

## 4470F – Seminar in American Literature: Reading “Eaarth”

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appointment

Course Room: UC 4401  
Course hours: Wed 4:30-7:30

### Description:

Recent environmentalists argue we live on a new planet, hence the new spelling “Eaarth.” We will read fiction, poetry, essays, and films from recent decades that use experimental techniques to understand our new Eaarth and what kind of planet it might become in the near future.

### Course Objectives

Successful students who complete the course will be able to:

- Analyze cultural works as reflective of larger environmental ideas
- Discuss and theorize cultural works using recent methods of literary and cultural scholarship
- Understand how elements of cultural form and content can become symbolic for aesthetic, social, environmental and experiences
- Write an analytical essay with a research component that proposes a compelling thesis

### Grading

Participation	15%	
Creative Eaarth assignment	20%	(at least 5 pages)
Blog post	5%	(2 pages)
Short Essay	5%	(2 pages)
Seminar presentation	15%	
Final Paper	40%	(10 pages)

**Note:** Computers are not allowed in this course.

**Assignments:** Late essays are not accepted. We will use OWL. Essays will be returned by OWL – be sure to read the comments.

**Participation:** Your participation is central to this class and is a key component of your growth as a student. Participation includes: being involved in class discussion,

participating in group work, and putting real energy into all assignments and readings.  
**Read the texts before the day they are discussed.**

**Presentations:** Presentations are 15 minutes long (I will keep time). The format is to focus on **three** main terms or issues in a given text. You will need to cite the text. You do not have to sum up the text or provide a lot of background – you can just jump into your three main ideas. You are welcome to make connections to previous texts or class discussion. You are also welcome to use any visual aids or handouts. You do not need to hand in any written work.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and obviously counts for your grade in participation. It is imperative to arrive to each class on time. No unexcused absences are permitted (I am not crazy and I do know that problems arise during the semester – but please supply a legitimate written excuse – see Western policy on this). If you miss a certain number of courses, I will warn you, but already you risk getting a zero in participation and/or dropped from the course.

**Academic Accommodation:** Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism constitutes an automatic failure of this course and goes on a student's permanent record of conduct. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me.

The following is a statement on plagiarism that has been mandated by the UWO Senate: "Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). Plagiarism checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their work in electronic form for plagiarism checking."

**MLA Documentation:** Undergraduate research papers written in Arts and Humanities follow

the formatting procedures outlined by the Modern Language Association. The complete guide to this format can be found in the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009). This guide can be found On Reserve in the D. B. Weldon Library, call no: LB2369.M57 2009. The Department of English also offers an overview of MLA documentation, at: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/guidelines.html>

**Western University Land Acknowledgment:** Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

### **Texts**

Ernest Callenbach *Ecotopia* (Bantam)

Allen Ginsberg *The Fall of America* (City Lights)

Craig Santos Perez *from unincorporated territory [lukao]* (Omnidawn, 2017)

Will Alexander *Compression and Purity* (City Lights)

John Steinbeck *The Grapes of Wrath* (Penguin)

Richard McGuire *Here* (Pantheon)

Sept. 12 – Introduction; Bill McKibben, *Eaarth*, excerpt; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, excerpt; Ramin Bahrani *Plastic Bag* (2009); Margaret Atwood “Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet”

Sept. 19 – **no class** – Ernest Callenbach *Ecotopia*; Will Steffen, et. al. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?”; Recommended: Eileen Crist “On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature”

Sept. 26 – finish *Ecotopia*; Stephen Zavestoski and Andrew Weigert “Bringing Forth an Ecotopian Future: The Production of Imagined Futures Through Contemporary Cultural Practices”; Dipesh Chakrabarty “The Climate of History: Four Theses”

Oct. 3 – Robert Smithson “The Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey”; photographs of Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha, Richard Misrach, Zoe Strauss, Edward Burtynsky; Nicholas Mirzoeff “Visualizing the Anthropocene”; Recommended: Joshua Schuster “Unearthing Photography”

Oct. 10 – **Fall Reading Week** – screen *Rise – Standing Rock* (#1 and #2) (2017)  
[https://archive.org/details/youtube-38rl\\_kSvfrs](https://archive.org/details/youtube-38rl_kSvfrs)

Oct. 17 – Imre Szeman “How to Know Oil”; Warren Cariou “Tar Hands: A Messy Manifesto”; “These Are the Defiant Water Protectors of Standing Rock,” *National Geographic* (2017) <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/01/tribes-standing-rock-dakota-access-pipeline-advancement/#close>

Oct. 24 – Denis Cosgrove *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, “Preface,” “Chapter 1: Imperial and Poetic Globe”; Buckminster Fuller “Spaceship Earth”; James Lovelock “Preface” “The Recognition of Gaia”; Alan Weisman *The World without Us*, excerpt (Ch. 2, 3, 18); E. O. Wilson *Half-Earth*, excerpt; David Grinspoon *Earth in Human Hands*, excerpt

Oct. 31 – **creative assignment due** – Allen Ginsberg *The Fall of America*; Craig Santos Perez *from unincorporated territory* [lukao]

Nov. 7 – **no class – blog post due** – screen Benh Zeitlin (dir.) *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012); Tavia Nyong’o “Little Monsters: Race, Sovereignty, and Queer Inhumanism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*”

Nov. 14 – **short assignment due** – Will Alexander *Compression and Purity*; Ted Chiang “The Great Silence” <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/the-great-silence/>

Nov. 21 – John Steinbeck *The Grapes of Wrath* (1-239)

Nov. 28 – John Steinbeck *The Grapes of Wrath* (finish)

Dec. 5 – Richard McGuire *Here*  
**Due: Final paper**

**Creative Assignment (due Oct. 31 – at least 5 pages):**

1. Create an Eearth – either an already possible alternative to Earth or a “if this goes on...” scenario on Earth. Give your planet a new name.
2. What do people do, see, think, eat, read or look at on your Eearth?
3. What philosophies, poetics, visual arts, and literary forms are central for your comprehension of your Eearth? What does Eearth look like? What poetics are appropriate to it?
4. Is your Eearth utopian/dystopian/ecotopian, or perhaps all of these?
5. Interview a person that is emblematic of your Eearth.
6. Describe an object or place that is emblematic of your Eearth.

**Blog Post (due Nov. 7):** Visit someone else’s Eearth. Describe your experience. Reflect on and theorize your visit.