

**Carleton University**  
**Winter 2021**  
**Department of English**  
**ENGL 2701 American Literature II**  
**Environmental Crisis and US Culture**  
**Monday/Wednesday: 10:05-11:25**  
**Format: Blended**  
**Instructor: Veronika Kratz**  
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**Office Hours: Thursdays 2-3PM by appointment**

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND US CULTURE**

### **Course description:**

In this course, we will investigate how environmental crisis has influenced US culture. Our examination will include various forms of literary and cultural texts dealing with both real and imagined disasters - from dust bowls and hurricanes to the looming threat of nuclear annihilation. We will explore the cultural lives of these crisis-narratives over time and in doing so we will encounter radically different ways of understanding the relationship between people and land in the US.

Coming into this semester, we are all experts on living with and through environmental crisis, and this course will allow all of us to apply our experiences and knowledge to critical literary analysis with the overarching goal of learning from one another.

### **Blended Format:**

*Lectures and learning materials:* these will be posted online for students to access asynchronously. I will post audio mini-lectures on cuLearn every Friday by 12PM (EST).

*Class Discussion:* We will meet weekly on zoom for class discussion during the scheduled meeting time. For our first class on Wednesday, January 13th, we will all meet to discuss the course and assignments. After that, I will split the class into two discussion groups. Half of the class will meet on Mondays (10:05-11:25), and half will meet on Wednesdays (10:05-11:25). I will post a zoom link to cuLearn every week. To combat the alienation and isolation of online learning and video calls, I'll be asking everyone to turn their webcams on for our discussions.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

In this course, students will gain an understanding of some of the ways that environmental crises have influenced and continue to shape US cultures. This will involve developing a familiarity with the changing concept of environmental degradation - how has an American understanding

of environmental crisis changed over time? In our particular attention to the narratives of crisis, students will practice critical analysis, close reading, and thoughtful reflection. Students will also practice agency in their own learning and outcomes through the use of self-evaluations and a minimal grading scheme. The class is designed to encourage students to connect the course material to their own knowledge, experience and expertise.

### **Texts:**

All course materials will be posted on cuLearn/ARES.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### *January*

Week 1 (Jan. 13th): Introduction

- DUE: Introduction and Self-Evaluation (Friday, January 15)

Week 2 (Jan. 18/20): Environmental Crisis on the Frontier

- James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (1823), Chapter II (The Judge's History of the Settlement; A Sudden Storm) & Chapter III (The Slaughter of the Pigeons)
- DUE: Reading Journal 1 (Friday, January 22)

Week 3 (Jan. 25/27): The Dust Bowl/Great Depression - Industrializing Crisis

- The Plow that Broke the Plains (1936)
- The Grapes of Wrath (1940) film
- DUE: Reading Journal 2 (Friday, January 29)

#### *February*

Week 4 (Feb. 1/3): Dust Bowl Legacies - Documentary and Remembrance

- Interstellar (2014)
- Resolution on a Green New Deal (2019) by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ed Markey
- DUE: Reading Journal 3 (Friday, February 5)

Week 5 (Feb. 8/10): Hurricane Katrina (2005) – A ‘Natural’ Disaster

- Josh Neufeld, *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge* (2008) (note we are reading the online webcomic and not the published book)
- Floodlines (2020) podcast series by The Atlantic, episodes 1-4
- DUE: Reflection 1 (Friday, February 12)

## WINTER BREAK Feb. 15-19

Week 6 (Feb. 22/24): Hurricane Katrina (2005) - Environmental Justice and the City

- Josh Neufeld, *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge* (2008)
- Floodlines (2020) podcast series by The Atlantic, episodes 5-7 (episode 8 optional, but fantastic)
- DUE: Reading Journal 4 (Friday, February 26)

*March*

Week 7 (March 1/3): Nuclear Anxiety - Living in Crisis

- President Harry S. Truman Announcing the Bombing of Hiroshima, August 6, 1945
- Ray Bradbury “There will come soft rains” (1950) short story
- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962), Chapter 1 “A Fable for Tomorrow”
- DUE: Reading Journal 5 (Friday, March 5)

Week 8 (Mar. 8/10): Nuclear Anxiety - Living in Crisis/Postmodernism

- Thomas Pynchon, “Entropy” (1960) short story from Slow Learner collection
- DUE: Reflection 2 (Friday, March 12)

Week 9 (Mar. 15/17): Settler Colonialism as Environmental Crisis - #NoDAPL/Standing Rock Movement/Contemporary Indigenous Futures

- Joy Harjo
  - [How to Write a Poem in a Time of War \(2017\)](#)
  - [Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings \(2015\)](#)
  - [Once the World Was Perfect \(2015\)](#)
  - [When the World as we Knew it Ended \(2002\)](#)
- DUE: Reading Journal 6 (Friday, March 19)

Week 10 (Mar. 22/24): Climate Change and Future Crises

- Parable of the Sower (1993), first half
- DUE: Reading Journal 7 (Friday, March 26)

Week 11 (Mar. 29/31): Climate Change and Future Crises

- Parable of the Sower (1993), whole text
- DUE: Reading Journal 8 (Friday, March 26)

## Week 12 (April 5/7): Climate Change and Future Crises

- Parable of the Sower (1993)/finishing up
- Stephanie Le Menager (2017), “To Get Ready for Climate Change, read Octavia Butler”
- DUE: Reading Journal 9 (Friday, April 9)

April 14th - Final Projects and Self-Evaluations Due

### **Assignments:**

All assignments will be submitted via cuPortfolio, instructions on how to use this program will be provided on cuLearn.

*Introduction/Self-Evaluation (5%)* - At the start of term, you will hand in an introduction letting me know a little about yourself and what brought you to the course. You will also hand in a self-evaluation that lays out your personal learning goals for the class (including the grade you wish to receive). We will work together throughout the term to achieve the goals you set out here.

*Reading Journal (20%)* - Students will submit a brief reflection every week. The journal is designed to be a low-stakes opportunity for you to explore your thinking on the readings, lectures, and class discussions. You’re encouraged to make use of different media and materials including photos, film, music, and writing. I will post prompts for your journal entries each week, but these are optional - feel free to approach them in your own way. Your journals will be evaluated on their consistency, evidence of independent thought, and engagement with course ideas/materials (including use of textual details). There are no journals on weeks when assignments are due.

*Missing journals:* you can skip two journal entries with no impact on your final grade (and these can also be made up at any time).

*Written Reflections (30%)* - You will write two 3-4 page reflections. The first will be due February 5th (worth 15% of final grade) and the second, March 12th (worth 15% of final grade). These reflections will function as expanded journal entries - they are opportunities to build on your thinking in a more polished format. I will post a series of prompts for the reflections but students are again encouraged to speak with myself or the TA about your own ideas for approaching the assignment.

The evaluation of these reflections will be based on evidence of independent thought, engagement with course ideas/materials (including use of textual details) and, unlike the journals, on the clarity and polish of your writing.

*Final Project (25%)* - At the end of term, you will hand in a final project that demonstrates your learning over the course of the semester. The format of the final project is up to you, although I will post a number of ideas/prompts on cuLearn. Your final project may take the form of a final essay, or it may look like something completely different based on your own background, skills, interests, and motivation in the course.

*Final Self-Evaluation (5%)* - Lastly, you will hand in a brief self-evaluation that reflects on your experiences and progress over the course of the semester to suggest a grade for yourself. I will use this grade in determining my own final assessment of your course work.

*Participation (15%)* - Participation will be evaluated based on your regular attendance and thoughtful contributions to class discussion. I encourage you to bring up ideas from your journals in discussion, especially if you have difficulty speaking in class. If you're worried about in-class participation please send me an email, I'm happy to discuss.

*Late Policy:* If you need to hand in an assignment late, please email either myself or your TA.

### **Evaluation:**

*Portfolio-based Assessment:* This class will use a minimal and holistic grading approach to assessment. We will not be assigning grades to each individual assignment. Instead, we will provide feedback on your portfolio of work at regular and announced intervals in the semester: once at the beginning of the semester and after each of your reflections.

At these scheduled points, we will give detailed feedback on your reflections and general feedback on your journals, but these comments will take into account your work in the course as a whole. For example, your reflection may be 'B+' level work but, in combination with excellent work in class discussion and in the journals, we would let you know that you are on-track for an 'A' in the course.

My intention is to eliminate some of the stress of grading and make it easier for you to engage in creativity and risk-taking in your thinking and work. If at any point in the semester you are unsure of your current standing in the course, please feel free to email me.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

### **Plagiarism:**

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own." This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

### **Requests for Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

*Pregnancy obligation:* write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

*Religious obligation:* write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

*Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:* The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of

Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

*Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit:

<https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

*Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

<https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>