

**University of Puerto Rico**  
Río Piedras Campus  
College of Humanities  
English Department  
Undergraduate Program

**B.** Literature and Ecology

**C.** INGL. 3XXX/ ENGL. 3XXX

**D.** 45 hours/ 3 credit hours.

**E. Pre-Requisites:** Level 4 or 5 on the English Department Placement Test, Advanced Placement in English Levels 4 or 5, or 580 and above on the CEEB.

**F. Course Description**

An interdisciplinary course that examines essays, short stories, novels, and films that address, from a variety of perspective, the human relationship to the natural, non-human world during the contemporary era of planetary change, globalization, and increasing commercial and technological dependency.

**G. Course Objectives: By the end of the course, students will be able to:**

1. Comprehend fundamental aspects of a variety of literature that addresses ecological issues, such as human alienation from nature, deforestation, habitat destruction, biotechnology, global warming, conservation efforts, indigenous land rights, etc.
2. Read critically and interpret essays from a variety of academic disciplines and popular genres, short stories, and novels (critical thinking).
3. Make intellectual connections between academic, literary, autobiographical, contemplative, professional and activist writings on and cinematic explorations of the interconnectedness between human life practices, human imagination, “wildness,” spirituality, biodiversity and the green Earth (critical thinking and cultural-historical awareness).
4. Recognize and analyze the argumentative and literary strategies of an array of informative, argumentative, and autobiographical essays and films that draw upon the popular sciences and health, anthropology, biology, ecology, ecocriticism, ecopsychology, environmental conservationism, history, global studies, religion, zoology, and the travel documentary. Examine the various modes of constructing knowledge about the interrelationship between literature and ecology (critical thinking and cultural-historical awareness).
5. Understand and use basic literary terminology and ecological concepts in classroom discussions and in written essay and research paper assignments (communication).
6. Respond aesthetically to essays, short stories and novels that approach the subject of the human quest to connect to the larger non-human world (aesthetic response).
7. Recognize the diversity of human experiences, perspectives, values, and concerns about

contemporary society, mass culture, technology, the environment and (natural) daily living as expressed through works of literature (cultural-historical awareness).

8. Analyze the influence of and participation in particular arts traditions or social movements by writers and film-makers from diverse cultural and geographic territories, (for example, from California's high Sierras to Japan, from Australia to Kenya, from Virginia to Britain, from the glacial peaks of Peru to the Himalayas of Nepal and Tibet, and, closer to home, from Curaçao and Jamaica to Puerto Rico) (transcultural-historical awareness).
9. Gain a more global or multicultural perspective through increased awareness of the non-European and non-American cultural traditions that have advocated environmental consciousness and have impacted the intersecting academic fields of postcolonial studies, ecology, literary studies, and ecocriticism.
10. Formulate and support critical arguments in verbal and written analyses of literary works, and in written essay and research paper assignments (communication, critical thinking, literary analysis writing).
11. Acquire a knowledge of available research sources in the field and be able to use the both bibliographic research sources and electronic databases and web-based research sources.
12. Acquire an inquisitive and thoughtful attitude regarding the relationship between literature, environmental justice, individual intellectual or spiritual growth, personal agency, community involvement, social action and global change (the connection between academic and experiential learning).

#### **H. Content and Time Distribution (45 hours)**

- I. Genres of Expression: Academic and Popular Essays on Environmentalism (An Anthropological Case Study and Science Fiction Films). Ecological Theme: Linking the Local to the Global. Author: anthropologist Jaffe Rivke. Films: *Silent Running* and *Soylent Green* (4.5 hours).
- II. The Informative Essay Intended for a Mass Audience: rhetorical devices in the essay introduction– use of the question or the personal anecdote in the essay introduction. Ecological Themes: Daily Living Practices, Genetically Engineered Food, and Endangered Water. Author: activist Jane Goodall (3 hours).
- III. The Rhetorical Strategies of the Argumentative Essay Written to a Specialist Audience. Ecological Theme: Ecopsychology and the Relationship between Man, Mental Health, Societal Well-being and the Natural Environment. Authors: ecopsychologists Paul Shepard and Alan Thein Durning ( in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*) (1.5 hours)
- IV. The Documentary Film Genre and Ecological Campaigning; Using Personal Biography Persuasively; Using History Persuasively in the Documentary Film Genre and Essays. Ecological Themes: Land Ownership, Use, and Conservation Issues: Public and Private Land as Managed by the State and Commerce or Social Elites; the “Dying Planet” as addressed by Film and Ecopsychology Essays; Authors: ecopsychologists Chellis Glendinning and Terrence O’Connor (*Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*) and poet, literary critic and environmental activist Gary Snyder. Film: *An Inconvenient Truth* (3 hours)
- V. Documenting Local Grassroots Movements, by Using Rhetoric that will Appeal to Global Funding Bodies. Ecological Themes: The Greenbelt Movement in Kenya; the Impact of the Demand for “Accountability” and Corporate Organization on Non-Governmental

- Organizations and Land Conservation. Author: Noble Peace Prize recipient Wangari Maathai (1.5 hours)
- VI. Using Descriptive Details in the Literary Essay; using an Economic Appeal as a Persuasive Device; Literary Tropes of Wildness, Wilderness, and Simple Living. Ecological Themes: Individual Experiential Knowledge versus Ideologies and Lifestyles Promulgated by Society; Nature as Utopia. Author: Henry David Thoreau ( 3 hours)
- VII. Determinism and Realist Fiction. Ecological Themes: the Interior and Exterior Landscape; Nature as a Force Hostile to Humans; Nature as Dystopia. Author: Jack London (1.5 Hours)
- VIII. The Linear Narrative in Non-Fiction Prose and Fiction; Using Multiple Perspectives within One Literary Text; Using Descriptive Detail in Short Stories to Symbolically Create Mood/ Atmosphere, and Enhance the Theme; Deep Description and Close Observations. Ecological Themes: Temporary Sojourns Into Nature; the Interconnectedness between the Weather, the State of Mind, and Human Relationships. Authors: Gretel Ehrlich and Ann Beattie (1.5 hours)
- IX. The Filmic Journey Narrative. Ecological Themes: Documenting China's History in Tibet; Global Violence and Land Disputes; Economic Needs, Competing Ideologies, Traditional Spirituality, National Politics, Cultural Conservation, and Sacred Lands. Film: *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion* (3 hours)
- X. Conventions of the Literary and Scholarly Travel Narrative; Representations of Encounters with the “Other” in the Film and Non-Fiction Prose. Ecological Themes: Economic Needs, Competing Ideologies, Traditional Spirituality, National Politics, Cultural Conservation, and Sacred Lands; Looking for Nature and Spiritual Upliftment Abroad. Author: Peter Matthiessen (1.5 hours)
- XI. The Power of the Personal Narrative and Family Story in a Dramatic Film. Ecological Themes: Global Change and Traditional Society; Harmonious Living on the Land; the Impact of Technology and Cultural Imperialism; Looking for Nature and Spiritual Upliftment Abroad. Author: Peter Matthiessen. Film: *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (3 hours)
- XII. Literary Non-fiction Prose; Integrating Scientific Reading Material with Personal Narrative. Ecological Themes: The Self-taught, Contemporary Naturalist; Nature and the Contemplative, Awakened Life; Integrating the Global and Local; Looking for Nature and Spiritual Upliftment Abroad and at Home; the Woman's Connection to Nature; Plot, Setting, and Characterization in Short Fiction; Woman as Symbol for Wildness and Wilderness; the Indigenous Civilization and Nature; Wilderness as a Dangerous and Death-Causing Place; Woman as Haunted by Nature; the Domestication of Nature in Landscape Art. Authors: Annie Dillard, Louise Erdrich, and Margaret Atwood (3 hours)
- XIII. Constructing a Fictional World; Conveying the Theme or Message in a Short Story. Ecological Themes: Rejecting the World as it has been Constructed; Desire for a More Perfect Existence; the Construction of an Imaginary World; Nihilism; Societal Anger, Shame and Pain; Human Nature and the Natural World. Authors: Ursula Le Guin and Jan Williams (1.5 hours)
- XIV. Using Appeals to Traditional Knowledge of Ancestral Peoples. Ecological Themes: In Search of Wildness, Wilderness and the Sacred; Competing Land Claims, the Law, and the Clash Between Traditional, Indigenous Relationships to the Land and Colonizers' Use of Land. Author: Gary Snyder. Film: *Where the Green Ants Dream* (3 hours).
- XV. The Futuristic Novel and the Future. Ecological Themes: The Genetically Engineered

Society. Student presentations on novel. Author: Aldous Huxley (6 hours)  
XVI. Presentation of Student Research and Writing Projects, Final Exam (4.5 hours)

**I. Teaching Strategies:** Lecture (30%), critical; guided group discussion (30%); task group projects (20%) on literary texts, critical readings, and films; critical essay and research paper writing (20%).

**J. Resources and Equipment Required:** English Department screening room, Sala Jorge Enjuto, or computer lab may be needed.

**K. Methods of Evaluation:**

Attendance and Participation	10%
Daily Quizzes	15%
Informal responses to reading assignments and films (Written homework assignments)	10%
Formal Essay #1	15%
Formal Essay #2	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Group Presentation on novel	5%
<u>Final Research/ Writing Project and Presentation</u>	<u>15%</u>
TOTAL	100%

\*\*\* *A differential grading system will be applied for students with special needs.*

**L. Grading System:** A, B, C, D, F

**Ley 51**

Los estudiantes que reciban servicios de Rehabilitación Vocacional deben comunicarse con el (la) professor(a) al inicio del semestre para planificar el acomodo razonable y equipo asistivo necesario conforme a las recomendaciones de la Oficina de Asuntos para las Personas con impedimento (OAPI) del Decanato de Estudiantes. También aquellos estudiantes con necesidades especiales que requieren de algún tipos de asistencia o acomodo deben comunicarse con el (la) professor(a).

**M. Selected Bibliography**

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### **FILMS:**

Silent Running (Dir. Douglas Trumbull, USA, 1971) (90 minutes)

Soylent Green (Dir. Richard Fleischer, USA, 1973) (97 minutes)

An Inconvenient Truth (Dir. Davis Guggenheim, USA, 2006) (96 minutes)

The Story of the Weeping Camel (Dir. Byambasuren Davan and Luigi Falorni) (87 minutes)

Where Green Ants Dream (Dir. Werner Herzog, USA, 1984) (105 minutes)

Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion (Dir. Tom Peosay, Tibet, 2003) (104 minutes)

"Lost in the Snow" (episode of the Discovery Channel Series I Shouldn't Be Alive, 2006)  
(52 minutes)

### **WEB SOURCES:**

1.) Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment: <http://www.unr.edu/cla/engl/isle/>

2.) Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment: <http://www.asle.umn.edu/>

3.) Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network: <http://www.iabin.net/>

4.) Environmental Writing Institute: <http://www.umt.edu/ewi/>

5.) Nature in Legend and Story: <http://www.h-net.org/~nilas/>

6.) Wilderness in the North American Imagination:

<http://pantheon.cis.yale.edu/~thomast/syll2.html>