

**ENGL 2303: Strange Bodies: Race and Nature in Early American Literature**  
Fall 20XX



**Instructor:** Julie McCown

**Office Number:** Carlisle Hall, Rm 412

**Email Address:** mccown@uta.edu

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Section Information:** (Tuesday, Thursday class)

**Time and Place of Class Meetings:** TBA

**Description of Course Content:**

For early Americans, the body offered one of the primary means of experiencing and understanding nature. Yet, the body was also a point of vulnerability; many writers expressed fear that the American environment would alter, degrade, or corrupt their bodies and minds. Theories and beliefs about racial differences were also closely connected to these concerns about the body in nature. This course examines the connections between ideas about race and nature in early American literary texts. Central questions addressed in this course include: What role did bodies play in early American conceptions of race and nature? How did “natural” explanations of racial difference fit into constructions of early American identity? How did ideas about nature and climate influence early American thoughts on slavery? How did differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality influence early American writings about race and nature? How are early American concerns with race and nature still relevant in today? How do early American writings about race and nature expand traditional assumptions about what counts as “literature”? To answer these questions, we will read a variety of texts (including essays, letters, poetry, fiction, and periodicals) spanning from 1503 to 1808 that explore how early American writers defined and challenged categories of race and nature and how those categories shaped constructions of early American identity.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. To encourage students to see that literary studies matter and to foster enjoyment of literature, as students engage with ideas and beliefs in ways that extend beyond the English classroom.
2. To help students recognize that literature does not occur as isolated literary events, but as complex dialogue within cultural and historical contexts.
3. To develop students' ability to read critically by studying a variety of literary elements such as form, structure, and style.
4. To enable students to demonstrate their understanding of and their ability to analyze literary texts both orally and in writing.

## Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials:

You will need to obtain copies of the following three texts:

- J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur – *Letters from an American Farmer* (ISBN: 978-0140390063)
- Leonora Sansay – *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (ISBN: 978-1551113463)
- Olaudah Equiano – *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (ISBN: 978-0142437162)

I will supply you with copies of the following texts:

- Amerigo Vespucci – from *Mundus Novus*
- Native American stories: “Man’s Dependence on Animals” (Anishinaabe Ojibway), “Origin of Disease and Medicine” (Cherokee)
- Thomas Harriot – from *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*
- Thomas Jefferson – excerpts from Query VI and XVIII, from *Notes on the State of Virginia*
- Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Banneker – Correspondence
- Cotton Mather – “The Negro Christianized” and excerpts from *The Christian Philosopher*
- Jupiter Hammon – “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” and “An Essay on Slavery”
- Phillis Wheatley – “On Imagination” and “Thoughts on the Works of Providence”
- Francis Williams and Edward Long – “An Ode” in Long’s *A History of Jamaica*
- James Grainger – Book IV of *The Sugar Cane: A Poem, In Four Books*
- Richard Allen and Absalom Jones – “A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793”
- John Marrant – “A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black”

## Descriptions of major assignments and examinations:

**Individual Blog Posts:** You will be required to write and post five (5) blog posts throughout the semester (see calendar for dates). Students will need to create their own blogs through WordPress (<https://wordpress.com/>). These blogs will be a way to share your writing with me, your fellow classmates, and the general public. Each of your required posts should be at least 250 words in length. In each post, you will discuss a work or topic covered in class in relation to a text from an early American periodical. These texts can be found in the American Periodicals database through the UTA Library. More specific instructions will be given in class.

**Long Essay:** In this five-page essay (at least 1,250 words), you will select a topic or theme related to the course’s overall theme of race and nature, analyze this topic as it appears in at least three of the assigned texts we will read, and EITHER relate it to periodicals from the time period OR relate it to a current issue or text from within the last 20 years.

**Midterm and Final Exams:** The midterm and final exams will be in-class short-answer and essay exams designed to ensure that students have read and understood the assigned texts, their cultural and historical contexts, and can recognize and discuss their literary elements. Class time will be set aside before each exam for review of materials.

**Commonplace Book/Blog:** A collaborative project in which you and your classmates will create a digital commonplace book in which you collect, compile, and display a variety of knowledge and materials pertaining to the readings and topics we will be covering over the course of the semester.

**Class Participation:** You will be graded daily on class participation, which includes coming to class prepared, making thoughtful contributions in response to the readings, asking and answering questions, and presenting a general attitude of interest in the course content. To receive full credit for participation each class you must: arrive to class no more than 5 minutes late, not leave class early, and demonstrate active engagement and preparation for each day's activities (this includes bringing the necessary readings, papers and other materials needed for each day).

**Attendance:** After accruing four unexcused absences in a T/Th class, students will be penalized 5% off their final grade for each additional absence. I will not supply what you miss by email or phone. Please make an appointment to see me in person to discuss absenteeism and tardiness. Please be in class on time, ready to begin the day's activities. Habitual tardiness is one indication of poor time management and life preparation.

**Grading:**

Individual Blog Posts	15%
Long Essay	25%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Commonplace Book/Blog	5%
Attendance and Participation	5%

Final grades will be calculated as follows: A=90-100%, B=80-89%, C=70-79%, F=69%- and below.

**Classroom Behavior:** Class sessions are short and require your full attention. All cell phones, pagers, iPods, MP3 players, laptops, and other electronic devices should be **turned off and put away when entering the classroom**; all earpieces should be removed. Store newspapers, crosswords, magazines, bulky bags, and other distractions so that you can concentrate on the readings and discussions each day. Bring book(s) and e-reserve readings (heavily annotated and carefully read) to every class. Students are expected to participate respectfully in class, to listen to other class members, and to comment appropriately. I also expect consideration and courtesy from students. Professors are to be addressed appropriately and communicated with professionally.

According to *Student Conduct and Discipline*, "students are prohibited from engaging in or attempting to engage in conduct, either alone or in concert with others, that is intended to obstruct, disrupt, or interfere with, or that in fact obstructs, disrupts, or interferes with any instructional, educational, research, administrative, or public performance or other activity authorized to be conducted in or on a University facility. Obstruction or disruption includes, but is not limited to, any act that interrupts, modifies, or damages utility service or equipment, communication service or equipment, or computer equipment, software, or networks" (UTA Handbook or Operating Procedures, Ch. 2, Sec. 2-202). Students who do not respect the guidelines listed above or who disrupt other students' learning may be asked to leave class and/or referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of

financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Academic Integrity:** All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.  
I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

Instructors may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).

**Electronic Communication:** All students must have access to a computer with internet capabilities. Students should check email daily for course information and updates. I will send group emails through MyMav. I am happy to communicate with students through email. However, I ask that you be wise in your use of this tool. Make sure you have consulted the syllabus for answers before you send me an email. Remember, I do not monitor my email 24 hours a day. I check it periodically during the school week and occasionally on the weekend.

UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this

account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory shall be directed to complete a Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Conferences and Questions:** I have three regularly scheduled office hours each week. These times are reserved for students to drop by or to make an appointment to discuss course assignments, grades, or other class-related concerns. I will be happy to make other appointment times for you if your class schedule conflicts with regular conference times or if I am not available on certain days. If you receive a grade on an assignment or quiz about which you have questions, please wait twenty-four hours before discussing it with me. This gives you time to process the assignment comments and to think about how your course work meets the requirements set forth for each assignment. I do not discuss individual student issues in the classroom before, during or after class.

**Syllabus and Schedule Changes.** Instructors try to make their syllabuses as complete as possible; however, during the course of the semester they may be required to alter, add, or abandon certain policies/assignments. Instructors reserve the right to make such changes as they become necessary. Students will be informed of any changes in writing.

## Course Schedule.

### Experiencing and Defining Early (Native) America

#### Week 1

**T** – Introduction to course; Read: Amerigo Vespucci, from *Mundus Novus*

**Th** – Read: Native American stories: “Man’s Dependence on Animals” (Anishinaabe Ojibway), “Origin of Disease and Medicine” (Cherokee); Thomas Harriot – from *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*

#### Week 2

**T** – Read: Crèvecoeur, Letter III “What is an American?”

**TH** – Periodicals and Commonplace Books  
Assign Commonplace Blog/Book groups

### Are Humans Like Plants? Climate and American Exceptionalism

#### Week 3

**T** – Read: Crèvecoeur, Letter IX “Description of Charles Town; Thoughts on Slavery; on Physical Evil; A Melancholy Scene

**TH** – Read: Thomas Jefferson, excerpts from Query VI and XVIII, from *Notes on the State of Virginia*

**Due:** Blog Post #1

#### **Week 4**

**T** – Environmental Justice Readings (handouts): “Principles of Environmental Justice,” “Executive Order 12898”

**TH** – Commonplace book/blog activity and presentations – Part 1

#### **Skin Deep? Slavery, Skin Color, and Intellect**

#### **Week 5**

**T** – Read: Cotton Mather, “The Negro Christianized” and excerpts from *The Christian Philosopher*

**TH** – Read: Correspondence between Benjamin Banneker and Thomas Jefferson  
**Due:** Blog Post #2

#### **Week 6**

**T** – Read: Jupiter Hammon, “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” and “An Essay on Slavery”; Phillis Wheatley, “On Imagination” and “Thoughts on the Works of Providence”; and Francis Williams and Edward Long, “An Ode” in Long’s *A History of Jamaica*

#### **Tropical Climates, Sugar Cane, and Slave Revolts**

**TH** – Read: James Grainger, Book IV of *The Sugar Cane: A Poem, In Four Books*

#### **Week 7**

**T** – Read: Grainger, cont.  
**Due:** Blog Post #3

**TH** – Review for Midterm exam

#### **Week 8**

**T** – **Midterm exam**

**TH** – Read: Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; or The Horrors of St. Domingo*  
Assign Commonplace book/blog groups – Part 2

#### **Week 9**

**T** – Read: Sansay, cont.

**TH** – Read: Sansay, cont.

**Week 10**

**T** – Read: Sansay, cont.  
**Due:** Blog Post #4

**TH** – Commonplace book/blog activity and presentations – Part 2

**Yellow Fever and Diseased Bodies**

**Week 11**

**T** - Read: Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, “A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793”  
 Assign Commonplace book/blog groups – Part 3

**TH** – Discuss long essay, blog posts, and environmental justice topics

**Traveling into the Wilderness and Across the Atlantic**

**Week 12**

**T** – Read: John Marrant, “A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black”

**TH** – Read: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*

**Week 13**

**T** – Commonplace book/blog activity and presentations – Part 3

**TH** – Read: Equiano, cont.  
**Due:** Blog post #5

**Week 14**

**T**– Read: Equiano, cont.

**TH**– Workshop on long essay

**Week 15**

**T** – Common place book/blog finished – final thoughts and reflections

**TH** – Final exam review

**Week 16**

**T** – Final Papers due, informal presentation/discussion of papers

**TH** – Final Exam