

PIEDMONT PROJECT: report
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IDS 104: The Great Conversation—Culture
spring semester 2010

I'd been hearing of the Piedmont Project for years before it occurred to me that there might indeed be a way for an English professor to do what the Project requires—to incorporate “environmental and/or sustainability issues” into one of my courses. I had assumed incorporation of such course content would be easy for people in the sciences and social sciences, but not for me. Of course, it didn't take much thought (and much research in the readily available files of reports of previous participants in the Project) for me to realize how wrong I was. Others in humanities had come up with wonderful ways to do what's required. I decided I could do the same. And although it was soon clear to me that a segment of the required sort (and even a semester-long focus) would be easy to incorporate into the sci fi course I teach in the spring (since so much of that literature does deal with “environmental and/or sustainability issues”), I decided to propose something closer to my heart, namely work with the writers of the Romantic period who lived in and wrote about the English Lake District (and with Wordsworth, in particular).

The years I have spent walking in their footsteps in that lovely part of the world and studying their poetry (and prose) have convinced me that their insistence on the value, the necessity, of life lived in harmony with nature is well worth sharing with my students and indeed with anyone and everyone who needs to overcome that alienation from nature that threatens our psychological health as well as the health of our environment. The presentations and discussions participants in this year's Project enjoyed during our time together in the spring helped me think the thought that has inspired my work on the Project since, the thought that a truly ecological life must involve the psyche, the heart and soul and mind, the inner world so often considered the purview of the humanities, as surely as it must involve the outer worlds we inhabit, those most often addressed by the natural and social sciences. And the time I spent in the Lake District this summer (six wonderful weeks, right in Grasmere, where Wordsworth wrote so much of his poetry) inspired me, too. I did a lot of thinking, a lot of feeling (much of it as I was walking, walking, walking). I put together the syllabus that follows for the team-taught interdisciplinary course described therein, a course I'll be teaching in the spring. And I might add that I also put together the talk I gave at the Oxford College convocation last week, a talk about personal ecology or psychological sustainability (and how walking and reading poetry, preferably poetry by people who do a lot of walking, can help us achieve both). I called it ““It's not easy being green”” (quoting that ecologist extraordinaire, Kermit the Frog).

Dr. John Kress and Dr. Gretchen Schulz
spring semester 2010

Course Description:

The Great Conversation – Culture is a team-taught interdisciplinary course intended to introduce students to a selection of great works in the fields of literature, art, music, philosophy, theology, politics, and history from ancient Greek and Roman times to the present. The focus will be on Western culture and civilization.

The works will be studied in roughly chronological order so that we might see how various thoughts and ideas have been developed and expressed throughout time. The purpose of the course, as is reflected in its title, is to promote our participation in the great conversation about our world, our society, and our humanity that has been going on for three thousand years and more. We will read the words (and view and hear the works) of those who have preceded us and then add our own thoughts and ideas to the conversation. We'll be reading (or otherwise dealing with) works whose titles are bolded in their entirety; we'll be reading only portions of other works, with the particulars of the reading TBA or "to be assigned." The classes will be discussion-based, with all of us taking turns in facilitating discussion from day to day. Guest facilitators (primarily faculty members from the Oxford campus) will join us upon occasion, both during the regular class sessions on Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 9:35 a.m. and during the supplemental sessions on Tuesday afternoon from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

This year, we have chosen the works for study and discussion to ensure that we'll be giving due consideration to a topic that is becoming more important with every passing year: sustainability. As we will see, relevant views on nature itself, on human nature, and in some cases, on the supernatural in relation to nature and human nature have informed the major works of the Western world from the very beginning. We'll think and talk about how those views have impacted our attitudes towards (and treatment of) ourselves and our world in their own time and since. Some of your journals entries and at least one of your papers will deal with this aspect of the material we are working with, as well.

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Course schedule:

January 13 introduction to the course
 15 *Bible/Old Testament*: "Genesis," chh. 1-22

 18 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
 19 *Bible/Old Testament*: "Exodus," chh. 1-20; "**Job**"
 20 Homer, *The Odyssey*

22 Homer, *The Odyssey*; journals checked (2 entries due)

25 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

26 Plato, *The Republic*, Books VI, VII, and X; Guest: Dr. Ken Anderson

27 Plato, readings TBA

29 Aristotle, readings TBA

February

01 Aristotle, readings TBA

02 *Bible/New Testament: "Luke"*; Guest: Dr. David Gowler

03 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*

05 Plutarch, readings TBA; journals collected (6 entries due)

08 Horace, Ovid, readings TBA

09 Greek and Roman art and architecture; Guest: Dr. Dick Corbin

10 Augustine, *Confessions*

12 *Beowulf*

15 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

16 Aquinas, readings TBA; Guest: TBA

17 Dante, *Inferno*

19 Dante, *Inferno*; first papers due

22 Boccaccio, readings TBA

23 medieval art and music; Guest: Dr. Maria Archetto

24 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, "The General Prologue," "The Knight's Tale"

26 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, "The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale"

March

01 Machiavelli, *The Prince*

02 Renaissance art and music; Guest: TBA

05 Shakespeare, *King Lear*

07 Shakespeare, *King Lear*; journals collected (8 entries due)

SPRING BREAK: March 8-12

15 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, readings TBA

16 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, readings TBA; Guest: Dr. Kent Linville

17 Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, readings TBA

19 Voltaire, *Candide*

22 Blake, readings TBA

23 Wordsworth, readings TBA

24 Shelley, *Frankenstein*

26 Shelley, *Frankenstein*

- 29 Darwin, readings TBA
30 Marx, readings TBA; Guest: Dr. Frank Maddox
31 Dickens, *Hard Times*
April 02 Dickens, *Hard Times*; **second paper due**
- 05 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, readings TBA; *The Federalist Papers*, readings TBA
06 Thoreau and Emerson, readings TBA
07 Whitman, readings TBA
09 Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*
- 12 Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*
13 modern art (impressionism, expressionism, cubism); Guest: TBA
14 Harlem Renaissance, African American poetry; Guest: Dr. Adriane Ivey
16 Harlem Renaissance, African American music; Guest: Dr. Brad Hawley;
journals collected (10 entries due)
- 19 Freud, readings TBA
20 feminist poetry, readings TBA; Carter, *"The Company of Wolves"*
21 ecological poetry, readings TBA
23 ecological fiction (fantasy): Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*
- 26 ecological film (science fiction): *Metropolis*; **final journal entry collected (reflective)**
27 ecological film (science fiction): *Blade Runner*
28 **third paper due**

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to read the assigned text (or, in the case of art or music or other non-literary work, study any assigned work) prior to class and to come to class well prepared to make frequent intelligent contributions to discussion of the thoughts and ideas raised by the text (or work). At regular intervals all of us will assume responsibility for facilitation of class discussion (working with one or two others to do so), initiating class discussion with an opening question and moderating discussion as it proceeds, using further questions as necessary. Those facilitating discussion will be expected to meet ahead of time to discuss the text for the class and to prepare questions. **At least some of those questions will deal with the ecological implications of the material assigned for the class.**

All who are participating in the ongoing great conversation of the course will keep journals of comments and questions stimulated by the texts read (or works studied) and by the class discussions of the texts (or works). At a minimum, each of us should prepare a journal entry prior to and/or following at least two of the four weekly class meetings, dealing somehow with issues relevant to the text (or work) assigned for that meeting. **When it makes sense to do so, we will suggest that at least one of the entries for a given week deal with the ecological implications of the material we have been discussing.** These journal entries may be written by hand (in a notebook of some sort) or typed (and then printed out to be put in a folder). The journal should

be brought to class each session for we may make use of them to promote discussion at any time. They will be collected at intervals indicated on the syllabus by the chief facilitators (Dr. Schulz and Dr. Kress). They will not be graded in the usual fashion, but their content will serve as an indication of the degree and quality of student engagement with the course material, and that information will factor into the overall grade assigned at the end of the term for the degree and quality of class participation.

Students will write three papers (of at least 1,000 words) due throughout the semester (as indicated on the syllabus). The format and content of these papers will be discussed in class. Students will be encouraged to bring a draft of each paper to a conference with the chief facilitators for the course, Dr. Schulz and/or Dr. Kress, so discussion may yield suggestions for revision which will strengthen the work. **We will ask that at least one of these papers address the ecological implications of the work being dealt with.**

Grading:	Class participation (including regular participation for 60 points and facilitation for 40 points)	100 points
	3 papers (for 50 points each)	150 points
	Journal entries	<u>50 points</u>
	Total for the course	300 points

Please note that Dr. Schulz and Dr. Kress will be grading your work using the plus/minus grading system.

Policy on absences: Since class participation is such an important component of this course, attendance is important, and excessive absence will result in points deducted from your grade for participation and your final grade. Only true emergency, significant illness, and required religious observance can excuse an absence. Please inform Dr. Schulz and Dr. Kress of the latter ahead of time.

Policy on late or missing work: A paper submitted late without an adequate excuse (true emergency or significant illness) will lose a letter grade for each calendar day it is late. A paper that is more than four calendar days late (without an adequate excuse) will not be accepted at all and will be given a zero. Missing or late journal submissions will affect the final grade. Failure to take an assigned turn as a facilitator-for-the-day (without an adequate excuse) will also affect the final grade.

Please note that all work for the course must be done in accordance with the dictates of the Honor Code of the College. Your name on any work you do for the course constitutes an Honor pledge.