

Thoreau in Our Time 46.357.201

Instructor: Susan E. Gallagher Susan_Gallagher@uml.edu

Time: Tuesday, 2:00 - 4:15

Faculty Page: <http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher> (Click on [Thoreau in Our Time.](#))

Office: Coburn 400

Office Hours: On campus: Tuesday, 1:00-2:00 + tbd; online: Friday, 7:00-9:00pm. To meet with me at other times, please email for an appointment.

Note: Links to all required readings are included on the course web page.

This course traces Henry David Thoreau's influence on major social and political transformations in American history from the abolitionist movement to the present day. We will focus first on Thoreau's writings on slavery, commercial development, environmental history, and individual liberty. Then we will study his formative role in the civil rights and environmental movements of the twentieth century. Finally, through a mix of outside speakers and student presentations, we will explore how his writings continue to shape ongoing struggles to deal with climate change, advance social and economic justice, and promote a greater sense of fairness in American life. The course will involve at least one trip to Walden Pond and a tour of Thoreau's birthplace in Concord, Massachusetts.

Requirements

You must have regular access to the Internet in order to take this course. You are not required to purchase any books. All course materials, including required readings and assignments, are available at <http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher>.

When you contact me via e-mail, you must include the letters "HDT" in the subject heading of your message. If you do not include "HDT," your e-mail could be misdirected or rejected as spam. Also, you must use your UML e-mail address whenever you contact me.

If you need to miss a session, please e-mail a valid excuse beforehand if you can or as soon as possible after that session. If you miss more than two sessions without providing a valid excuse, you will receive an "F" for the course.

You must not plagiarize. If you copy from any outside source without providing proper attribution in any of your assignments, you will receive an "F" for that assignment. If you copy from any outside source without providing proper attribution on either the midterm or the final exam, you will automatically fail the entire course.

Assignments

The coursework is divided into six sections. To complete each section, you must provide brief answers (one or two sentences or fill-in-the-blanks) to questions on the required readings. In some cases, you will be required to submit your answers via e-mail; in others, you will be required to print out your answers and bring them with you to class. Please follow the instructions included with each set of reading questions and always arrive in class prepared to show that you have read the assigned materials.

In all of your assignments, you must demonstrate your ability to write college-level prose. Consequently, all of your work must be thoughtfully composed and free of grammatical errors. I will do my best to help you solve writing problems, but if your assignments are carelessly

written, or if you neglect to proofread, or if you submit work late without a valid explanation, you will not do well in this class.

During each section, I will assign research topics either to individual students or to small groups. You will not be required to conduct extensive additional research, but will be expected to find out enough about assigned topics to provide an informal summary of central points to the class.

During the final third of the term, each of you will prepare and give presentations on specific aspects of Thoreau's contributions to political philosophy, social movements, environmental studies, or other aspects of American life. You are free to devise your own presentation topics, but I will supply a long list of topics from which you can choose. On the date of each presentation, each of the students involved will be required to submit a summary of the main points made.

Exams

For your midterm exam, you will be required to write two two-page essays on specific aspects of the required readings. In order to help you complete the exam, I will supply a list of thesis statements that you may use as the opening paragraph for each of your midterm essays.

Your work will be graded according to your ability to write college-level prose. Consequently, like your answers to the reading questions, your midterm must be carefully written and proofread. If your essays do not conform to the basic rules of college-level composition, you should not expect to receive a passing grade.

For your final exam, you must choose one of the following options:

1. You may write a five-page paper on a topic chosen from a list that I will supply well in advance.
2. If you already possess the required technical skills, you may create a web page on a specific aspect of one of the major issues covered in class.
3. If you would like to conduct further research on a topic related to issues raised in class, you may make an in-depth presentation of your findings near the end of the term.
Note: choose this option only if you are prepared to carry out significant extra research.

No matter which of these options you choose, you must submit a thesis statement on your topic approximately two weeks before the work is due. In order to help you complete this task, we will discuss possible thesis statements in class well in advance of the due date for the final exam.

Grade Formula: Weekly Assignments and Class Participation = 30%
 Midterm = 30%
 Final Paper/Presentation = 40%