

ENGW 1912W: Wild Words: Science and Nature Writing in New Zealand

[DRAFT: Please note, specific dates and assignments may change.]



Meeting Time/Place T/Th 1 p.m.-2:15 p.m., Room TBA
Instructor Kim Todd
Office/Office Hours T/W 10-11 a.m., Pillsbury 320F
E-Mail kftodd@umn.edu

Texts Clare Walker Leslie, *Keeping a Nature Journal*, 3rd Edition
Best American Science and Nature Writing 2022, ed. by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson
Excerpts from *Extraordinary Anywhere: Essays on Place from Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. by Ingrid Horrocks and Cherie Lacey
Additional essays and articles, available either online or as handouts

Supplies Colored pencils

Course Description

In this Freshman Seminar, which meets both LE theme and WI requirements, we will explore writing about science and nature in a variety of forms, from field journals and science interpretation to audio/video essays, profiles, and creative works inspired by the natural world. These varied writing assignments will allow students to develop the core writing skills of brainstorming, drafting, and revising as well as communicating ideas in different modes for different audiences. Useful for writers, science students, those engaged with environmental issues, and curious adventurers, the class begins after spring break and extends into May with a two-week immersion experience in New Zealand.

An island nation of fiords and volcanoes that has followed a unique evolutionary path, New Zealand is the ideal place to read and write about the natural world. Populated by flightless birds and outsize insects, it has no native land mammals except bats. The country, also called Aotearoa, "The Land of the Long White Cloud," is at the forefront of many scientific debates and challenges, including evolution on islands, the impacts and control of native species, climate change, and reintroduction biology. We will explore Wellington, the capital city, as well as Dunedin, the "Wildlife Capital of New Zealand," a city rich in Māori and Scottish heritage, Victorian architecture, and literary tradition. We will meet with scientists and conservationists working on issues that face both New Zealand and the entire planet. In addition, we will take trips to Matiu/Somes Island, a predator-free scientific reserve, the Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarewa), and the Otago Peninsula, home of colonies of little blue penguins and royal albatross.

This course meets the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

- Communicating effectively in a variety of genres, from audio presentations to science interpretation, to field journals.
- Engaging diversity by understanding approaches to science, nature, and landscape across cultures, both in New Zealand and the United States.
- Thinking critically about scientific/environmental issues facing New Zealand specifically and the planet more broadly and evaluating sources, including science journal articles, museum exhibits, and op/eds, that purport to offer solutions.
- Employing creativity, innovation, and revision skills in the writing of several short papers and one longer personal essay.
- Navigating international travel, gaining interpersonal skills and independence.

ENGW 1912W is a part of the University of Minnesota's liberal education (LE) curriculum. These courses, in the words of the Council on Liberal Education, “invite students to investigate the world from new perspectives, learn new ways of thinking that will be useful in many areas of life, and grow as...active citizen[s] and lifelong learner[s].” It satisfies Global Perspectives theme by asking students to think ethically about important challenges facing our society and world; reflect on the shared sense of responsibility required to build and maintain community; connect knowledge and practice; and foster a stronger sense of our roles as historical agents. As required by the Global Perspectives theme, the course focuses on the world beyond the United States--New Zealand, in particular. In addition, it allows students to reflect on the international and personal implications of issues such as the need for accurate, accessible, and engaging science communication; human/wildlife interactions; and restoration efforts.

Attendance

In-class participation is a necessary component of this course. Excessive absences and/or tardiness impact your performance and, ultimately, your grade. You are responsible for all material covered in class, whether you were present or absent. Participation also includes doing the readings and coming to class prepared to talk about them.

Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom

Writing requires great concentration, as do face-to-face discussions of your peers' work, so I will ask that you turn off cell phones and other electronic devices in the classroom. This includes laptops, with a few exceptions. If an essay has been assigned in an online format, you don't have to print it out for discussion. Drafts handed out to your peers and workshop comments for your peers must be in hard copy. Of course, I will make an exception for students who have a documented disability.

Field Journal

In this class, we will create field journals—notes of observations, thoughts, questions—kept as a record and as a source inspiration for longer pieces. You can either write on the pages of the “Nature

Journal” or use the assignments as inspiration and write in a separate designated “field journal.” If you choose the second, select a journal that is light, easy to carry, and has blank pages. Either way, bring the journal with you to New Zealand. While we are in the Twin Cities, you will do a journal assignment per week. While in New Zealand, we will do a journal assignment a day. For the earlier submissions, you will take a photo of an entry and turn it in on Canvas; at the end of the class, you will turn in the whole journal.

Short Papers

We start by writing three short papers for this class, each one about 500 words. By writing about a place, writing a natural and cultural history of a plant or animal, and writing a profile of a scientist, you will master research skills, observation skills, critical thinking skills, and interviewing skills. In addition, you will experiment with energetic prose that will let you take complex ideas and make them accessible to a general audience.

Audio/Video Essay

For this three-minute audio or video essay, you will formulate a question about something you have observed and pose that question at the start of your essay. For example: How can the royal albatross fly for so many days without landing? What makes one non-native species successful in a new ecosystem while another one quickly dies off? Why are New Zealand pigeons so much larger than their North American counterparts? Then, using information from research and interviews, you will answer the question and provide your conclusions to your listeners or viewers. We will go over examples in class.

Final paper

Your final paper will be a personal essay of roughly 1,500-2,000 words that revises and develops ideas launched in your field journal entries and shorter papers. It will be an in-depth exploration of the way a scientific controversy plays out in a particular place, grounded in specific details, and fueled by your observation and research. All papers should use a 12-point font and traditional margins.

Evaluation

Your grade will be determined according to the following:

10%	Place paper
10%	Animal/plant paper
10%	Profile paper
20%	Audio/video essay
20%	Field Journal
20%	Final paper
10%	Class participation

Grade Definitions

The University uses plus and minus grading on a 4.000 cumulative grade point scale in accordance with the following:

- A (4.000) - Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- A- (3.667)
- B+ (3.333)
- B (3.000) - Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B- (2.667)
- C+ (2.333)
- C (2.000) - Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
- C- (1.667)
- D+ (1.333)
- D (1.000) - Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
- S - Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better

For additional information, please refer to the University policy on Grading and Transcripts:
<https://policy.umn.edu/education/gradingtranscripts>

Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as: plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask. Review the University's Student Conduct Code.

Student Conduct Code

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community. As a student at the University you are expected to adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities." Review the University's Student Conduct Code.

Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom

Please do not use personal electronic devices in the classroom. If you need to use a particular device—for example, a laptop—come discuss it with me. Students are not permitted to record any part of a class/lab/other session unless explicitly granted permission by the instructor. If the student does not comply, the student may be asked to leave the classroom. For complete information, please reference the [policy on Student Responsibilities](#).

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials

Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student interests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community. For additional information, please see the [policy on Student Responsibilities](#).

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult [Board of Regents Policy](#).

Sexual Harassment

"Sexual harassment" means unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature under either of the following conditions: (a) when it is stated or implied that an individual needs to submit to, or participate in, conduct of a sexual nature in order to maintain their employment or educational standing or advance in their employment or education (quid pro quo sexual harassment); (b) when the conduct: (1) is severe, persistent or pervasive; and (2) unreasonably interferes with an individual's employment or educational performance or creates a work or educational environment that the individual finds, and a reasonable person would find, to be intimidating, hostile or offensive (hostile environment sexual harassment). Sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, relationship violence and related retaliation are all prohibited conduct at the University of Minnesota. For additional information, please consult [Board of Regents Policy](#).

In my role as a University employee, I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office that addresses these concerns. This allows a Title IX staff member to reach out to those who have experienced sexual misconduct to provide information about the personal support resources and options for investigation that they can choose to access. You are welcome to talk with me about concerns related to sexual misconduct. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive to your requests for confidentiality and support as possible. You can also or alternately choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include The Aurora Center, Boynton Mental Health and Student Counseling Services.

Disability Accommodations

The University of Minnesota views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to

providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

- If you have, or you think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (612-626-1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
- Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations, please contact your access consultant/disability specialist.

Additional information is available on the [DRC website](#) or e-mail drc@umn.edu with questions.

Mental Health and Stress Management

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the [Student Mental Health Website](#).

Academic Freedom and Responsibility

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost.

Additional Classroom Policies

For a full list of university classroom policies, please see:

<https://cla.umn.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/classroom-policies>

Schedule

Pre-class meeting

January 16

Orientation and syllabus distribution

Week 1

March 11-15

Introduction and Writing Fundamentals

Read Leslie, "Keeping a Nature Journal," Intro.

Week 2

March 18-22

Grounding in History

Read Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle* excerpt; Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* excerpt; Sommerville *Two Hundred Fifty Ways to Start an Argument about Captain Cook* excerpt; Quammen, *Song of the Dodo* excerpt

Field Journal Entry #1 Due

Week 3

March 25-29

Writing the Land

Read Dillard, "Total Eclipse;" Doyle, "Imagined Foxes;" Momaday, "The Way to Rainy Mountain" excerpt.

Field Journal Entry #2 Due

Week 4

April 1-5

Writing about Plants and Animals

Read Renwick, "The Story of the World's Loneliest Tree;" Quammen, "Has Success Spoiled the Crow;" Sherriff, "Beavers are Firefighters Who Work for Free;" Hausti, "Thriving Together; Salmon, Berries, and People;" Wynn-Grant, "Black Bears, Black Liberation."

Field Journal Entry #3 Due

Short Paper #1 Due—Essay about a Place

Week 5

April 8-12

Interpreting Journal Articles

Read Hudson, "Think globally, act locally: collective consent and the ethics of knowledge production;" journal articles selected by students.

Field Journal Entry #4 Due

Week 6

April 15-19

Interviewing and Profiles

Read Frey, "George Divoky's Planet;" Yong, "Dynasty;" Brown, "How Do You Find an Alien Ocean?"

Field Journal Entry #5 Due

Assignment #2 Due—Profile of a plant or animal

Week 7

April 22-26

Writing Scientific Controversy

Read Song and Temple, "The Climate Solution Actually Adding Millions of Tons of CO² into the Atmosphere;" Subramanian, "The Nature of Plastics;" O'Connell, "Why Silicon Valley Billionaires are Prepping for the Apocalypse in New Zealand;" Kolbert, "The Big Kill."

Field Journal Entry #6 Due

Week 8

April 29

Other Creative Forms

Read Horrocks, "Dissolving Genre: Toward Finding New Ways to Write About the World;" Ihimaera, *Whale Rider* excerpt; Tuwhare, poems.

Short paper #3 Due--Profile of a scientist

New Zealand Trip

May 9—Leave Minneapolis

May 11—Arrive in Wellington. Walking tour of the capital city and waka tour. Discussion of 'Wai Māori' by Tina Ngataand. **Field journal entry.**

May 12—IFSA Orientation, followed by visit to Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; tour Te Taiao Nature and Landscape and Desire exhibitions, among others; meet with a museum science communicator. **Field journal entry.**

May 13--Visit Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne ecosanctuary, an urban "island." Discussion of the history and conservation of endangered species in New Zealand and "The Immense Trees of Ooahaouragee" by Geoff Park. **Field journal entry.**

May 14—Lecture/session on Writing about Climate Change with Victoria University professor Rebecca Priestly. Students walk up Mt Victoria /to wind turbines on their own. **Field journal entry.**

May 15—Excursion to Matiu/Somes Island, a predator-free scientific reserve. Discussion with Department of Conservation representation about the island's human and natural history. **Field journal entry.**

May 16—Students explore on their own. **Field journal entry. Audio/video essay due.**

May 17—Fly to Dunedin. Dunedin walking tour. Class presentations/discussion of audio/video essays. **Field journal entry.**

May 18— Visit to Dunedin Farmers Market and discussion of farming in the region; visit to Otago Settlers Museum to look at human history of the area. Discussion of excerpts from *Extraordinary Anywhere* anthology. **Field journal entry.**

May 19--Orokonui Ecosanctuary; discussion of invasive species and conservation efforts; Volunteer restoration project. Discussion of excerpts from *Extraordinary Anywhere* anthology. **Field journal entry.**

May 20--Trip to Otago Peninsula; Lanarch Castle/Pyramids hike/Blue Penguins lecture and viewing/visit to Royal Albatross Centre. **Field journal entry.**

May 21—Monarch Wildlife Cruise to see albatross, petrels, cormorants, New Zealand fur seals, dolphins, and New Zealand sealions. Professor-led discussion of ocean life/ocean conservation. **Field journal entry. Final essay draft Due.** Peer workshopping of essay drafts.

May 22—Lecture with Lloyd Davis, Professor of Science Communication, and penguin biologist. Visit to Otago Museum which covers the natural history of the region. Discussion of excerpts from *Extraordinary Anywhere* anthology. **Field journal entry.**

May 23—Students explore on their own: Tunnel Beach/glow worm cave. Farewell dinner. **Field journal entry.**

May 24—Leave for Minneapolis/Arrive in Minneapolis. **Field journal due.**

May 28—**Final essay due.**