ENGL F213X: Academic Writing about the Social and Natural Sciences

Humans and Whales

First of all, “Welcome to English 213X.” The aim of this course is to help you write more critically, effectively, and reflectively. The day-to-day work of the class centers on the writings of the students in it, and particularly on the question of how writers can make use of the comments of their readers in revising what they have to say. The course will engage you in a project of writing and reading, of critiquing papers, editing, and revising. It is designed to help you learn how to use writing to pursue compelling issues in the university and the broader intellectual community.

This semester, our work will focus on a particular topic: whales. We will examine and interrogate a variety of scientific and non-scientific texts which are concerned with whales and humankind’s relationships with them. We will trace the origins of this relationship back to the mythological past, and we will study how it has developed and changed over time. In an effort to better understand the history of humankind’s interactions with these magnificent sea creatures, we will complete a series of exploratory and analytical papers.

The readings for this semester include:

1. “The Inland Whale”
2. “The Story of the Whale”
3. Henry Huntington’s “Using Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Science: Methods and Applications”
4. Selections from Harry Brower, Sr.’s The Whales, They Give Themselves

The key texts for this course will also be your writings and those of your classmates. We will discuss the published pieces through the lens of your writings, considering how the texts are represented or quoted or how a paper negotiates a particular passage. Our focus on writing will be detailed. We will look closely at papers you and your classmates have written, trying to figure out ways of making them more interesting, precise, complex, and reflective. In order to do this, I will reproduce selected papers for distribution to the class over the course of the semester. This will be done anonymously. To make productive use of our time, I will make sure to select papers that make a good start on the assignment. You will be offered chances to revise the writings you do for this class—and one of the goals of this course is to offer you a sense of the various forms that such revision might take. You will be asked, for instance, to redraft your writings, to compose a second and stronger version of the same piece in response to the comments of your readers. But you will also be encouraged to draw on and extend the ideas and phrasings of one piece as you move on to write the next, to think of your writings as building one on the other. The measure of how well you do in this course will be the work you produce as a writer—the interest and power of your words on the page—and your ability to negotiate the writers’ processes—to read and critique
your own work and that of others, to edit, to revise, to place your work in interesting relation to others’ texts and positions.

Course Goals:
- Read key texts about whales.
- Learn how various intellectual fields/subjects intersect.
- Closely analyze each reading (its content, its formal elements, and its rhetorical strategies).
- Collaboratively discuss the issues contained in each reading.
- Complete roughly four writing assignments, one of which will be a research paper.
- Learn how to revise previously written papers.
- Hone an assortment of writing techniques.
- Compose a portfolio of the semester’s best work.

Practical Matters

Texts and Other Materials:
1. All of the readings for this class are posted on Blackboard. You will need to print the readings and bring them to class.
2. You should have some sort of electronic paper-saving device.

Questions and Help: If you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or course policies, do not hesitate to contact me for help. You can ask questions during class, but I am also available via email, after class, and during office hours. If you have a question about an assignment that is due the next day, please email me early enough to give me time to write you back.

Preparation for Class: There are several different kinds of work you will need to do to prepare for class. You should read carefully each assigned text. Take notes. Mark your handouts so you can locate passages that interested or challenged you. Be ready to raise questions or to pose difficulties you encountered in the reading. Look up words that puzzle you in a dictionary; use the library’s resources to look up textual references that intrigue you. Look over your notes before class so you will be ready to participate and frame questions for discussion.

Quizzes: To ensure that the reading is being completed, there will be a series of short reading quizzes which will constitute ten percent of your final grade. These quizzes will be given randomly throughout the course of the semester. Some will be purely objective; some will require short essay-type answers; others might require you to conduct a close analysis of a relevant quotation from that day’s reading. You should prepare yourself for all of these kinds of quizzes. If you are absent on the day of a quiz, you do not need to make it up. Your average will be calculated based on the number of quizzes that you have taken.

Participation: Twenty percent of your final grade will reflect your participation in this class during the semester. For the most part, you will be participating in general class-wide discussions of the readings; however, there will be some days when you will be working in smaller groups. Keep in mind that the participation grade is a measure of your intellectual engagement in the class. Thus, I take into account a wide variety of factors when I determine it (some of these factors might include: attendance, late papers, quality of contributions, preparedness, tardiness, and overall behavior).

Assignments: You are responsible for preparing the reading and writing assignments for the course as fully as you can and on time. All work is due on the day specified at the time specified. Any work submitted after that date will be accepted, but a penalty of one full letter grade for each day late (including weekends) will be applied.
to the final grade for that assignment. Also, you will not receive feedback on late papers, and they will not be workshopped in class. If you are worried about deadlines, make sure to submit papers early. You will be writing every week, sometimes beginning a new assignment, sometimes revising or continuing a previous assignment. Remember that your paper may be copied and discussed by the class as a whole. As such, papers should be suitable for reproduction and distribution in class. Be sure to save copies of your writings because you will need them for the final portfolio assignment. More details about the assignments (formatting instructions, topics, etc.) will be distributed as they are due.

Note: Computer problems are no excuse for late papers. Be sure to email drafts to yourself and save them somewhere (your phone, a flash drive, Google Docs, a friend’s computer, a floppy disc, a CD, etc.).

**Revisions:** It is crucial in learning how to write to rewrite, to go back to a paper, rethinking and reworking it, cutting, moving things around, devising different ways to phrase something, uncovering an issue that was buried in confusing prose or white space. Rewriting allows you to improve what you started with, although sometimes you have to take apart something that seemed to work initially but didn’t take into account the complications you now see. There are several points in the term set aside for you to return to an earlier assignment and revise, and you will also be able to revise assignments for your portfolio.

**Proofreading and Correctness:** Do not expect me to serve as your personal proofreader or editor. If any of your writing seems careless or hurried—making it difficult to read with attention and respect—it will be returned to you for correction before you are granted credit for the assignment. Of course, the late penalty will apply. Errors in papers must be corrected in the portfolio reviews. If you have any questions about a specific error or problem in usage or syntax, consult a writing handbook, dictionary, or other reference, or make an appointment at the Writing Center.

**Writing Center:** The Writing Center, located in Gruening 801, is an excellent resource. The consultants can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can supplement your work in this course throughout the term. I might suggest that you go to the center for help on a particular problem. You can also make your own appointments for help with this class or any others you may have while at UAF. If you are interested in taking advantage of their services, you should take a look at their website (http://www.alaska.edu/english/studentresources/writing/) or call ahead (474-5314) to make an appointment.

**Blackboard:** We will be using Blackboard this semester. Make sure to check it at least once a week. Assignments, readings, handouts, and the syllabus will be posted and updated on Blackboard.

**Midterm Progress Reports and Conferences:** At midterm, you will exchange letters with me about your progress in the course. We will schedule a conference at which I will give you a progress report and an approximate grade for your work in the course to date.

**Grading and Portfolio:** The final evaluation for this class is done by reviewing your portfolio of written materials, as well as by assessing the work you did in class, both written and oral. At the end of the term, you are required to turn in your portfolio, an electronic folder that includes three essays that you have selected as representing your best work in the course. These three papers should be revised and edited to demonstrate your ability to bring your writing to an accomplished level. This final portfolio review gives you one more chance to revise your work and gives me an occasion to review the progress you have made over the course of the term.

**Grade Breakdown:**
- Class Participation = 20%
- Reading Quizzes = 10%
- Assignments 1-4 = 30%
- Final Portfolio = 40%
Note: The grade for Assignments 1-4 will be calculated by averaging the grades for first drafts and revisions.

**Grading:** Grading will follow UAF guidelines:
A range = Indicates exceptional work and independent thinking as well as mastery of the subject.
B range = Indicates outstanding ability above the average level of performance.
C range = Indicates a satisfactory or average level of performance.
D range = Indicates work of below average quality and performance.
F range = Indicates failure to meet the lowest standards.

For + grades, the standards are slightly higher than those stated for any given range, and for – grades, the standards are slightly lower than those stated for any given range.

**UAF Grading Policy Information:** The following specifies the implications of the grade of “C” (and below) for letter-graded undergraduate courses which are prerequisites for other courses, degree major requirements, or core courses.

C (2.0): A minimum grade of “C” (2.0) is required for all prerequisites and major courses.

C- (1.7): Minimum grade required for all core (X) courses. A grade of “C-“ (1.7) in a class which is a prerequisite for another class or in a class required for a student's major will result in the student being required to retake the class.

D+ (1.3); D (1.0); D- (0.7): A grade of “D+,” “D,” or “D-“ in a core (X) class will automatically require the student to retake the class to receive core credit.

**Course Policies**

**Email Correspondence:** Email is the best way to get in touch with me, and I welcome emails from all of my students. Please remember to be professional, polite, and to the point.

**Office Hours:** Office hours represent time that is set aside so that you can meet with me outside of class. Feel free to come to office hours. I can answer questions that you might have about the readings or discussions. Also, I can look at drafts of your papers and give you advice on how to improve your writing. If you cannot come during regular office hours, you can always make an appointment.

**Readings:** You need to print out the readings on Blackboard and bring them to class. If you do not bring your readings to class, you will not be counted present for that day.

**Tardiness, Early Exits, and Misc. Classroom Behavior:** Make sure to come to class on time. This semester, you may want to give yourself some extra time to get to class. Much of campus is under construction, and you may find yourself having to make unexpected detours around obstacles. If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will not be counted as present. Also, in order to receive credit for attending class, you have to attend the entire class. Therefore, you will not receive credit for that day’s attendance if you leave class and do not return. Once class has begun, please do not take a break (bathroom or otherwise) unless you have some kind of extreme emergency. Try to be as non-disruptive as possible as you exit and enter. Food and beverages are permitted in class, but, again, please try be non-disruptive. If you sleep through class, you will not be counted as present. If you do work for another class during our allotted time period, you will not be counted as present.
Attendance: Since the work of the course depends on our collaboration as readers and writers, and since your work is central to class discussion, attendance is required. If you miss more than 20% of our meetings (4 days of class), for whatever reason, you will fail the class. Every absence you accrue over the course of the semester counts towards your final total.

Make up Work: Of course, you will be allowed to make up any work that you miss as a result of absence. You should contact me ASAP to make arrangements to do so. I do not give out extra assignments if you fall behind in your work.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and Other Electronic Devices: No electronic devices are permitted in class. During class, all cell phones and laptops should be put away in your bag. If you use any of these devices during class, you will be asked to leave the room, and you will not receive attendance credit for that day.

Weather, Emergencies, and Class Cancellations: Should severe weather or any other kind of emergency occur, you should assume that we are meeting unless you are specifically notified via email or on Blackboard. Should class be cancelled, you will receive email and instructions about readings and assignments.

Disabilities: The University of Alaska Fairbanks is committed to equal opportunity for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services in 208 Whitaker at 474-5655 or 474-1827 (TTY). You can also visit their website (http://www.uaf.edu/disability/) for more information on these matters.

Student Code of Conduct, Academic Integrity, and Plagiarism: All students are required to read and abide by the UAF Student Code of Conduct. According to this Code of Conduct:

“Disciplinary action may be initiated by the university and disciplinary sanctions imposed against any student or student organization found responsible for committing, attempting to commit, or intentionally assisting in the commission of any of the following prohibited forms of conduct:
1. cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty;
2. forgery, falsification, alteration, or misuse of documents, funds, or property;…”

(http://www.uaf.edu/catalog/current/)

What this policy means for us is that cheating and plagiarism are absolutely prohibited in this class, and there are severe penalties for committing these offenses. Plagiarism and cheating are both grounds for failure of the assignment and the class as a whole. For our purposes, here, plagiarism is defined as taking the thoughts and ideas (no matter what form they may take or what medium in which they appear) of another individual and presenting them as your own. Therefore, if you are drawing on or quoting the work of others (including published authors, fellow students, teachers, friends, relatives, etc.), you must acknowledge that you are doing so. In this class, you will need to cite your sources using the MLA style guidelines. If you are directly quoting someone else, you must indicate that you are doing so by naming your source, using appropriate quotation marks, and giving the reference for your material. If you are summarizing or referring to the work of others, you need to make that clear to your readers as well. You should, above all, turn in written assignments that are of your own composition, not the work of others. Be careful not to lose your writings or lend them to others. You should expect that any paper that you submit for this class will be spot-checked for plagiarism.

Scheduling: You should follow the syllabus for the schedule of all readings and assignments. Certain minor items on this syllabus may be subject to change, and you will be informed in class or by email of all changes that I might make. If you are absent, you are responsible for making up the work, and it is usually a good idea to check Blackboard or contact me or someone else in class about what you missed.
**Extenuating Circumstances:** If you have any extenuating circumstances that might interfere with the course policies as they are stated on the syllabus, you should let me know ASAP.