

Earth Mending: A History and Praxis

Tuesdays, 1:30-4:20 p.m.

Briger C300

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m to 12:30 p.m., Briger 315

Course Overview:

Living at the brink of death is still a form of living. And the life that flourishes there deserves not only elaboration and study, but also a deep attention to strategic application and use within the climate crisis. Rooted in case studies from disability history, wildfire and Pyrophytel plant life, plastic-eating worms, and repair culture, this course surveys what it means to live with and through the mending practices that inform types of living that lay close to apparent death. “Earth Mending” asks what recuperative practices—such as carework, mending, stewardship, and reparation—have to offer (to our individual lives, to the persistence of communities, to the soil, air, and water) during times of ecological and humanistic crisis.

Learning Goals:

- 1). Introduce the history and practice of environmental mending.
- 2). Experiment with mending practice at different scales.
- 3). Create a final project that delves into the histories and skills researched, discussed, and practiced throughout the semester.
- 4). Practice flexible and adaptable modes of collaboration.
- 5). Engage multiple levels of writing, from weekly reading annotations to project plans and final reports.
- 6). Open up our thinking about climate crises with histories of macro and micro mending and repair.

Weekly Seminar:

Seminar will consist of mini-lectures, seminar discussion guided by the professor, and open conversations where each of you share.

Readings:

All readings are available via a PDF course reader.

Assignments:

- Self-Assessment #1, #2 (5% each, 10% total)
- Commonplace Book (20%)

- Final Project (30%)
- Final Project Presentation (10%)
- Participation Assessment / Self-Assessment #3 (5%)
- Annotation of Text (10%)
- Weather Quilt (15%)

Attendance:

I support and understand your potential need throughout the semester to miss class (up to the equivalent of one week) for illness or other life challenges, provided that you communicate with me about these absences. When you miss beyond a week of class, you will need to complete makeup work to replace the work missed, and some content will not be available.

Access:

We all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Technology:

Being intellectually and emotionally present in this class is a choice we all make. Your presence is not something we can demand of you, nor is it something any of us should take for granted. I encourage you to be present for yourself, your classmates, conversation, and open inquiry by minimizing technology-based distractions. I will leave a bowl at the entrance to the classroom where you may drop any devices (phone, laptop, watch, etc) at the beginning of class. You can opt-in to this at any point during class, but I ask that you do not retrieve your device(s) until class ends.

Email:

If you have a course question or concern, please reach out by email. It can take up to 36-48 hours for email responses, so please be patient.

Extension Requests:

I accept work within a week of a deadline, with a 5% grade reduction. Unless previously arraigned by email conversation, I do not accept work outside of the one-week extension window.



Sophie Vershbow
@svershbow

Whenever someone tells me they used ChatGPT



Generative AI:

GAI tools are not recommended for success in this class. If you use GAI tools on an assignment, you must describe how you used the tool and include both the prompt and the relevant output. Using these tools without disclosing when and how you used them is a violation of the University's academic regulations.

Generative AI cuts out process, but thinking is process. Shortcuts degrade quality. This technology relies on stolen property and exploited laborers, and exacts significant environmental costs. Building skills as a thinker, reader, and writer equips you for success as a professional, for participation as a citizen, and for fulfillment as a human. That development only happens with sweat, practice, shitty first drafts, errors, time, and revision. Your work in this course should be made by you – not someone you pay and not a bot – and work not made by you will be considered an academic integrity violation and evaluated accordingly. Similarly, all lectures, assignments, feedback, and grades will be made by me without AI, nor will any of your intellectual property be fed to tools that train AI. Ideas are social, so let's make them together.

Assignments:

Self-Assessment #1 and #2 (5% each, 10% total)

Self reflections should answer the following questions. A two paragraph response for each question will suffice. If you have more to say, that is Ok, too.

1. What do others not see in my work that I want seen?
2. Where in this class do I feel my resistance to change, and what am I resisting?
3. What does my thinking run toward, and what does it run from?
4. Anything else you want to share?

Commonplace Book (20%)

A commonplace book is a unique combination of daily commentary and thoughts, scrapbook, and life journal as it relates to topics engaged in our course. A diary of practice can serve as a repository not only for reflection, but also for magazine or newspaper clippings, botanical specimens, photos, treasured quotations, epigrams, recipes, thoughts, and almost anything else that you want to preserve or remember.

Your commonplace book will serve as a repository for the ways you see and think about environmental mending both in and out of the classroom. You will be asked to provide two shares from your commonplace book throughout the semester.

Final Project (30%)

Your final project for this course will be self-chosen from a list of existing option or, if you choose, self designed. I will distribute a list of potential options in the later part of the course. Your final project can engage any of the work we have undertaken in the class, from creative praxis to historical and critical writing.

Final Project Presentation (10%)

Guidelines for final project presentations will be available after fall break.

Participation Assessment / Self-Assessment #3 (5%)

You will perform your own assessment of your participation in the class at the end of the term. This includes attributing a numerical grade, between 0 and 5, to your participation in the class. In what ways did you successfully contribute to the class and where did you struggle? This is expected to be 500-750 words.

Annotation exercises 10%

Every week, you will be asked to physically annotate a selection of text from our readings. Guidelines for annotation can be found on our course site (images), with text instruction below. Your annotation should be included in your commonplace book, which comes to class with you every week.

Annotation exercises provide us with evidence of your careful reading of the course materials (beyond your participation and written work). You are expected to come to class with print copies of all readings, complete with annotations and notes.

Each week, you will submit 1 page of photographic replication of your annotations. You can choose the page from any of the assigned readings. See the model annotations below; annotations will be graded based on similarity with the model, in areas including volume of annotations, selection of appropriate passages to mark, and variety of annotation styles. You will complete 8 annotations throughout the course of the semester and each is worth 1 point toward your final grade, for a total of 8 points.

This exercise is borrowed from Adam Kotsko and has been slightly modified.

Weather Quilt (15%)

The Weather Quilt is a course project that we all contribute to.

Each member of the class will be assigned a day and time to record the weather on a piece of cyanotype-painted cloth. Instructions on recording process will be shared in class.

At the end of the semester, we will sew our squares together to make a course quilt. Your contributions will be worth 15% of your final grade.

SCHEDULE OF COURSE MEETINGS

Week 1: Tuesday, September 2

i., introductions

Readings: Syllabus

ii. the menders

Week 2: Tuesday, September 9

readings, “Why Mend?” Arounna Khounnorgi from Visible Mending (Quadrille, 2024); Dr. Kyle Powys Whyte, "Kinship" from We are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices From Turtle Island on the Changing Earth (New Press, 2022).

Week 3: Tuesday, September 16

readings, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “We Were Maybe Not Going to Save the World, but We Were Going to Save Each Other: How Disabled Mutual Aid Is Different than Abled Mutual Aid” from The Future is Disabled; Turner et al, "Living on the Edge: Ecological and Cultural Edges as Sources of Diversity for Social–Ecological Resilience."

submit: 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m.;

practice: running stitch; first cyanotype weather recording.

Week 4: Tuesday, September 23

No meeting

Week 5: Tuesday, September 30

readings, Sunaura Taylor, “Introduction,” from Disabled Ecologies (2020); Zoe Todd, “From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study.” **submit:** Self Assessment #1; 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m.

iii, earth materials: dirt, deserts, curbcuts

Week 6: Tuesday, October 7

readings, Ellen Stroud, “Does Nature Always Matter: Following Dirt Through History” (2003); **submit:** 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m., bring cyanotype recordings; **practice:** whip stitch

Week 7: Tuesday, October 14

No meeting

Week 8: Tuesday, October 21

readings, excerpts from Disability Rag; **submit**: 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m.

Week 9: Tuesday, October 28

readings, Sunaura Taylor, "Treating Disabled Ecologies" from Lesson from a Wounded Desert (2020); Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Interdependence Is Not Some Giant Living in a Hillside" from The Future is Disabled; **submit**: Self Assessment #3; 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m.; **practice**: backstitch

iii., thresholds: fire, decomposition, reformation

Week 10: Tuesday, November 4

readings, Julia Watts Belser, "Disability, Climate Change, and Environmental Violence: The Politics of Invisibility and the Horizon of Hope" Disability Studies Quarterly, 40(4); Allison Kafer "Bodies of Nature"; **submit**: 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m.

Week 11: Tuesday, November 11

readings, Stephen Pyne, "Unimaginable Freaks of Fire: Profile of a Pyrophytel from Burning Bush (University of Washington Press, 2015);" The Honorable Ron W. Goode, "Restoration" composed by Dahr Jamail from We are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices From Turtle Island on the Changing Earth (New Press, 2022); **submit**: 1 pg of annotation, submit by email no latter than Sunday of this week, 8 p.m.; **practice**: backstitch

Week 12: Tuesday, November 18

readings, Lauren E. Oakes, "Beginning with Seeds: Restoration in the Wake of Wildfires"; Erica Tom, Good Fire (2021); Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Becoming Earth;" **submit**: Self Assessment #3; **practice**: blanket stitch

iv., conclusions

Week 13: Tuesday, November 25

No meeting, Friday schedule

Week 14: Tuesday, December 2

due: final project presentations