

# Contemporary American Literature: Environmental Justice

Dr. Everett Hamner

Western Illinois University, Spring 2015

ENG 337, Thursdays 12:30-3\*, Quad Cities Complex 2204, [westernonline.wiu.edu](http://westernonline.wiu.edu)

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## General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

Study of contemporary American fiction, poetry, non-fiction, drama, and film, emphasizing recent formal and thematic trends. Prerequisite: ENG 299 with a grade of C or better, or consent of instructor.

## Specific Description & Goals

This course considers emerging directions in early twenty-first-century US literature and film and pressing questions about the future of “nature.” We will look especially at the problems of climate change and the ways in which various publics have responded to (or ignored) evidence that *homo sapiens* is currently hurting the odds of our long-term survival (not to mention thriving). Reaching beyond reactionary rhetoric and utilizing a basic primer on the science, we will see how American fiction has begun to tell this story slant: via an epic science fiction novel about terraforming Mars, a National Book Award-winning tale about a Midwestern man who loses part of his memory, a gritty portrayal of an Appalachian woman’s exhaustion with her marriage, and several postapocalyptic tales that reflect on relationships between men and women, parents and children, and people and dogs.

\*A unique element of this course is its linkage with Dr. Malachuk’s ENG 305, Nonfiction Forms. On five weeks (see schedule below), we will meet from 12-2:30 so as to begin immediately after ENG 305, and on those dates Dr. Malachuk will visit our class for the first half, just as Dr. Hamner will be part of his morning course’s second half. Students who take either course separately will receive the same amount of in-course hours as they would in any class and will benefit from another instructor’s insights; students who take the two courses together will have an even more unique opportunity to benefit from the overlap. By juxtaposing 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century nonfiction nature writing with late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century fiction, we will learn even more about questions of individual vs. communal engagement, conservationist and preservationist distinctions, ecofeminism, and post/apocalyptic.

Coursework includes four announced reading/viewing comprehension quizzes, three papers, and in-class presentations. The aim is to take our answers to the following questions as far as we possibly can:

- ✓ How do we evaluate data, rhetoric, and stories of climate change and other ecological issues?
- ✓ How are ecological concerns at local levels related to and portrayed beside global challenges?
- ✓ How are literary visions of wilderness, rural life, suburbia, and urban environments changing?
- ✓ How do the shifts in narration and form that come with postmodern literature affect readers’ and viewers’ orientations to contemporary material and cultural transformations?
- ✓ How is contemporary US literature illuminating ties between ecological issues, concepts of beauty and utility, and problems of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and disability?

## Reading & Assignment Schedule

\*Any article (etc.) below not listed under "required texts" will be available on Western Online under "Content."

### **PART ONE: FANTASTICALLY WIDE-ANGLE LENSES**

**1<sup>st</sup>** WEEK, JAN 22<sup>ND</sup>: ECOLOGY AS OTHERWORLDLY FANTASY **JOINT CLASS: 12-2:30**

**IN CLASS:** ~Interpreting key scenes from *Avatar* (2009)  
 ~Self-introductions (using introductory survey handout)  
 ~Syllabus review and discussion of goals and assignments, especially Paper #1

**2<sup>nd</sup>** WEEK, JAN 29<sup>TH</sup>: NO CLASS (DR. HAMNER AT CONFERENCE)

**READING:** ~Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars* (parts 1-3, pp. 1-202)

**VIEWING:** ~Documentary: *Disruption* (<http://watchdisruption.com>)

**WRITING:** ~Paper #1 due online (in "Dropbox," under "Assessments") by Wed 2/4

**3<sup>rd</sup>** WEEK, FEB 5<sup>TH</sup>: MARS AS A WINDOW ON EARTH

**READING:** ~Robinson, *Red Mars* (parts 4-5, pp. 203-382)  
 ~ Highlights of *The National Climate Assessment* (2014) (read first 68 pp. of the pdf online)

**IN CLASS:** ~An introduction to Kim Stanley Robinson and science fiction as allegory  
 ~Discussion of paper #1 submissions

**4<sup>th</sup>** WEEK, FEB 12<sup>TH</sup>: NO CLASS (LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY), BUT A BUS TRIP TO FIELD MUSEUM

**READING:** ~Robinson, *Red Mars* (parts 6-8, pp. 383-572)  
 ~Excerpts, Timothy Clark, *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011)

**5<sup>th</sup>** WEEK, FEB 19<sup>TH</sup>: THOREAUS PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE **JOINT CLASS: 12-2:30**

**READING:** ~Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"  
 ~Kim Stanley Robinson, "The Actual World: 'Mount Thoreau' and the Naming of Things in the Wilderness" (October 22, 2014, *Slate*)  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2014/10/mount\\_thoreau\\_in\\_the\\_sierra\\_nevada\\_how\\_mountains\\_get\\_named\\_in\\_the\\_wilderness.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2014/10/mount_thoreau_in_the_sierra_nevada_how_mountains_get_named_in_the_wilderness.html)  
 ~Kim Stanley Robinson, *Fifty Degrees Below* (pp. 3-33 only, via pdf)

**IN CLASS:** ~Quiz #1 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 1)  
 ~Cross-over discussion with ENG 305: Thoreau figures past, present, and future

## PART TWO: REALIST CLOSEUPS

6<sup>th</sup> WEEK, FEB 26<sup>TH</sup>: BIRD BRAINS, HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY, AND ...

READING: ~Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker* (parts 1-2)

IN CLASS: ~An introduction to the eclectic Richard Powers  
~Discuss Paper #2

7<sup>th</sup> WEEK, MAR 5<sup>TH</sup>: ... MIDWESTERN LAND USE

READING: ~Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker* (parts 3-5)

WRITING: ~Paper #2: 300+ words on proposed paper (any format) due online (in "Discussions," under "Communication") by Wed 3/4

IN CLASS: ~Workshopping: presentations of paper proposals and constructive criticism

8<sup>th</sup> WEEK, MAR 12<sup>TH</sup>: PRESERVATION VS. CONSERVATION

**JOINT CLASS: 12-2:30**

READING: ~William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"

VIEWING: ~*Beasts of the Southern Wild* (streamable on amazon.com for \$3-4; 15+ copies available in public library system; 1 copy on WIU-QC library reserve for overnight check-out)

WRITING: ~Paper #2: Full-length draft due online ("Discussions") by Wed 3/11

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #2 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 5's quiz)  
~Workshopping: reading and responses to paper drafts

MAR 19<sup>TH</sup>: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

9<sup>th</sup> WEEK, MAR 26<sup>TH</sup>: FICTION AS FLIGHT ...

READING: ~Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (ch. 1-8, pp. 1-214)

WRITING: ~Paper #2: Final version due online (in "Dropbox") by Wed 3/25

IN CLASS: ~An introduction to Kingsolver and monarch migration  
~Kingsolver's testimony to Pennsylvania House of Representatives (8/26/14)

10<sup>th</sup> WEEK, APR 2<sup>ND</sup>: ... OR FIGHT?

READING: ~Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (ch. 9-14 + author's note, pp. 215-436)

IN CLASS: ~Ecocritical approaches to Kingsolver  
~Discuss Paper #3

TH 3/26, 3-5 pm: TREE WRAPPING (OAK SAPLING PLANTING PREPARATION) WITH LIVING LANDS & WATERS, DAVENPORT PUBLIC WORKS (1200 46<sup>TH</sup> ST., DAVENPORT, IA 52807)

**PART THREE: DISASTERS & (PARTIAL) SOLUTIONS**
**11<sup>th</sup> WEEK, APR 9<sup>TH</sup>: ECOFEMINISM**
**JOINT CLASS: 12-2:30**

- READING: ~Timothy Clark, "Ecofeminism" (from *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, pp. 111-19)  
 ~Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest* (1972)
- WRITING: ~Paper #3: 300+ words on proposed project due online ("Discussions") by Wed 4/8
- IN CLASS: ~Quiz #3 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 8's quiz)

**12<sup>th</sup> WEEK, APR 16<sup>TH</sup>: CHOOSING DIRT**

- READING: ~Le Guin, "Paradises Lost" (2000)
- WRITING: ~Paper #3: Half-length draft (or equivalent) due online ("Discussions") by Wed 4/15
- IN CLASS: ~How Le Guin, and ecofeminism, have changed—and haven't

**13<sup>th</sup> WEEK, APR 23<sup>RD</sup>: SURVIVING ALONE ...**

- READING: ~Peter Heller, *The Dog Stars* (pp. 3-159)
- WRITING: ~Paper #3: Full-length draft (or equivalent) due online ("Discussions") by Wed 4/22
- IN CLASS: ~Coming full circle: Heller as interpreter of McCarthy

FRI 4/24: CAS RESEARCH &amp; AWARDS RECEPTION

**14<sup>th</sup> WEEK, APR 30<sup>TH</sup>: ... OR TOGETHER?**

- READING: ~Heller, *The Dog Stars* (pp. 160-320)
- WRITING: ~Paper #3: Final version due online ("Dropbox") by Wed 5/6
- IN CLASS: ~Course evaluations

**15<sup>th</sup> WEEK, MAY 7<sup>TH</sup>: THE ENDS OF POST / APOCALYPTIC**
**JOINT CLASS: 12-2:30**

- READING: ~Wendell Berry, "The Way of Ignorance"  
 ~Berry, "It All Turns on Affection" (<http://www.neh.gov/print/3971>)  
 ~Berry, "The Handing Down," "The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer,"  
 "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," "Requiem" (poetry)  
 ~Henry David Thoreau, on "Useful Ignorance" in "Walking" (*Walden* 282-287)
- VIEWING: ~*The Road* (2009 film adaptation of 2006 Cormac McCarthy novel)
- IN CLASS: ~Quiz #4 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 11's quiz)



FRI 5/8: WIU-QC STUDENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE

## FINALS WEEK, MAY 14<sup>TH</sup>: PAPER PRESENTATIONS

IN CLASS: ~Brief presentations of Paper #3

### Texts for Purchase

#### PLEASE NOTE:

\*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices—that site now has free 2-day shipping for students. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (also try bookfinder.com).

\*Other materials will be posted or linked via Western Online and may be printed on campus at no cost.

~Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars*. Spectra, \$6. ISBN: 0553560735.

~Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker*. Picador, \$11. ISBN: 0312426437.

~Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*. Harper Perennial, \$13. ISBN: 0062124277.

~Peter Heller, *The Dog Stars*. Vintage, \$9. ISBN: 0307950476.

### A Few of Many Additional Recommendable Texts

#### FICTION

Paolo Bacigalupi, *Pump Six and Other Stories*, *Ship Breaker*, and *The Drowned Cities*

Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars*, the Science in the Capital trilogy, and 2312

Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*

Peter Heller, *The Painter* (I've not yet read this, but looks promising)

Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

Margaret Atwood, the *MaddAddam* trilogy: *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*

David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

George Turner, *The Sea and Summer*

Joan Slonczewski, *A Door into Ocean*

Jeff Vandermeer: The Area X trilogy: *Annihilation*, *Authority*, and *Acceptance*

#### FILM & TV

*Snowpiercer*

*The Fountain*

*Children of Men*

*I am Legend*

*Sleep Dealer*

*Dark City*

*Blade Runner*

*Adaptation*

*The Matrix* trilogy

*Noah*

*Planet of the Apes* remakes

*District 9*

*An Inconvenient Truth*

*Years of Living Dangerously*

*Living Upstream*

*Crude*

#### NONFICTION & SCHOLARLY BOOKS

Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*

Eric Otto, *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism*

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*

Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*

Bill McKibben, *Eaarth* and *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*

Katharine Harmon, *You are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*

Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*

## Grading Criteria

- ~An **A** recognizes broad and deep understanding of the course material, regular and insightful discussion contributions, and very strong written work—a major impact on the course’s success.
- ~A **B** indicates good commitment to coursework, demonstrable contributions and achievements in both verbal and written analysis, and tangible positive impact on other students’ learning.
- ~A **C** reflects adequate completion of coursework, including satisfactory participation and writing.
- ~A **D** or **F** denotes incomplete or unsatisfactory coursework, unsatisfactory participation (missing more than 25% of class time or 4+ classes), and / or detraction from course goals (via plagiarism or otherwise).

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/ minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

40%	Quizzes (4 x 10% each)
10%	Paper #1
25%	Paper #2
25%	Paper #3

*I will add 1/3 grade on Paper #2 or #3 for a high-quality presentation of it at the WIU-QC CAS Research Evening and/or the WIU-QC Student Research Conference (the same materials should work in each context).*

## Assignment Descriptions

**Quizzes:** My goal is for these to be neither picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could do well merely by reading online summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned texts with good comprehension should average 60-80% of the points available (i.e., putting them in the “B” range). Understandably, students sometimes lament the quizzes initially, but in end-of-semester surveys, they almost unanimously agree that these simple assessments provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one. My best advice is to get the reading done well in advance, then go back over it, your reading and in-class notes, and my “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful.

**Paper #1:** A 1000+word autobiographical, nonfiction narrative of a key moment in your immediate personal experience with nature, wilderness, urban or suburban environments, and / or the problem of climate change. Be sure to at least briefly reference both this week’s reading and viewing materials. 2/3 of the grade will be based on how effectively you enable your audience to experience the moment vicariously and how thoughtfully you reflect on your actions or response. 1/3 of the grade will reflect your writing’s organization, clarity, and mechanical polish.

**Paper #2:** A 1500+word close analysis of *how multiple priorities for environmental “good” are in tension in one scene* (probably less than a chapter) of either *Red Mars* or *The Echo Maker*. This paper should develop a risk-taking interpretive argument that helps a reader already familiar with the scene to better understand it and the novel as a whole. 1/3 of the grade will reflect insights about contemporary environmental issues; 1/3 will reflect quality of close reading of the text; 1/3 will reflect organization, clarity, & polish.

**Paper #3:** A creative work of “artistic criticism,” in a medium approved by Dr. Hamner, that fulfills the following requirements: (1) it represents and comments upon at least one text from this course (not including the one used for Paper #2); (2) it considers ecological issues on both small and large scales; (3) it connects ecological issues with problems of social justice (whether in terms of race, class, gender, sex, or otherwise); (4) it shows rather than tells, revealing and urging, not preaching or demanding; (5) it is either 1500+ words or preapproved by Dr. Hamner as representing the equivalent. Projects will include a reflective appendix, which will vary in length; this will be discussed in detail in week 10.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

The following is part of all of my syllabi. Please read it carefully, but keeping its generality in mind.

**My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students**

The better we understand each other's expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~*Just as critically*, I expect students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is *very* hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other such endeavors, but my role is to challenge you beyond your comfort zone and to honestly assess the quality of your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even a semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and even your entire college GPA can never convey those fully.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does *not* know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not in order to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. That can only happen with your simultaneous investment, though. What you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond class meetings.

**Attendance & Participation**

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other's unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. *Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as ½ class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an "F" for the course.*

**Classroom Courtesies**

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and other electronics should not be used during quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

**Making Contact**

While there are occasional exceptions, I do my very best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won't need major adjustments during the course of the semester. Please read it thoroughly, as many routine questions I receive are answered somewhere in its pages. Also, please keep in mind that unless you anticipate being gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don't need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other routine challenges we share as human beings.

When you have an urgent question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, you are very welcome to contact me, preferably via email (much faster than phone). My goal is to respond within 2-3 business

days, if not sooner; however, I am unlikely to reply at night or on weekends or holidays. Please also note that I use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.

In short, while I ask you to turn to the syllabus and each other first for simpler questions about assignments or missed materials, I do so in order to save my time for more complex and substantial issues. Please feel welcome to ask questions after class or schedule a visit during office hours; I look forward to many good one-on-one and small group conversations over the course of the semester.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?  
A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting's break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends' families, etc.).
2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?  
A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of "discussion notes," and I usually get these posted on the course website (under "Content") within 24 hours.
3. Q. What should I write about?  
A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you're having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and those who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.
4. Q. How does your grading scale work?  
A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it's simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (= .80), then multiply that by 4 (=3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. In each case, I reserve the right to bump the grade up a notch if I believe it's warranted (or rarely down, most often when there are attendance problems like those described earlier in the syllabus).
5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?  
A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be down when a deadline is approaching, emailing the paper and then posting it asap is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers can take longer; in those cases, please alert me of your submission with an email.

### **Further Writing Assignment Guidelines**

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1" justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file.

## **The Writing Center**

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”

## **Late Work**

*Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.*

## **Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. *Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course.* We will briefly review proper citation in class, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic honesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at [www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php](http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php).

## **Counseling Services**

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

## **Accommodations**

“In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Support Services and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor’s attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512 for additional services” (from Official University Policy Manual at [www.wiu.edu/policies/syllabus.php](http://www.wiu.edu/policies/syllabus.php)).

## **Student Rights & Responsibilities**

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see [www.wiu.edu/provost/students/](http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students/).

## Dr. Hamner's Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

### The Introduction

1. **Hook:** Will your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers' attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper's thesis natural or forced?
2. **Thesis:** Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper's central claim?
 

*Strengthening your thesis:*

  - *Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?*
  - *Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?*
  - *Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?*
3. **Map:** Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

### The Body

4. **Main Points:** Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs' goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?
5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences:** Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?
6. **Organization:** Are there any paragraphs that don't make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g. too-short/disconnected "lonely" paragraphs or too-long/repetitive "bullying" paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument's force grows more naturally?
7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation:** Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument's main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?
8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis:** Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does *your* interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?
9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches:** Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? ("The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.") Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? ("In this story everything is about death.")

### The Conclusion

10. **Closure:** Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay's main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

### Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues:** Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?
 

*Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):*

  - *Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?*
  - *Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?*
12. **Stylistic issues:** Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?
 

*Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:*

  - *Verbal "fluff": is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the "impact per word ratio" as high as possible.*
  - *Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?*
  - *Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?*
  - *Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?*