Writing 230SK: Writing Across Cultures

Walden
International: Analyzing Thoreau Across Cultures

Spring 2016

Dates / contact hours: 300 minutes each week
Academic Credit: 1
Modes of Inquiry: W, CCI
Course format: seminar

Instructor’s Information

Professor: Patrick Morgan
Email: patrick.morgan@duke.edu / Please email me with any questions!

DKU Mobile: TBD

Prerequisite(s), if applicable

For Duke undergraduates, completion of Writing 101

Course Description

Writing Across Cultures
This course provides writing experience and training through theme-based seminars on a topic selected by the instructor. The course component includes cross-cultural inquiry within writing, as well as an emphasis on making texts public.
Walden International: Analyzing Thoreau Across Cultures

Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden* and often called the first environmentalist, never traveled—at least physically—outside of North America. Intellectually, though, he was a globetrotter who rigorously engaged with Asian philosophies, including Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. He was among the first writers to introduce Asian thought to America. Indeed, Thoreau is so profoundly influenced by Asian philosophy that, in 1937, Chinese writer and inventor Lin Yutang wrote, “Thoreau is the most Chinese of all American authors in his entire view of life, and being a Chinese, I feel much akin to him in spirit […]. I could translate passages of Thoreau into my own language and pass them off as original writing by a Chinese poet, without raising any suspicion.”

In anticipation of Thoreau’s bicentennial in 2017, this course will analyze his writings from an international perspective, focusing primarily on his engagement with Asian thought. How does Thoreau “package” ancient Asian philosophies in order to comment on nineteenth-century American culture? How have modern-day Asian scholars viewed Thoreau, and can we use these national discussions to frame our own international analyses of *Walden*? What are the cultural forces and contexts that allow scholars like Lin Yutang to claim Thoreau as “the most Chinese of all American authors”? We will practice the skill of close reading alongside the craft of academic writing, rigorously exploring the myriad connections between Thoreau and Asia. We will read *Walden* slowly and deliberately, closely analyzing his language, and thinking about how his simple, lucid writing style can influence our own writing.

More specifically, we will explore Thoreau’s cross-cultural connections through a series of three writing projects. 1.) We will undertake a collaborative digital humanities project, adding our analyses of *Walden* to an online edition of Thoreau’s text, in conversation with each other and the international scholarly community. That is, in anticipation of our class meetings, we will participate in a digital conversation that will potentially include students from around the world. 2.) We will take a digital “field trip” to Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, the place where Henry David Thoreau lived to focus on his writing. From a list of videos illustrating short passages of *Walden*, you will select one video and write a short essay in which you analyze the sights and sounds you see and hear around Walden Pond in relation to Thoreau’s words. 3.) We will complete a final writing project in which each student undertakes a formal, argument-driven analysis of *Walden*. You will explore in depth one particular connection—of your choosing—between *Walden* and another culture or cultural expression, whether it’s the way Thoreau frames another culture in his own work or the way other cultures read Thoreau.

Although we will analyze Thoreau’s writing throughout the course, our major focus will be on crafting elegant and engaged academic writing. Just as Thoreau took *Walden* through multiple drafts, we will work as a community to hone our writing through multiple drafts. In developing their writing, students are offered practice in:

1. *Researching*. Students critically read scholarly work about their topics of interest.
This research may include locating sources, questioning methodology, examining evidence, identifying social or political contexts, or considering the implications of an academic work.

2. **Workshopping.** Academic writers reread their own writing and share work-in-progress with colleagues in order to reconsider their own arguments. Students learn how to become critical readers of their own prose through responding to one another in classroom workshops, seminar discussions, and individual teacher/student conferences.

3. **Revising.** Students are asked to rethink their work-in-progress in ways that go beyond simply fixing errors or polishing sentences in order to extend, refine, and reshape what they have to say and how to say it.

4. **Editing.** As a final step in preparing documents for specific audiences, students learn how to edit and proofread.

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**Course Goals / Objectives**

The central goal of this course is to provide native English students and English language learners guided practice in rigorous reading and writing of the sort expected in other courses across the academy and in civic and professional life beyond the university, whether in China or elsewhere. Intellectual writing typically includes certain features:

- Locates the project within the context of previous thinking on the subject
- Responds to and makes use of the work of others
- Judiciously offers reasons in support of its central claim
- Recognizes the guiding assumptions and limitations of the findings
- Exercises intellectual curiosity, creativity, and precision

This course also provides students the opportunity to closely read, appreciate, and discuss Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, which is one of the top nonfiction books written by an American. Although we’ll analyze and respond to Thoreau’s language in general, we’ll also explore the many ways he engages with the international community, especially Asian philosophies and cultures.

**Learning Objectives**

Students learn to:

1. **Engage with the work of others.** In pursuing a line of inquiry in research, scholars identify and engage with what others have communicated.
2. **Consider cross-cultural perspectives.** In an increasingly multi-cultural world, scholars cultivate a more in-depth understanding of cultural differences in academic writing and scholarly practices.

3. **Articulate a position.** The point of engaging with the work of others is to move beyond what has been said before. Scholars respond to gaps, inconsistencies, or complexities in the relevant literature, anticipate possible counterarguments or contradictory evidence, provide new evidence or interpretations, and advance clear and interesting positions.

4. **Situate writing for a multi-cultural audience.** In order to best contribute to their fields of inquiry, scholarly writers develop an awareness of the expectations and concerns of their intended readers. These expectations include not only appropriate and effective support for arguments, but also differing cultural conventions of acknowledgement, citation, document design, and presentation of evidence.

5. **Transfer writing knowledge into situations beyond the “Writing Across Cultures” course.** Even as scholarly writers situate their writing for specific audiences, they also need to transfer knowledge and practices across cultures, disciplines, and contexts.

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**Required Text(s)/Resources**


**Additional Materials**

Access to a computer, our course website, and Duke Library resources

**Course Requirements**

In our Writing Across Cultures course, we will develop three writing projects:

1.) **Digital Annotation Conversations**

Every writer needs a place to reflect, take risks, practice, and make connections. As you read *Walden*, you’ll want to take notes recording your engagement with the text. In order to engage further with each other and the wider scholarly community, you will share a series of analytic reflections throughout our session in the form of digital annotations. This is your chance to thoughtfully respond to Thoreau’s words in conversation with the rest of the class.

We will join an international community of scholars who are thinking and writing about *Walden* via the Readers’ Thoreau <http://commons.digitalthoreau.org>, a collaborative initiative of SUNY Geneseo, the Thoreau Society, and the Walden Woods Project. This cross-cultural
between Thoreau’s observations in conversation with Thoreau’s nineteenth-century experience will allow us to reflect upon the many ways different cultures respond to Thoreau’s words, and will be a springboard into our face-to-face conversations. Specifically, virtually every week, you will respond to a particular passage (depending on where we are in Walden) based on a series of prompts you will be given beforehand. These prompts may be provided by your fellow classmates who are in charge of leading discussion for the week. Your response will consist of roughly 4-8 thoughtful sentences in which you engage with Thoreau’s words. This engagement can occur through a number of ways, such as: paraphrasing a sentence and then explaining how those words make you feel or agreeing/disagreeing/complicating those words; connecting that sentence to a larger pattern you’ve noticed in Walden; relating Thoreau’s experience to your own experience, mindful of the cultural and temporal differences; clearly explaining what you appreciate about Thoreau’s words in the particular passage you’ve chosen and then analyzing the form of Thoreau’s sentences, whether it’s his grammar, rhetorical constructions, or the images he invokes; exploring how a particular sentence or passage relates to our cross-cultural theme or classroom discussion; noting something you find challenging about Thoreau’s language, and posing a question for the digital community; “unpacking” Thoreau’s language and taking a stance in relation to his claims. Over the course of the session, a majority of your responses should be in direct conversation with another member of the Readers’ Thoreau community. In other words, your weekly digital annotation should be a conversation in which, rather than responding to Thoreau’s words alone, you are actively placing your response in conversation with both Thoreau and the members of our learning community, starting a conversation outside of class that we can continue inside of class. Further details will be explained in class.

2.) Short Essay: Reflections from Your Visit to Walden Pond (600—900 words)
Since we won’t be able to physically travel to Walden Pond during our seven weeks in Kunshan, China, I decided to bring Walden Pond to you. This past summer, I spent a few weeks living in Thoreau’s hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, making a daily trek—before sunrise—to the shores of Walden Pond. With a video camera and my copy of Walden in hand, I took a series of videos replicating the movements-through-space Thoreau made back in 1845. That is, I tried to locate the areas around Walden Pond Thoreau describes in his book, illustrating—via the movement of the video camera—the areas, objects, and phenomena Thoreau experienced.

You will “adopt” one of these videos illustrating short passages of Walden, and in a short essay (600-900 words), describe what you see and hear at Walden Pond, compare and contrast what you see and hear with Thoreau’s words, and make a clear, concise argument exploring the difference you see between your experience at Walden Pond (i.e. the video) and Thoreau’s experience (i.e. his words). In what ways do you experience Walden Pond differently than Thoreau? How much is that difference cultural? Individual? Temporal? This is your chance to describe what you see during your digital field trip to Walden Pond, placing your present-day observations in conversation with Thoreau’s nineteenth-century observations. Further details will be explained in class.

3.) Final Writing Project: Formal, Argument-Driven Analysis of Walden (1500—2400 words)
For our major writing assignment, each student will explore in depth one specific connection between Thoreau’s Walden and another culture or cultural expression. By “cultural
“expression,” I am referring mainly to written texts, belief systems, philosophies, and religions; in other words, anything that can be considered an expression of a certain culture. You can, for example, develop a specific argument exploring Thoreau’s engagement with Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. You should follow your research passion when choosing which cultural intersection you’d like to explore. The goal of this writing project is to closely analyze one dimension of Walden’s cross-cultural connections while also placing your own voice in the context of the wider critical community. That “while also” is the major challenge of this essay project. Learning how to situate your own interpretation within a scholarly context is a pivotal skill no matter what academic discipline you choose to pursue because specific, creative, and original arguments never occur in a vacuum. By articulating a position, situating that position as a response, and clearly delineating what is at stake in your essay, you will actively grapple with one of the most challenging aspects of any writing project: imbuing your writing with a larger sense of purpose.

Choosing one chapter of Walden, write a formal, argument-driven essay in which you make a specific claim regarding how Thoreau’s chapter intersects with the international community. The class will receive a series of prompts you may want to use to guide your research focus. You are highly encouraged, though, to explore a specific international connection of your own choosing as you develop this paper. Do you notice any patterns in the way Thoreau engages a particular community? How does he marshal the language of another culture for his own rhetorical means? What kind of work do these cultural references and quotes do within Walden? Attend closely to the language of Walden to support your argument.

Length: Your final project should be 5-8 pages (double-spaced, single-sided printing) plus a Works Cited page in MLA format. In other words, your introduction, body, and conclusion must be at least 5 pages (approximately 1500 words) in length; the Works Cited page does not count for one of these minimally required pages.

Prewriting exercises, drafting, and revising are integral to a student’s success as a writer. Feedback may take a variety of forms—audio, written, audio/written combination, and in-person—from a variety of sources such as peers, teacher, and tutors.

**Assessment Information / Grading Procedures**

Attendance and intellectually rigorous participation in weekly seminar sessions, and in all other work, is crucial to this course. We are all members of a learning community, and it is your duty to prepare carefully before each class session and engage actively during each class session. Please support your community by being a fully engaged participant!

Requirements and percentage of final grade:

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<tr>
<td>Intellectual Participation</td>
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<td>Weekly Digital Annotation Conversations</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Unless I have approved a deadline extension at least a week in advance, late submissions of graded documents will be lowered by a full letter grade per 24-hour period. Late penalties begin immediately. For instance, if a submission is due before a class meeting, the maximum grade for an essay turned in after the start of class will be “B.” No credit is granted for short assignments turned in late. And no credit is given if you fail to hand in the preliminary steps leading up to the final version of an essay.

Diversity and Intercultural Learning

The theme for this Writing Across Cultures course is “Walden International: Analyzing Thoreau Across Cultures.” Henry David Thoreau engaged rigorously, throughout his life, with diverse cultures, philosophies, and religions, and this engagement is evident throughout his most famous book. Thus our theme lends itself well to DKU’s global perspective. Drawing from the diverse demographic of the students enrolled in the class, we will consider the various ways in which Thoreau invokes other cultures and the various ways other cultures invoke Thoreau. This course provides a safe environment for students to explore various cultural and intercultural interactions of individuals across spaces and histories.

Course Policies and Guidelines

PARTICIPATION
This course is structured as a workshop seminar; therefore, your attendance and active participation are crucial to the functioning of our learning community. It is your duty to print Sakai texts out before class and bring them to class with you. Not bringing hard copies of the texts we’ll be discussing constitutes an absence. You should be printing these texts out and marking them up with your active reading, scribbling responses on margins, noting parts you find interesting or confusing, and engaging with the written word. Your participation also includes bringing loose-leaf paper to class with you for our short writing assignments.

Characteristics of an intellectually alert and active student include the following:

1. Engage actively during every class period by using classroom time productively. Everyone has an off day from time to time, but for nearly every class meeting your brain should be working the entire class time.

2. Participate actively during every in-class workshop, and push yourself to provide your classmates with consistently thorough, thoughtful, and helpful feedback. You should help your classmates become better writers throughout the semester. Take their work seriously and think hard about how it can be improved.
3. Use the feedback you receive to improve your writing. You do not have to make every change suggested by your readers, of course, as readers will sometimes disagree. But you must take all feedback seriously, and your final drafts should show evidence of your careful consideration of your readers’ suggestions.

4. Work with your classmates to complete any group assignments to the satisfaction of everyone in the group. Fairly divide group assignments and complete, on time, all the work you agree to take on for your group.

5. Produce complete, thoughtful drafts of every assignment, and turn all work in on time. Complete every assignment by the deadline, and bring a complete, printed draft—when asked for—to every writing workshop.

6. Revise thoroughly and thoughtfully. Revision means substantially clarifying your ideas, reorganizing your argument, rethinking your claims, strengthening your evidence, deepening your research, adjusting your style, and/or reimagining your relationship to your audience. Make substantial revisions before submitting the final draft.

7. Proofread final drafts to eliminate distracting surface errors and typos. Final drafts do not have to be perfect, but you should learn any grammar rules that consistently cause you trouble, by talking with a classmate, using a handbook or online resources, and/or meeting with me.

8. Attend all scheduled conferences with me and come prepared to use the conference time productively. If I indicate on a draft that I would like you to schedule an appointment to talk with me, please do so within the week.

9. Show respect for every member of our learning community. This includes using respectful language, taking each other’s ideas seriously, and refraining from distracting behaviors, such as checking email, surfing the Web, or texting during class. Check that your mobile phone is never on during class.

10. Be prepared for class. Complete the required reading, print any required handouts, and—if asked for—bring your laptop and whatever drafts, revisions, or research I’ve required.

**ABSENCES AND TARDIES**

Plan to attend every class meeting. Situations may arise, however, that necessitate missing class. You are permitted to miss a total of two class meetings—due to illness or other emergencies—over the course of the term without penalty. In such cases, send me a short, explanatory e-mail at least one day in advance. It will be your responsibility to catch up, including getting notes and class materials from a classmate. Any absences beyond this two-class limit will result in your final course grade being lowered a full letter grade for each additional day missed. (In other words, a grade of B would become a C-) If you reach a fourth absence, I will contact your Dean. In addition, arriving more than 10 minutes late or unprepared to participate (i.e. half-asleep, without requested materials, etc.) qualifies as an absence.
You are expected to arrive on time, ready to engage in the day’s work. You are permitted three tardies (1-10 minutes late) without penalty over the course of the semester. If you are tardy beyond this limit, your final course grade will be lowered a half grade for each tardiness beyond this three-tardy limit. (In other words, a grade of B would become a B-.)

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

We are members of an academic community, and academic intellectual integrity is essential. Please familiarize yourself with Duke’s web materials on plagiarism to ensure that you are aware of the academic conventions for crediting the sources you use. Plagiarism is defined here, and various possible misuses of source material are analyzed for their errors. The penalty for plagiarism is failure of the assignment, failure of the course, and/or judicial sanctions. (See [http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism](http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism)).

Each student is bound by the academic honesty standard of Duke Kunshan University. Its Community Standard states: “Duke Kunshan University is a community composed of individuals of diverse cultures and backgrounds. We are dedicated to scholarship, leadership, and service and to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect, and accountability. Members of this community commit to reflect upon and uphold these principles in all academic and non-academic endeavors, and to protect and promote a culture of integrity.” Violations of the DKU academic honesty standard will not be tolerated. Cheating, lying, falsification, or plagiarism in any practice will be considered as an inexcusable behavior and will result in zero points for the activity.

Please also familiarize yourself with the Duke academic standards. Duke University holds its students to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. As a Duke student you pledge to uphold the Duke Community Standard:

- I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors;
- I will conduct myself honorably in all my endeavors; and
- I will act if the Standard is compromised.

For more information on academic integrity and the Duke Community Standard see: [http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/resources/community_standard/cs_more.html](http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/resources/community_standard/cs_more.html).

Maintain your academic integrity and avoid plagiarism by (a) taking careful notes to help you distinguish between your own ideas and language and those you have borrowed from sources, (b) attempting to cite all sources correctly even in first drafts, (c) mastering citation conventions and citing all sources correctly in all final drafts, and (d) never attempting to disguise another’s work as your own, never purchasing essays online, and never engaging in any other act of academic dishonesty. New ideas only come about because we are all constantly borrowing ideas and sharing our work with others; be generous about attributing and citing those whose work has influenced your own.
TECHNOLOGY
The use of mobile phones, tablets, and laptops is not permitted during the class, except when approved beforehand.

FORMATTING AND DOCUMENT DESIGN
It is your responsibility as a scholar to present your work in a clear, transparent, and careful manner. I will ask you to resubmit any piece of writing that seems hurried or carelessly prepared and it will thereafter be subject to late penalties. Aspects of professional-quality academic documents include:

12 pt. Times New Roman font (or equivalent)  Proofread  Double line spacing
One-inch margins all around  Edited  Titled
In accordance with MLA formatting guidelines (page numbers, headings, etc.)
Single-sided printing

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS
Some writing assignments may be submitted as hard copies in class, some may be submitted electronically to Sakai, and others may be emailed to me. Pay careful attention to the mode of submission and the number of copies you need to bring. Please refer to assignment prompts for detailed instructions.

MAKE-UP WORK
Students are allowed to make up work only if missed as a result of illness or other unanticipated circumstances warranting a medical excuse, consistent with DKU policy. You must notify me in advance if you will miss a project deadline. Project extensions requested for medical reasons must be negotiated at the time of illness.

THE WRITING STUDIO: WORKING WITH A TUTOR
During the semester, you will be able to meet with a Writing Studio tutor based at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, via Skype, Google Hangout, or Adobe Connect. The tutor will strategize with you about how to revise your work, taking up concerns about analysis, argument, and structural strategies. You will be able to schedule regular individual tutoring sessions. E-Tutoring sessions will also be available, where you can fill out a detailed submission form and submit a draft for feedback electronically.