

Department of English & Writing Studies

## PRAGMATISM AND AMERICAN AESTHETICS

ENGLISH 9210A  
Fall 2022

Instructor: Prof. Kate Stanley  
Contact: [kate.stanley@uwo.ca](mailto:kate.stanley@uwo.ca)  
Class time: Thursday, 12:30pm-3:30pm  
Class location: UC 3415  
Office Hour Appointment Sign-up: <https://calendly.com/kate-stanley/15min>

This course traces the legacy of the philosophical tradition of pragmatism in American aesthetics and culture from the Puritans to the present with a special focus on pedagogy. At the heart of this course are foundational essays and lectures by William James, which introduce the tenets of pragmatism, pluralism, and radical empiricism. We will focus on the relationship between pragmatism and literary study as it intersects in the classroom and extends into the practice of everyday life. With its emphasis on clear thinking and practical action, the “pragmatic method” of inquiry can seem hostile to aesthetic experimentation. We will study consider sites of intersection and divergence between proponents of what has been described as “the official philosophy of America” and an eclectic array of social and cultural innovators who have variously engaged with pragmatist methods over the last century and a half. In particular, we will trace a pragmatist-activist line from Emerson up to the present by way of two poets—A.R. Ammons and Tommy Pico—who test whether a pragmatist “ecology of practices” can motivate interventionist environmental and climate action.

### COURSE READINGS

Our core texts are available at the Western Bookstore. You'll also find links to an alternate online source for these books below: [https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=32022&courses%5B0%5D=001\\_UW/ENG9210A](https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=32022&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/ENG9210A)

Ammons, A.R. *Garbage: A Poem*. Norton, 2003.  
<https://www.bookdepository.com/Garbage-R-Ammons/9780393324112?ref=grid-view&qid=1661350885838&sr=1-1>

James, William. *Pragmatism and Other Writings*. Penguin, 2000.  
<https://www.bookdepository.com/Pragmatism-Other-Writings-William-James/9780140437355?ref=grid-view&qid=1661351121303&sr=1-1>

Lapoujade, David. *William James: Empiricism and Pragmatism*. Duke UP, 2019.  
<https://www.bookdepository.com/William-James-David-Lapoujade/9781478006763?ref=grid-view&qid=1661350980037&sr=1-8>

Pico, Tommy. *Nature Poem*. Tin House, 2017.  
<https://www.bookdepository.com/Nature-Poem-Tommy-Pico/9781941040638?ref=grid-view&qid=1661351093207&sr=1-1>

E-copies of all assigned readings on the course reading schedule below are uploaded on Perusall for the purpose of completing the Collective Reading assignment each week:

[https://app.perusall.com/courses/eng-9210a/\\_dashboard/assignments/cnmRyZ7zSyYubBpNH](https://app.perusall.com/courses/eng-9210a/_dashboard/assignments/cnmRyZ7zSyYubBpNH)

You are therefore able to access all our readings online. I'm encouraging you to purchase paper copies of the longer readings because of the demonstrable benefits of reading on paper, as outlined below:

<https://hechingerreport.org/evidence-increases-for-reading-on-paper-instead-of-screens/>

## COURSEWORK

Class Participation	10%	i.) Midterm Reflection – Oct 13 ii.) End-of-term Reflection – Dec 8
Slow Reading Exercise	5%	Draft: Sept 22 (Workshop #1 – 500 words) Submit: Sept 29 (600 words maximum)
Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James	10%	i.) Pedagogy Practice (10 mins per teacher) ii.) Pedagogy Reflection (900-1200 words per teacher)
Teaching Exercise #2 James's Readers	10%	i.) Pedagogy Practice (10 mins per teacher) ii.) Pedagogy Reflection (900-1200 words per teacher)
Collective Reading Exercise Perusall Posts	10%* *completion grade	6 50-word reading posts per week (300 words) Due: 48 hrs before class (by Tues @ 12:30pm) 10 weeks of posts → 1% per week x 10 = 10%
Essay Proposal	5%* *completion grade	i.) Pitch – Oct 13 (200 words) ii.) Outline (600 words) + Critical Conversation (900-1200 words) – Nov 10
Final Essay	50%	Draft: Nov 24 (Workshop #2 - 1200 words) Draft: Dec 1 (Workshop #3 - 2400 words) Share In-Progress Work: Dec 8 (5 mins) Due: December 12 (3600 – 4000 words)

## Course Ethos

Our class will honour the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will use each other's preferred and chosen names and pronouns; we will engage in respectful and generous conversation with each other; we will avoid language that is hurtful, violent, or exclusive. We will also acknowledge that we may make mistakes, and that learning from each other and questioning ourselves is part of the EDI process.

## Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

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

### Graduate Course Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at: <https://uwo.ca/health/psych/>.

### Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found [here](#).

### Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Graduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

COURSE SCHEDULEAbbreviations

*WI* William James: *Writings 1878-1899*. Library of America, 1992.  
*WII* William James: *Writings 1902-1910*. Library of America, 1987.  
*POW* William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*. Penguin, 2000,  
*PP* William James, from *The Principles of Psychology*. Dover, 1890.

CLASS	DISCUSSION	READINGS	DUE
Week 1: Sept 8	Introduction	Robert Richardson, "William James," <i>New York Times</i> . (14 pages)  James, "On Some Mental Effects of the Earthquake," <i>WII</i> , pp. 1215-22.	Rdg: 20 pages
Week 2: Sept 15	Jamesian Reading	James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," "What Makes a Life Significant" [from <i>Talks to Students</i> , <i>POW</i> , pp. 267-303.  Ralph Waldo Emerson, from "Nature," pp. 7-11.  Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."  Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."  Joan Richardson, Introduction: Thirteen Ways of Looking at Pragmatism," <i>Pragmatism and American Experience</i> (2012), pp. 1-31.  Richard Poirier, "Reading Pragmatically." <i>Poetry and Pragmatism</i> (1992), pp. 171-93.	Rdg: 100 pages
Week 3: Sept 22	Reading James	James, "A World of Pure Experience," <i>POW</i> , pp. 314-36.  Michael Clune, "'Blind and Dead': William James and Aesthetic Education," <i>William James and Literary Studies</i> (forthcoming, 20 pages)  David Lapoujade, "Introduction," <i>William James: Empiricism and Pragmatism</i> (2019) pp. 1-8.  WORKSHOP # 1: Slow Reading Exercise	Rdg: 50 pages  DUE: Slow Reading Exercise Draft (500 words)

Week 4: Sept 29	Jamesian Experience, Jamesian Aesthetics	<p>James, "The Stream of Thought," <i>PP</i>, pp. 225-90.</p> <p>James, "Does "Consciousness" Exist?" <i>WII</i>, pp. 1141-58.</p> <p>Lapoujade, "Chapter 1: Radical Empiricism," pp. 9-26.</p> <p>Richard Shusterman, "The Pragmatist Aesthetics of William James." <i>The British Journal of Aesthetics</i>, Vol. 51, No. 4, (2011): pp. 347–61.</p>	<p>Rdg: 100 pages</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #2: Shusterman</p> <p>DUE: Revised Slow Reading Exercise</p>
Week 5: Oct 6	Jamesian Pluralism	<p>W.E.B. Du Bois, from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (25 pages)</p> <p>James, "Is Life Worth Living?" <i>POW</i>, pp. 219-41.</p> <p>James, "The Absolute and the Strenuous Life," <i>WII</i>, pp. 940-41.</p> <p>James, "Conclusions" [from <i>A Pluralistic Universe</i>] <i>WII</i>, pp. 776-81.</p> <p>James, "Faith and the Right to Believe," [an appendix to <i>Some Problems of Philosophy</i>, "section on 'The Pluralistic or Melioristic' Universe"], <i>WII</i>, pp. 1099-1101.</p> <p>Cornel West, "James on Individuality, Reconciliation, and Heroic Energies," and "W. E. B. Du Bois: The Jamesian Organic Intellectual," from <i>The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism</i> (1989), pp. 57-68, pp. 138-150.</p> <p>Ross Posnock, "Going Astray, Going Forward: Du Boisian Pragmatism and its Lineage," from <i>The Revival of Pragmatism</i> (1998), pp. 33-44</p> <p>Walton Muyumba, "Introduction: Vamping 'til Ready," <i>Pragmatism and Jazz Improvisation, The Shadow and the Act</i> (2009), pp. 1-13.</p>	<p>Rdg: 110 pages</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #2: West</p>
Week 6: Oct 13	Jamesian Attention	<p>James, "Attention," <i>PP</i>, pp. 402-4, 424-29, 442-44.</p>	<p>Rdg: 150 pages</p>

		<p>A.R. Ammons, <i>Garbage</i>. Penguin (1993). (115 pages)</p> <p>Andrew Epstein, “‘Everyday-Life Projects’ in Poetry and Beyond,” and “Chapter 3: ‘The Tiny Invites Attention’: A.R. Ammons’s Quotidian Muse,” <i>Attention Equals Life</i> (2016), pp. 29-35, 110-31.</p>	<p>DUE:</p> <p>i. Revised Slow Reading Exercise (600 words)</p> <p>ii. Essay Pitch (200 words)</p> <p>iii. Participation Check-in</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #2: Epstein</p>
Week 7: Oct 20	ZOOM CHECK-INS	Meeting: Essays, Participation, Slow Reading	20-minute meeting sign-up
Week 8: Oct 27	James & Everyday Life	<p>James, “Preface,” and “Attention,” [from <i>Psychology: Briefer Course</i>], <i>WI</i>, pp. 3-4, pp. 210-28.</p> <p>Tommy Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i>. (2018) (70 pages)</p> <p>Ammons, from <i>Tape for the Turn of the Year</i>. (5 pages)</p> <p>Brian Teare, “The Earth is Full of Men,” <i>21/19: Contemporary Poets in the Nineteenth-Century Archive</i> (2019), 142-60. *Concentrate on pgs. 142-44, 149-52, 157-60.</p> <p>Jenny Odell, “Introduction: Surviving Usefulness,” “Chapter 4: Exercises in Attention,” from <i>How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy</i> (2020), pp. ix-xxiii, pp. 95-126.</p> <p>Min Hyung Song, “Introduction: The Practice of Sustaining Attention to Climate Change,” “Chapter 4: How Should I Live? Inattention and Everyday-Life Projects,” from <a href="#">Climate Lyricism (2022)</a>, pp. 1-15, pp. 80-97.</p>	<p>Rdg: 150 pages</p> <p>Teaching Exercise: Reading James</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #2: Odell and/or Song</p>

Week 9: Nov 3	BREAK	READING WEEK	
Week 10: Nov 10	Pragmatism; or, a New Name for Some Old Ways of thinking	James, <i>Pragmatism, POW</i> , pp. 5-132.  Lapoujade, "Chapter 2: Truth and Knowledge," pp. 27-49.	Rdg: 145 pages  DUE: Essay Outline + Critical Conversation  Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James  Teaching Exercise #2: Lapoujade
Week 11: Nov 17	Pragmatist Belief	James, from <i>The Meaning of Truth, POW</i> , pp. 135-41, 146-67.  James, from <i>The Will to Believe, POW</i> , pp. 191-218.  Nick Gaskill, "The Will to Make Believe," <i>William James and Literary</i> (forthcoming, 27 pages).	Rdg: 80 pages  Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James  Teaching Exercise #2: Gaskill
Week 12: Nov 24	Changing Your Mind	James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," [from <i>The Will to Believe</i> ], <i>WI</i> , pp. 566-94.  James, "Conversion," and Conversion--concluded," [from <i>Varieties of Religious of Experience</i> ,] <i>WII</i> , pp. 177-238.  Isabelle Stengers, "William James: An Ethics of Thought," <i>Radical Philosophy</i> 157 (2009): pp. 9-19.  Adam Phillips, "'Loose Change': The Conversions of William James." <i>Raritan</i> ; Vol. 37, No. 1, (Summer 2017): 21-39.  WORKSHOP #2: Essay Draft	Rdg: 120 pages  DUE: Essay Draft (1200 words)  Teaching Exercise #1: Reading James  Teaching Exercise #2: Phillips and/or Stengers
Week 13: Dec 1	Pragmatic Community	Lapoujade, "Chapter 3: Faith and the Pragmatic Community," pp. 51-71.  Rebecca Solnit, "William James's Moral Equivalents," <i>A Paradise built in Hell: The</i>	DUE: Essay Draft (2400 words)  Rdg: 40 pages

		<p><i>Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster</i>. (2009), pp. 49-57.</p> <p>William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War." <i>WII</i>, pp. 1281-93.</p> <p>EWORKSHOP #3: Essay Draft cont.</p>	<p>Teaching Exercise #1: Rdg James</p> <p>Teaching Exercise #2: Lapoujade</p>
Week 14: Dec 8	Wrap-Up	Sharing Work + Wrap Up	<p>Sharing Work-in-Progress (5 mins)</p> <p>DUE: End-of-term Reflection</p> <p>DUE: Final Essay (Dec 12)</p>