WRTG 3020: Topics in Writing
Myths of the American West

“If there is such a thing as being conditioned by climate and geography, and I think there is, it is the West that has conditioned me. It has the forms and lights and colors that I respond to in nature and in art. If there is a western speech, I speak it; if there is a western character or personality, I am some variant of it; if there is a western culture in the small-c, anthropological sense, I have not escaped it.” —Wallace Stegner

Jaquelin Pelzer
MWF 9:00 – 9:50pm  
Section 003, DUAN G1B27
MWF 10:00 – 10:50pm  
Section 011, DUAN G1B25

Spring 2015  
Contact: jaquelin.pelzer@colorado.edu or 303-735-4671 (e-mail preferred)
Office Location/Hours: ENVD 1B50-C, (days and times TBA)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
In this class we will work on improving your written communication, critical thinking, and research skills while developing your rhetorical awareness as we examine issues surrounding the American West. Along the way, you will have the opportunity to explore some of your own interests through regular writing assignments and a final research project. This is neither a history nor a literature course, although we’ll be discussing both at times. We will read a blend of traditional academic writing, creative nonfiction, travel writing, and memoir from the 1800s to today. You will actively work on improving your own writing by studying the writing of others. Our goal is to interrogate the myths of the American West and to determine for ourselves what the American West is, what seems to be its future, and what the West ultimately represents to each of us.

Major topics discussed: early exploration, expansion, and the romanticized West; race and issues around indigenous populations and immigration; land use, through exploitation and recreation; environmentalism in the American West; the urban West; and representations of the West in film and television. Some of the authors we will read include Barry Lopez, Gretel Ehrlich, N. Scott Momaday, Aldo Leopold, Wallace Stegner, Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Nelson Limerick, John Muir, Mark Twain, John McPhee, and Jane Tompkins. We will also listen to podcasts, watch documentaries, and analyze other forms of media that enhance our understanding of the American West gleaned from the written word. Through vigorous class discussions about our readings and a variety of regular writing assignments, students will hone their critical and rhetorical skills, exploring various writing styles and methods by which writers convey their deeply held beliefs about the West.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS
• They Say/I Say, 3rd edition (available at CU Bookstore)
• All other reading assignments will posted to D2L or distributed in class.

Note: You must bring these readings, along with your thoughts and comments, to class with you, either by printing them out or by bringing them in on a tablet or laptop to access during class discussions. (See cell phone/laptop policy on the following pages.)

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING WEIGHT (% of total grade)

Short Essays - 35%
- At the end of five (5) modules, you’ll write a 2-3 page reaction/reflection essay

Weekly Discussion Posts on D2L – 10%
- On weeks that you don’t have a short essay due, you’ll post a brief (1 paragraph) reflection on the week’s readings and in-class discussions to D2L. You’ll also reply to one classmate’s post.
Independent Essay Selection, Presentation, and Leading Class Discussion - 10%
- Everyone will sign up for a week to find and present to the class a supplemental reading either about the module topic, or another essay/chapter from an author we’ve read, or something about the topic from within your own discourse community. These readings must be shared with the class via D2L (posted to that week’s thread) by Wednesday at midnight.

Final Essay - 30%
- A 10-12 page essay about some aspect on the American West that you’ve researched

Final Presentation - 5%
- You will present your final essay topics/arguments during the last two weeks of the semester

Attendance and Participation – 10%

COURSE GRADING SCALE
Note: you will only receive a letter grade for your final, cumulative grade for the class.

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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COURSE GOALS
WRTG 3020 is offered through the Program for Writing and Rhetoric and has been designed to fulfill curricular requirements established by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), the University of Colorado Boulder, and the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR). This course is approved for the College of Arts and Sciences core upper-division curriculum for written communication. As such, this course is designed to:

- Extend Rhetorical Knowledge, Critical Thinking, & Their Written Applications

We’ll work on developing and extending your rhetorical skills to read and write in ways that demonstrate an understanding of:

- Framing issues, defining and defending theses, inventing and arranging appeals, answering counterarguments, and formulating strong and well-reasoned arguments.
- Making decisions about form, argumentation, and style from the expectations of different audiences.
- Seeing writing as a form of personal engagement, demanding an awareness of the inherent power of language and its ability to bring about change.
- Valuing writing as a collaborative dialogue between authors and audiences, critics, and colleagues.
- Developing topic-specific language that is appropriate for the defined discourse communities while also intelligible to lay audiences.
- Addressing specific audiences, anticipating patterns of reasoning, possible questions, and potential objections of readers in academic and public contexts.
- Locating and using resources when necessary; critically evaluating information sources for credibility, validity, timeliness, and relevance.
- Drawing inferences from a body of evidence.
- Distinguishing description from analysis and argument.
- Distinguishing flawed from sound reasoning, and being able to respond to and challenge claims.
- Recognizing a thesis, and understanding the organic relationship between thesis and support in an essay.
- Structuring and developing points of argument in a coherent order to build a case as writers; recognizing this structure and development within texts as readers.
• **Extend Experience in Writing Processes**
  Writing is a process. Advanced academic writing involves multiple drafts, extensive revision, and collaboration with others in your discourse communities. This course will enhance your abilities to:
  - Approach writing as an on-going process.
  - Engage in thoughtful critiques of peers’ writing and understand the significance of the peer critique process to your own writing.
  - Effectively respond to and incorporate feedback from others into your writing.

• **Extend Mastery of Writing Conventions**
  This course requires you to exercise skill in both academic and informal writing styles. You’ll develop a better understanding of what the “rules” are, when to use them, and when to break them. We’ll work on refining your writing to:
  - Construct and convey meaning as clearly, concisely, and effectively as possible.
  - Apply the basics of grammar, sentence structure, and other mechanics integral to analytical and persuasive writing.
  - Refine editing and proofreading skills.
  - Enhance organization by developing strong, well-focused paragraphs and a strategically structured discussion.
  - Use voice, style, and diction appropriate to the rhetorical context.

• **Advance Content Knowledge**
  The readings and assignments in this course will help you to develop a strong working knowledge of critical perspectives on the American West, both as a geographical and imagined entity. As such, this course will help you to:
  - Understand how myths of the American West have shifted over time.
  - Understand how concerns of race and environment have shaped views of the West.
  - Approach dominant views of the West with a critical eye.
  - Engage with a variety of media presentations of the West to construct your ideas about the West.
  - Analyze different voices and address diverse audiences through multiple writing styles.

**CLASS POLICIES**

**Attendance & Participation Policy:** I will be taking attendance every class meeting. If you miss more than 3 classes, your attendance grade will drop by 10 points for each additional absence. Excessive absences detract from your own learning experience as well as that of your classmates who rely on your energy and input as a writer and fellow student. Missing more than ten classes puts you in jeopardy of not passing the course.

There are no quizzes or tests in this course, therefore responses to assigned readings and in-class discussions heavily influence your final grade. Your participation in these discussions and other related activities calls for you to do the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them.

**Tardy Policy:** You will be counted as tardy if you are 5 minutes late (or more). Three tardies count as an absence. You’ll need to check with me after class to make sure you’re not counted as absent, and you must ask your classmates what you missed if you are tardy.

**Absence Policy:** Please let me know before class if you are going to be absent. You will be responsible for getting notes or catching up from a classmate, so I encourage you to get to know your fellow students. **Any major assignments must be submitted on time regardless:** if you are going to miss class on a due date, email your assignment to me by the end of the class period in order not to be counted as late.

**Conferences:** All students are strongly encouraged to meet with me at least once during the semester so we can discuss your progress in the class and on specific assignments. You are responsible for setting up a time to come talk to me during my office hours.
Writing Assignments & Revisions: This is a writing course, and we are writing students: we will write and write often. All essay assignments and drafts, unless otherwise noted by me, must be submitted in hard copy. Be sure to hold onto electronic copies of your papers to protect from loss.

Although I expect you to turn in your most polished work by the assignment due date, writing is a learning process and sometimes our best work can still use some polishing. You may revise one of your graded Short Essays, but you must first have a conference with me. In order to receive a better grade, your assignment must reflect your thorough and thoughtful revision and the changes discussed in your conferences with me. Please turn in the original graded assignment with your revision. There are no revisions for assignments that are turned in late or did not meet assignment requirements. Revised essays are due a week after our conference about your revisions, and all revisions must be submitted by May 1.

Late Work: Deadlines are deadlines for a reason: you need to keep up with the work assigned lest you find yourself bogged down at the end of the semester with an overload of work to make up. If you submit late work, you will lose 5 points off that paper’s grade for every day that it is late.

Cell Phones & Laptops: The use of cell phones is not permitted at any time during class as they are a distraction to you, to me, and to your fellow students. All cell phones should be turned off or put on silent and stored in your backpack/purse for the duration of class. If you have a family emergency, let me know before class starts; otherwise, if you violate this policy I may ask you to leave class and you will be counted as absent for the day.

Laptops and tablets are permitted if you chose not to print out the assigned readings, since we will be discussing them in class and you will be expected to point to certain passages during discussion. Laptops may also be used for some in-class writing exercises. At all other times, laptops should be put away. Like the cell phone policy, if I sense you are abusing the use of laptops during class by accessing unrelated items, you will be asked to leave the class and will be counted as absent for the day.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES
Learning Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (during the first two weeks of the course, if possible) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, and http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see guidelines at http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html.

Religious Holidays: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. I am happy to comply with this policy. Please let me know in advance if you will miss class because of a religious observance and we will adjust your due dates for essays accordingly. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.

Academic Honesty and CU’s Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include cheating, plagiarism, abetting others’ academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303/735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.
Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities.

Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment or discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh

RESOURCES

- Various links and resources about the West posted on D2L (see “Resources” page)
- The Purdue Owl, http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/679/01/
- University of Colorado at Boulder’s libraries, http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/
- The Writing Center: Norlin E111 (in Norlin Commons, near the east entrance of Norlin Library). This is staffed by the Program for Writing and Rhetoric. Consultants there can help you examine writing strategies, develop your ideas, and organize your thoughts. I highly recommend that students take advantage of this free service, whatever their writing ability. Because appointments at the Writing Center are so helpful, they are popular; set up an appointment to see them early in your paper writing process. Web site: http://www.colorado.edu/ArtsSciences/PWR/writingcenter.html

COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1 (1/12-1/16) Lay of the Land: What is the American West?
Week 2 (1/21-1/23) Foundational West: Early Explorations and Romanticizations of the West
Weeks 3-5 (1/26-2/13) The Diverse West: Indigeneity, Immigration, and Race
Weeks 6-7 (2/16-2/27) Using the Land: From Agriculture to Recreation
Weeks 8-9 (3/2-3/13) Protecting the Land: Environmentalism and the American West
Week 10 (3/16-3/20) The Urban (and Suburban) West
Weeks 11-13 (3/30-4/10) Visualizing the West: Film, Television, and Other Forms of Popular Culture

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<th>Major Assignments and Due Dates:</th>
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<td>Short Essays (five of them) - 35%</td>
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<td>Weekly Discussion/Reflection Posts on D2L - 10%</td>
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<td>Additional Essay Selection, Presentation, Discussion with Class - 10%</td>
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<td>Final Essay - 30%</td>
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<td>Final Presentation - 5%</td>
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**Due dates are subject to change. * Opportunities for extra credit will be announced during the semester**
COURSE CONTENT & DAILY SYLLABUS (> signifies homework for the following class):

*All readings posted to D2L, except for selections from They Say/I Say (3rd edition)*

Jan. 12 Introductions and course overview

Lay of the Land: What is the American West?

Jan. 14 Lay of the Land: What is the American West?
Discuss Lopez essay
> Read Gretel Ehrlich, from The Solace of Open Spaces (1985)

Jan. 16 Lay of the Land (cont’d)
Discuss Ehrlich essay
> Write Short Essay #1 – Personal Narrative
> Read The Journals of Lewis and Clark (1805) (excerpts)

Jan. 19 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no class)

Foundational West: Early Explorations and Romanticizations of the West

Jan. 21 Short Essay #1 due
Foundational West: Early Explorations and Romanticizations of the West
Short in-class readings (copies distributed in class). Excerpts of:
  John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierras (1911, written in 1869)
  Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Frontier in American History” (1893)
  Elinor Prewitt Stewart, Letters of a Woman Homesteader (1913, written in 1909)
Discuss readings in small groups and then as a class
> Read the other two excerpts from class discussion
> Read Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses” (1895)

Jan. 23 Foundational West (cont’d)
Discuss Twain essay and other readings
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)
> Read Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), from School Days of an Indian Girl (1900)

The Diverse West: Indigeneity, Immigration, and Race

Jan. 26 (Option A: Short Essay due)
The Diverse West: Indigeneity
Discuss Zitkala-Sa
In class: Watch short documentary on Wounded Knee
> Read N. Scott Momaday, from The Man Made of Words (1997)

Jan. 28 Indigeneity (cont’d)
Short in-class reading: excerpts from Black Elk Speaks (1932)
Discuss Momaday, Black Elk, and Wounded Knee documentary
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates
Jan. 30  Indigeneity (cont’d)  
Discuss supplemental readings  
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)  
> Read *They Say/I Say*, Ch. 12  
> Read Estelle T. Lau, from *Paper Families* (2006)

Feb. 2  The Diverse West: Immigration  
In class: Watch short PBS documentary on Angel Island  
Discuss Lau and Angel Island documentary  
> Read Gloria Anzaldúa, from *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987)

Feb. 4  Immigration (cont’d)  
In class: Watch *Frontline* piece on Mexican immigration  
Discuss Anzaldúa and immigration documentary  
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

Feb. 6  Immigration (cont’d)  
Discuss supplemental readings  
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)  
> Read *They Say/I Say*, Introduction  
> Read Michael Johnson, from “African American Literature and Culture and the American West” (2013)

Feb. 9  The Diverse West: Race in the West  
Short in-class reading: excerpts from James P. Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth* (1856)  
Discuss Beckwourth and Johnson  
> Read Mine Okubo, from *Citizen 13660* (1946)

Feb. 11  Race in the West (cont’d)  
In class: Watch short documentary on Manzanar  
Discuss Okubo and documentary  
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

Feb. 13  Race in the West (cont’d)  
Discuss supplemental readings  
> Read *They Say/I Say*, Ch. 1  
> Write Short Essay #2  
> Read Henry Nash Smith, from *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol & Myth* (1950)

**Using the Land: From Agriculture to Recreation**

Feb. 16  **Short Essay #2 due**  
Using the Land: From Agriculture to Recreation  
Short in-class readings (distributed in class):  
  Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (1949)  
Discuss Smith and Leopold  
Feb. 18 Using the Land (cont’d)
Discuss Elliott West
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

Feb. 20 Using the Land (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)
> Read They Say/I Say, Ch. 4
> Read Edward Abbey, “Telluride Blues – A Hatchet Job” (1977) and “Down There in the Rocks” (1979)

Feb. 23 Using the Land (cont’d)
Discuss Abbey

Feb. 25 Using the Land (cont’d)
Discuss Limerick
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

Feb. 27 Using the Land (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings (lead by classmates)
> Read They Say/I Say, Ch. 7
> Write Short Essay #3

Protecting the Land: Environmentalism and the American West

March 2 Short Essay #3 due
Protecting the Land: Environmentalism and the American West
In class: Watch part of The National Parks (Ken Burns)
> Read Wallace Stegner, “The Best Idea We Ever Had” (1998)

March 4 Protecting the Land (cont’d)
Discuss Stegner
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

March 6 Protecting the Land (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)
> Read They Say/I Say, Ch. 9
> Read Rebecca Solnit, from Savage Dreams (1994)

March 9 Protecting the Land (cont’d)
Discuss Solnit
> Read John McPhee, “Los Angeles Against the Mountains” (1989)

March 11 Protecting the Land (cont’d)
Discuss McPhee
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates
March 13  
Protecting the Land (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings
> Read They Say/I Say, Ch. 5
> Write Short Essay #4

The Urban (and Suburban) West

March 16  
Short Essay #4 due
The Urban (and Suburban) West
Short in-class reading (distributed in class): D. J. Waldie, from Holy Land (2005)
Discuss Price and Waldie
> Read Mike Davis, from City of Quartz (1990)

March 18  
The Urban West (cont’d)
In class: Watch short PBS piece on homelessness in Los Angeles
Discuss Davis and L.A. video
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

March 20  
Final Essay topic idea due (via email)
The Urban West (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)
> Read They Say/I Say, Ch. 8
> Read Jane Tompkins, from West of Everything (1992)

March 23-27  
Spring Break (no classes)

Visualizing the West: Film, Television, and Other Forms of Popular Culture

March 30  
(Option B: Short Essay due)
Visualizing the West: Film, Television, and Other Forms of Popular Culture
Discuss Tompkins
In class: Watch The Great Train Robbery (1903)

April 1  
Visualizing the West (cont’d)
In class: Watch episode 1x01 of Deadwood (2004)
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

April 3  
Visualizing the West (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings
> Write discussion/reflection post on D2L (due before class time on Monday)
> Read They Say/I Say, Ch. 2
> Read Philip J. Deloria, from Indians in Unexpected Places (2004)

April 6  
Visualizing the West (cont’d)
In class: Watch part of Reel Injun (documentary) in class
Discuss Deloria and Reel Injun
> Read article on science fiction and Westerns (TBD)
April 8  Visualizing the West (cont’d)
In class: Watch episode 1x02 of *Firefly* (2002)
> Read supplemental readings selected by your classmates

April 10 Visualizing the West (cont’d)
Discuss supplemental readings
> Read *They Say/I Say*, Ch. 3
> Work on rough outline for Final Essay; bring to class on Monday

**Final Projects**

April 13 (Option C: Short Essay due)
Final Projects
Getting started: research questions and outlines
Small group feedback on outlines
> Read *They Say/I Say*, Ch. 10
> Work on Final Essay rough draft

April 15 Final Projects (cont’d)
Moving forward: introductions, conclusions, and transitions
Incorporating your sources
> Work on Final Essay rough draft

April 17 Rough Draft of Final Essay due in class (also posted to D2L by 5pm)
Workshop: Final Essay Rough Drafts
> revise Final Essay draft
> Read *They Say/I Say*, Ch. 11

April 20 Final Projects (cont’d)
Brief grammar review
In-class work day (bring your drafts, laptops, and questions)
> revise Final Essay draft
> prepare Final Project Presentation

April 22 Final Project Presentations, Group I
> revise Final Essay draft

April 24 Final Project Presentations, Group II
> revise Final Essay draft

April 27 Final Project Presentations, Group III
> revise Final Essay draft

April 29 Final Project Presentations, Group IV
> finalize your Final Essay

May 1 Final Essays due in class (also posted to D2L Dropbox by 5pm)
(Revised Essays due)
Short in-class reading: Wallace Stegner, “Why I Like the West” (1998)
Discuss Stegner, plus course review, reflection, and wrap-up