

ENGLISH 310-01: HOW TO TALK MIDWESTERN

Spring 2015
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WAC 109

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We have failed to live up to our geography.
--Theodore Roethke

The man who is often thinking it is better to be somewhere else than where he is excommunicates himself.
--Thoreau

DESCRIPTION:

You are Midwesterners. Even if you don't hail from this part of the country, you've now spent a good portion of your young adult lives here. After three or four years at Beloit College, you have a distinct notion of what it means to be a Beloit. This capstone course, offered to junior and senior English and Environmental Studies students, is designed to help you think creatively and critically about what it means to be a Midwesterner. Unlike other regions of the country, the Midwest is often described as an "anti-region." What, in fact, is the Midwest? What are the defining features of its landscape? Are its citizens and its art somehow recognizable as Midwestern? This course will interrogate the concept of a Midwest aesthetic or sensibility by examining works of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction (and to a lesser extent drama, film, music and visual art) by writers and artists creating art from and about the Midwest. Many of these works will have an eco-focus that directly addresses the Midwestern landscape as a contested space. Besides reading, discussing and interpreting the Midwestern-themed works on the syllabus, students in the class will create (and revise through peer workshops) their own creative works of Midwest-inspired art to reveal what the Midwest has come to mean to them personally. Prerequisite: junior standing and English 190 and 196; or consent of instructor.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Sherwood Anderson. *Winesburg, Ohio*. Norton Critical edition.
2. Lorine Niedecker. *Granite Pail. Gnomon*.
3. Aldo Leopold. *Sand County Almanac*. Oxford.
4. Louise Erdrich. *Love Medicine*. Harper Perennial.
5. Kim Blaeser. *Absentee Indians*. Michigan State University.
6. John Porcellino. *Map of My Heart*. Drawn and Quarterly.

- Sanders, Foster Wallace.

COURSE GOALS

1. To interrogate the two questions: Is there a distinct Midwestness? How is it revealed in art?
2. To ask (and answer through creative expression) these two questions: Who am I? What is my relationship to this place?
3. To improve each other's work, and our own, through a generous yet disciplined workshop.
4. To expand the range of our appreciation for and practice in various forms of literature and art.
5. To better understand and appreciate the Midwestern landscape.
6. To write and revise something you're proud of.
7. To reflect on your liberal arts education at Beloit in preparation for graduation.

DEADLINES

Without them, we accomplish little. Best not to wait for certain slants of light in order to write, says Toni Morrison. You set your own deadlines for the class, but you must keep them. Because it will disrupt the efficiency of the workshop, late work will not be accepted. You are required to bring multiple copies of your work to class a week before it is to be discussed. E-mail submissions to the class are unacceptable. A drop box outside my office may be used for absences.

EVALUATION

I will not assign a letter grade to your creative works but will give you a thorough narrative evaluation. Basically, you have a B to lose or improve upon. Lose it by turning in slipshod or undeveloped work, by missing class, deadlines, or by being a narrow-minded or otherwise ineffective critic. Improve it by dazzling us with exceptional work, fresh insights during discussion and consistently thorough critiques. Remember that evaluation in any art class is subjective; however, there are several things you can do to ensure the grade you want.

- 1. Complete written work on time.** Late work won't count during the course or in your final portfolio. This will obviously reduce your final grade.
- 2. Revise.** Think of revision as re-visioning your work. Seeing it again. Revision includes, but is not limited to, editing and proofreading. This is not a composition class. We take for granted that you can write and punctuate sentences.
- 3. Turn in only carefully revised work.** Even your "first draft" should be revised before you turn it in to your peers. From this point on, no one except yourself should ever see a first draft of anything you write. Consistently shabby "first drafts" will reduce your grade.
- 4. Take an active part** in class discussions and workshops. Thoroughly critique each of your peer's manuscripts. Attentiveness can balance introversion.
- 5. Be present.** See below.

ATTENDANCE

Missing more than two classes will result in the diminution of your grade at the rate of one-half grade per absence. All other absences are unexcused, except in rare emergencies, and in such cases, only if you contact me by the day of your absence and provide adequate documentation. You are responsible for all deadlines regardless of your attendance. If you miss a deadline, you will receive neither credit for the missed assignment nor a peer critique of the assignment.

CONFERENCES

I would like to meet with each of you individually during the semester. You are required to schedule and attend a conference with me sometime before the midterm. Of course, you are encouraged to visit my office hours as often as you like.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Three new creative projects. (Or one project with three movements). Some combination of fiction, personal essay and poetry, revised before and after submission. Two of these three projects will be presented in class workshop, with the final submitted at the end of the course in a portfolio of all works. Multi/genre/media projects encouraged. Projects may build off previous coursework. Students must work in poetry and at least one prose genre. 50 percent.
2. One oral presentation of 7-10 minutes introducing the class to a Midwestern artist, writer or musician not on the syllabus. 10 percent
3. A Midwest Journal, including the Patch of Earth Project. Three entries per week. 20 percent.
4. Active and articulate participation in the seminar, including shared responsibility for leading discussion. 10 percent.
5. Participation in at least two Liberal Arts and Practice Center activities, such as workshops on resume writing, networking, or developing a personal portfolio. 10 percent

THE PATCH OF EARTH PROJECT

Each of you will map out, mark and “inhabit” your own little patch of the Midwest this semester. You will create a plot (or a quadrat as scientists call them), that is relative in size to your own physical measurements. You will visit this plot at various times during the semester, taking detailed notes on what you see, touch, hear, feel, smell and think. You will seek help from a biology student to identify what you see. From your plot, you will observe the change of the season, and you will practice phenology, or the science of biological cycles (for our purposes, especially, the science of first arrivals). One—or perhaps all—of your creative projects will grow from the Patch of Earth Project. You will work in teams to locate, map and mark your plots. You will invite your partner to your plot on multiple occasions.

WHAT IS A CAPSTONE?

From the Beloit College Catalog: “All students complete a capstone experience, typically in their final year. The primary goal of the capstone requirement is to help students apply and articulate what they have learned at Beloit College in ways that will make them better practitioners of the liberal arts. Capstone experiences emphasize integration and synthesis of theory, practical experience, and content of courses previously taken. Such experiences can be located within a major, but they can also be more broadly focused.” This course is a departmental capstone with elements of a broader, interdisciplinary capstone.

VISITING ARTISTS

This course will host two visiting artists, comics writer John Porcellino, and Native American poet Kim Blaeser (the newly minted Wisconsin Poet Laureate!). Besides sharing their work and creative processes, these artists will speak to you about (and answer questions about) their own career paths in the arts to help you better imagine your own.

FIELD TRIPS

We’re fortunate to live within two hours drive of two of Wisconsin’s most famous literary locales—Aldo Leopold’s shack near Baraboo and Lorine Niedecker’s cabin near Fort Atkinson. Besides being historical sites (and pilgrimage sites), these two places are inspirational writing destinations. We’ll explore the working spaces of two of Wisconsin’s most famous authors and compose some new work of our own on the premises.

ICE FISHING, THE MORONIC STORM
 Jim Hannister

EN 310 CLASS CALENDAR (DRAFT)

Week 1:	T 1/20	Introductions. What does the Midwest mean to you. "Ode to the Midwest;" "Lying in a Hammock..."
	R 1/22	SR Sanders and David F. Wallace essays ; Greg Brown's "Iowa Waltz"
Week 2:	T 1/27	Anderson 1 st 3rd <i>Maya</i>
	R 1/29	Anderson next 3rd. Stake out "Patch of Earth" by today. <i>Jen, Tim (Kirby)</i>
Week 3:	T 2/3	Anderson to end. Turn in first project idea (<i>SAM</i>) (<i>Kirby</i>)
	R 2/5	Niedecker 1 st half <i>Alex</i>
Week 4:	T 2/10	Niedecker 2 nd half and film <i>Kiara</i> .
	W 2/11	Susan Choi reading 8 p.m.
	R 2/12	<i>Maya, Dartz, Tanner, (Maya)</i>
Week 5:	T 2/17	<i>Jen, Tim C, Anika (Kyla)</i>
	R 2/19	Porcellino, <i>Kirby, Emma R</i>
Week 6:	T 2/24	Porcellino, <i>Sam, Emma, Dartz.</i>
	R 2/26	Porcellino class visit <i>Emma</i>
Week 7:	T 3/3	<i>Safari, Samantha, alex, Jen.</i>
	R 3/5	<i>KYLA, Keia, Dylor, Tim, Mike</i>
Week 8:		Spring Break: March 7-15
Week 9:	T 3/17	<i>SAFARI/KIARA</i> Leopold <i>Anika</i>
	R 3/19	Leopold <i>Mike</i>
Week 10:	T 3/24	Leopold and film <i>Sam B.</i>
	R 3/26	<i>DARTZ/ANIKA</i> Blaeser 1 st half <i>Dylan</i>
Week 11:	T 3/31	Blaeser to end, <i>TIM, MAYA, Safari</i>
	R 4/2	Blaeser visit
	S 4/4	Niedecker field trip on Sat? <i>SAM, SAMANTHA</i>
Week 12:	T 4/7	<i>EMMAR, KIARA, Kirby, Tanner</i>
	R 4/9	No class; AWP conference
Week 13:	T 4/14	<i>EMMA/EMA</i> Erdrich 1 st half, <i>ALEX, EMMA</i>
	R 4/16.	Student symposium

The dangerous undertow will return you here.

Week 14: T 4/21

^{KYLA}
Erdrich to end SAFARI

R 4/23

Revision or LAPC day

S 4/25

Leopold field trip?

Week 15: T 4/28

Darth, Anicka, ~~Stinson~~ EMMA

R 4/30

Jen, MIKE, Dylan

5/2

Week 16: T 5/5

LAPC day?

KYLA
wkslp