

Carleton University*
Department of English
Fall 2024 Preliminary Course Outline
ENGL 3920: Literary Ecological Fieldwork
Prerequisite(s): third-year standing or permission of the department
***Situated on unceded Algonquin Anishnaabe territory in the Kiji Sibi watershed**
Prof. Brenda Vellino: Brenda.vellino@carleton.ca

Approved Environmental Studies Elective, Geography and Environmental Studies.
Approved EACH minor elective.

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course Description

This literary fieldwork course draws together literature, culture, decolonial Indigenous- informed environmental humanities, and ecological studies. Grounded in an interdisciplinary and experiential approach, it features learning in the classroom and within local urban ecosystems on unceded Algonquin territories in the Kiji Sibi watershed such as rivers, wetlands, urban forests and flora and fauna. Time will be devoted to exploratory short field work excursions adjacent to campus and further afield. These excursions will also be complemented by weekly or bi-weekly discussion of creative and scholarly texts. Course readings will be selected from poets, fiction writers, creative non-fiction writers, and knowledge keepers/theorists who themselves mentor close observational engagement with elements of the more-than-human-world. Student encounters with the more-than-human world will be further supported by guest learning with local Indigenous knowledge keepers, field naturalists, and visual artists.

The experiential fieldwork component of the course will foster opportunities for students to create their own creative nonfiction fieldwork narratives through writing, sketching, photo, and audio documentation. Engagement with local habitats will test the claim that humans may be more compelled to address ecological challenges like climate disruptions, species extinctions, and ecosystem degradation by learning to care for the waters, land, plants, trees, and more-than-human creatures where we live and work. This course will also engage tensions between (settler) place-based environmental studies and decolonial land and territory focused Indigenous perspectives. Place-based education has often side-lined Indigenous presence and knowledges in territories claimed by settler scholars as spaces of “re-inhabitation.” This course then takes up the question of whether and how place-based cultivation of the arts of attentive noticing can be undertaken in respectful engagement with Algonquin Anishinaabe rights to lands and territories, as well as learning from Indigenous art practices and teachings on relational responsibilities to the more-than-human world.

Fieldwork Practice: Three Hours per Week (on location observation, plus writing and sketching). Please note: no sketching experience necessary!

Course Readings

Students will need to buy four books: these will be available at Black Squirrel Books & Cafe (on Bank St. near Sunnyside)

- Clare Walker Leslie. *The Curious Nature Guide*. (2015): a lovely intro to fieldwork nature journaling.
- Rita Wong and Fred Wah: *Beholden: A Poem as Long as a River* (2018): poetic/visual fieldwork engagement with the Columbia River watershed flowing from northern BC out to the Pacific.
- Rita Wong and Cindy Mochizuki – *Perpetual* (2015): a graphic novel poem about water stories, Indigenous knowledges, the Tar Sands, and climate action.
- Drew Hayden Taylor – *Cottagers and Indians* (2019): a play about the tensions between a settler cottager’s views of lakeshore property and Anishinaabe practices of sustainable cultivation and harvesting of wild rice beds in Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe First Nations Territories, also known as the Kawartha Lakes region of Southern Ontario.

Assignments

- **4 Fieldwork Practice Exercises** (5 marks each): 20%
- **Participation/Attendance** 10%
- **3 Engaged Reading Responses/In-Class Writing** (5 marks each) 15%
- Peer responses to two classmate’s final projects 5%
- **Autumn Transformations Local Habitat Final Project:**
(All segments to be posted as components of **cuPortfolio Collection**)
 - **Local Habitat Journal 1: cuPortfolio, Tab 1** 5%
 - Local Habitat Fieldwork Journal (# Journals 2-5) 20%
 - **cuPortfolio: Tab 2**
 - **Final Project Proposal: cuPortfolio, Tab 3** 5%
 - **Research-Informed Autumn Transformations Project** 20%
 - **cuPortfolio: Tab 4:** Combining fieldwork insights, questions, and interventions with research, choose a multi-media format to showcase your discoveries: Possibilities include a research-informed **Podcast** with scripted text and companion images/sounds drawn from autumn fieldwork journal (10-15 min.); **or** multi-media **Zine** (12 pages) with research informed text/images drawn from autumn fieldwork journal; **or mixed media web presentation** (text, video, images, sound, based on above criteria) or set of poems, songs, or visual art pieces (TBD with professor).

Attendance Policy: Please note that students **missing more than 50% of classes may not pass the course**, unless significant extenuating medical (or other) circumstances persist and are discussed with the professor.

Climate Statement: We are witnessing the effects of climate change escalate rapidly, impacting the character of the world around us. Climate change disruptions impact peoples and multi-species worlds unevenly across many planetary regions, territories, and communities due to racialized capitalism and extractive settler colonialism. In this class, selected works will help us consider and discuss these impacts as part of the larger project of sharing and creating knowledge from an Indigenous informed, decolonial, and environmental humanities perspective.