

# Honors Program, SUNY Potsdam

## Single-Seat Course Proposal

**Proposals are due by the last day of Add/Drop Week of the semester in which the proposed course is to be taught. Early submissions during the previous semester are encouraged and will be considered on a rolling basis. Please send the following to the Honors Program office at Dunn Hall 309 (email to [lawrenbs@potsdam.edu](mailto:lawrenbs@potsdam.edu) is preferred):**

1. This form, completed
2. A copy of the course syllabus, complete with stated course objectives, pedagogical methods, and assessment tools

**Course Information** LITR 351 Nature and Literature

Instructor: Donald J. McNutt

Course Department and Number: LITR 351

Term (e.g. Fall 2011): Spring 2012

Day/Time: TuTh 11:00-12:15

Credit Hours: Credit Hours: 3

**Enriched Experience:** How will the proposed work or activities provide an enriched experience (rather than just extra work) for the honors student? For example, how much time will be devoted in- or out of-class to the student's honor's work? What additional readings, if any will be required of the honors student?

In addition to reading the established course materials and contributing to large and small group discussions, [the student] will immerse him/herself in ecocritical theory, the practice of the reading the ways in "artistic representations envisage human and non-human webs of interrelation," as Laurence Buell writes in his recent study *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). I propose to invite [the student] to examine how ecocriticism can broaden and deepen her understanding of art history, particularly how ecocriticism can be applied to painting as an art form. She is especially interested in studying the Hudson River School of landscape painting, and particularly the paintings of Thomas Cole.

[The student's] examination of Cole and the Hudson School will connect explicitly to the course's focus on the Romantic movement in literature in the nineteenth century. This will enhance the interdisciplinary aspect of [the student's] study of art and ecocriticism. This approach will also give him/her a solid foundation for studying later American nature painters if he/she chooses to next semester.

Methods that [the student] will master as an honors student in LITR 351: Close reading, genre analysis, integrating secondary research, articulating an understanding of ecocriticism and its relationship to art history in America, applying ecocriticism to the Hudson School and its members.

Possible Additional Readings (for research, annotated bibliographies, etc.)

Braddock, Alan, ed. *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (2009).

Cole, Thomas. "Essay on American Scenery" (1836). *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches of Thomas Cole* (1980).

Downing, Caroline. "The Adirondacks and American Art." *Inside the Blue Line: Essays in Adirondack Environments* (2010).

Gifford, Sanford. Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford Gifford (2003).  
New York Historical Society. The Hudson River School: Nature and the American Vision (2009).  
O'Toole, Judith H. Different Views in Hudson River School Painting (2005).

**Shared Results:** Will you provide a way for the honors student to share with class members the results of his or her honors work? If so, how?

During the last meeting of the class, each student in LITR 351 is required to speak informally for a few minutes about their final essays or about some discovery they've made through course readings/assignments. The honor student would be required to describe his/her scholarly discoveries as well during the final meeting.

# Syllabus

Literature 351: Nature and Literature  
Spring 2007  
Dr. Donald McNutt  
mcnuttdj@potdam.edu  
(315) 267-2044

Office: Morey 247  
Office Hours:  
W 4-6 & F 4-5 and  
by appointment

## Nature and Literature

O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterances are  
your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter,  
but has its cunning duplicate in mind.

- Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

This course explores the many ways in which literary artists have engaged and represented the natural world. We will focus primarily on texts written in America from the Transcendental period (beginning with the publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* in 1836) through the present, as writers continue to reflect on humanity's relationship to – and impact on – the natural world. After analyzing important mid-nineteenth-century works by Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau, we'll attempt to trace their influence on later writers. We'll also consider what has motivated diverse groups of people to respond to nature through poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Additionally, we'll deepen our analysis of course texts by discussing how language shapes our perceptions and definitions of nature. Conversely, we'll also examine the ways in which nature contributes to our understanding and use of language itself, how it represents the non-human world through "natural" tropes, images, symbols, and the like.

Our goals this semester are 1) to become conversant with the modern tradition of nature writing, especially in American letters, since the 1830s; 2) to comprehend this tradition in context of key historical developments (e.g. the Industrial Revolution); 3) to build a critical vocabulary that enables us to examine a variety of literary texts with precision; and 4) to compose dynamic, well-crafted, and effective analytical essays. The final essay will require research of secondary sources, and we'll work in class on integrating your research with your insights about any text(s) you choose to examine.

### **Required Texts (Available at the College Store):**

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*  
Faulkner, William. "The Bear" (edition TBA)  
Fuller, Margaret. *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*  
Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*  
Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*

I will distribute some course materials in class and some through email as attachments.

**Recommended:** A glossary of literary terms. *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Chris Baldick is thorough, accessible, and fairly cheap. I also recommend *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M. H. Abrams, though this excellent text is pricey. Both of these glossaries are available for purchase online. Also, as we approach the final essay, I'll be happy to explain how to use databases such as the MLA (Modern Language Association) Bibliography, available through the Crumb Library webpage.

### Course Requirements

Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	25%
Essay 3	40%
Journal Responses	10%
Class Participation	10%

All essays must be typed, double spaced, with standard fonts. Suggestions and guidelines for each essay will be distributed well before the essay's final drafts are due. Please submit drafts and final essays on time. Late drafts and essays will be penalized by 1.0 for each day they remain late. Unless a clear emergency prevents you from turning in an essay within a week after its due date, I will not accept an excessively late essay. Please complete your work promptly.

**Plagiarism**, even when unintentional, is a serious offense and will result in failure for the course, as well as possible expulsion from the college. Do not present others' words and ideas as your own. Properly cite any source you work with using MLA documentation style. If you ever have questions about using others' ideas in your writing, just ask and I'll be happy to help you.

**Attendance** is required. You are allowed three absences, so use them wisely. If you miss four classes, I will penalize your class participation grade by deducting 2.0 at the end of the term. Five absences will earn you a 0.0 for participation. If you miss more than five classes, you cannot pass the class. It is your responsibility to keep count of your absences.

**Class Participation** is also required. Let's strive for dynamic discussion each time we meet: Please come to class ready to discuss your insights and questions. A college classroom is an open forum for adult discussion, analysis, and exchange. Don't be shy! And, even if there's disagreement about interpretations or points-of-view, I expect you to respect each other as adults. Also, no eating in class, please.

**Journal Responses:** Periodically, I'll ask you to respond in writing to questions, problems, or sets of ideas related to our readings. In these one or two-page responses, I want you to engage the text(s) in question and cite and interpret specific passages to demonstrate your insights. For the journals, don't worry about coming up with a polished thesis (that's for the essays). Rather, you might think of the journals as ways to gather ideas and explore avenues that you can return to for more in-depth analysis in the essays. Please type all journals double space, using standard fonts. Unless a real emergency occurs, turn in the journals as hard copies on the day they are due. Late journals will be penalized.

**In this age of mobile technologies, a word or two about their place in our classroom:** You're welcome to use a laptop so long as you use it *only* for class (e.g. for taking notes). Please also be courteous and turn off your cell phones before we begin each day. Finally, and it should go without saying, No texting!

## Daily Schedule:

Complete readings before you come to class. Readings and assignments may change, so be alert for announcements about the daily schedule.

I encourage you to visit my office hours if you have any questions about the course or your writing. We can always make an appointment for a convenient time to meet. Beginning with essay two, you will all have the opportunity to work on revising first drafts of your essays. Here's the drill: you produce a first draft, I comment on the draft, making suggestions for improvement, and then I return the draft to you. For essay two, you can choose simply to revise the essay without talking to me, or you may confer with me in Morey 247 about my suggestions and feedback. Of course, if you ever have any questions about my comments, please don't hesitate to ask. For the final essay, everyone is required to meet with me in conference to work on revision strategies. I'm happy to respond to as many drafts as you'd like me to look over, time allowing. I also strongly encourage you to take revision seriously: it's a crucial skill for all writers to learn and practice.

M Jan 25	Welcome! Course Intro and Overview
W Jan 27	<b>Nature in the Beginning</b> <i>Genesis</i> (1-3:19) from <i>Sayatasha's Night Chant</i> (poetry of the Native American Zuni tribe)
F Jan 29	Above continued.
M Feb 1	Above continued. Focus on Origin Stories across cultures.
W Feb 31	<b>Romanticism and American Transcendentalism</b> William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807) From Wordsworth's <i>Ode: Intimations of Immortality</i> (1807)
F Feb 5	Ralph Waldo Emerson's <i>Nature</i> (1836) Read pp. 1707-1722
M Feb 8	<i>Nature</i> , pp. 1722-1734
W Feb 10	Above continued.
F Feb 12	Above continued. Guidelines and Suggestions for Essay 1 distributed and discussed.
M Feb 15	Margaret Fuller's <i>Summer on the Lakes</i> (1843): Chaps 1 and 3
W Feb 17	Fuller, Chap 6
F Feb 19	Above continued.
M Feb 22	Henry David Thoreau's <i>Walden</i> (1854): "Economy" (1-26)
W Feb 24	<i>Walden</i> , "Economy" (26-52)
F Feb 26	<i>Walden</i> : "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" (53-64)

M Mar 1	<i>Walden</i> : "Higher Laws" (136-144) <b>Essay 1 due at the beginning of class.</b>
W Mar 3	<i>Walden</i> : "Spring" (193-206) and "Conclusion" (206-216)
F Mar 5	Above continued.
March 8-12	Break.
M Mar 15	Concluding Reflections on Transcendentalism; and from Thomas Cole's "Essay on Natural Scenery" (1836)
W Mar 17	<b>Naturalism</b> Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" (1898)
F Mar 19	Crane continued.
M Mar 22	Crane continued. Guidelines and Suggestions for Essay 2 distributed and discussed.
W Mar 24	<b>Modernism</b> William Faulkner's "The Bear" (1935)
F Mar 26	Faulkner continued.
M Mar 29	Faulkner continued.
W Mar 31	Faulkner continued.
F Apr 2	<b>Native Americans Views</b> from N. Scott Momaday's <i>The Way to Rainy Mountain</i> (1969) <b>First draft of Essay 2 due.</b>
M Apr 5	<b>Epistemology, Natural Worlds, and Human Landscapes</b> Annie Dillard's <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i> (1974): Chapters TBA
W Apr 7	Dillard, Chapters TBA Guidelines and Suggestions for Essay 3 distributed and discussed.
F Apr 9	Dillard, Chapters TBA
M Apr 12	Dillard continued.
W Apr 14	Drafting Strategies for Essay 2; Approaches to Essay 3: Suggestions for Research

F Apr 16      **Modernity and Nature's Allure**  
Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1996): "Author's Note" and Chapters 1-3

M Apr 19      Krakauer, Chaps 4-5  
**Essay 2 due at the beginning of class. Submit all drafts.**

April 21—24: Campus Festival 2010, "Footprints in the North Country: Pathways on the Planet." We will not meet for seminar during the Festival, but please attend at least one panel or session and compose a journal response to it (the topic, what you learned, etc.). How did the session relate to our discussions about nature, literature, wilderness, modernity, etc? One or two pages will do.

M Apr 26      Krakauer, Chapters 6-9

W Apr 28      Krakauer, Chapters 10-12  
Approaches to Essay 3: Integrating Research and Sources; Troubleshooting

F Apr 30      Krakauer, Chapters 13-14

M May 3      Krakauer, Chapters 15 and Epilogue

W May 5      Approaches to Essay 3: Integrating Research and Analysis

F May 7      Troubleshooting for Essay 3: Citation and Works Cited formats  
**First draft of Essay 3 due.**

M May 10      Conferences in Morey 247

W May 12      Conferences continue.

F May 14      Conferences continue.

Your final draft of Essay 3 is due when we meet for our "**Final Exam**" period during exam week (date and time TBA). Please submit all drafts for this essay. Also, please be prepared to speak briefly to the class about your research/discoveries in your final essay.

**Have a safe and relaxing summer break!**

**LITR 351**  
**Nature and Literature**  
**Spring 2012**  
**Honors Component**

Single-Seat Honors Proposal

In addition to completing readings and assignments on the LITR 351 syllabus, [the student] will

- 1) Compose bi-weekly journals (1-2 pages) reflecting on [the student's] specific interests in ecocriticism and Art History, specifically the Hudson School Painters;
- 2) Use [the student's] second essay to begin integrating his/her independent research with analyses of nature writing by American Romantic writers (e.g. Emerson, Fuller, Thoreau, Cole, et al)
- 3) Produce an Annotated Bibliography of at least five secondary sources. Ideally, these sources will contribute to [the student's] final essay;
- 4) Compose a final essay that integrates her discoveries about American literature and the Hudson School. Integrating secondary research and close reading, the essay will demonstrate [the student's] ability to apply the principles and methods of ecocriticism to the Hudson School Painters or other related fields of nature painting.