Think Piece 3** by 5.00 p.m.

FYS Engagement: Complete Health and Wellness Module by Oct. 4 at 11.59 p.m.

Week 7: Lamenting Ecological Losses

- Oct. 05 Lockwood, “The Affective Legacy of *Silent Spring*”
- Oct. 07 McKibben, “The End of Nature”
- Oct. 09 Discussion: Midterm examination

Week 8: Midterm Examination

FYS Engagement: Complete Financial Literacy Module by Oct. 18 at 11.59 p.m.

Week 9: Recomposing Relations

- Oct. 19 Barnett, “Politics of Edibility: Reconceptualizing Ecological Relationality”
Oct. 21 Lee, “My Mushroom Burial Suit” ([link](#))
Spade, “When I Die, Recompose Me” ([link](#))
Oct. 23 Offline activity: Complete and submit **Think Piece 4** by 5.00 p.m.

Week 10: Tuning in to the More-than-Human

- Oct. 26 Salvador and Clark, “The Weyekin Principle”
Oct. 28 Bonta, “October”
Oct. 30 Discussion: Listening

Week 11: Grappling with Eco Grief (Don’t forget to vote Nov. 3!)

- Nov. 02 Barnett, “Grievable Water: Mourning the Animas River”
Nov. 04 Jeff Orlowski, *Chasing Ice* ([link](#))
Nov. 06 Offline activity: Complete and submit **Think Piece 5** by 5.00 p.m.

Week 12: Embodying Tensions

- Nov. 09 DeLuca, “Making Waves”
Nov. 11 Knight and Trummel, *Dam Nation* ([link](#))
Nov. 13 Discussion: Term paper and final presentations

Week 13: Action and Anxiety

- Nov. 16 Arendt, *The Human Condition* excerpts
Nov. 18 Reichardt, *Night Moves* ([link](#))
Nov. 20 No class (professor at conference)

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break

I strongly encourage you to take advantage of Thanksgiving Break to begin, if you have not already, writing your term paper and developing your final presentation.

Week 15: Resistance and Desire

- Nov. 30 Thunberg, Speech at the 2019 UN Climate Summit ([link](#))
Dec. 02 Stephens and Sprinkles, “Ecosex Manifesto” ([link](#))
Dec. 04 Discussion: Term paper and final presentations

Week 16: Final Presentations

FYS Engagement: FYS Engagement Survey by End of Class

***Term paper due Wednesday, December 16, at 11.00 a.m.
Email your term paper to me at barnett@psu.edu.***