

First Year Tutorial
Fall 2003
TTh 8:10-9:50
Goodnow 109

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The first year tutorial, taken in the fall semester, is Grinnell College's only general academic course requirement. The college intends the tutorial to assist students in further developing their critical thinking skills and in improving their written and oral communication skills. Each of the tutorials offered in a given fall semester is based around a particular subject matter, which provides the vehicle by which the above goals are accomplished. The subject matter for this tutorial is described below.

Decline and Renewal in the Heartland

The arrival of European Americans in the Upper Midwest in the middle of the nineteenth century led to dramatic changes in the region's ecology. In what was perhaps the most rapid and extensive degradation of a natural ecosystem in human history, in the space of 50 years settlers plowed under millions of acres of the native tallgrass prairie and replaced it with a diversified agricultural ecosystem on what proved to be some of the best farmland in the world. As agriculture expanded, the prairie diminished. Today in Iowa, the state most completely transformed, less than 0.1 % of native prairie remains. Accompanying this change, Iowa's Native Americans were largely dispossessed and left the state. Numerous species of native birds and mammals were also extirpated. Meanwhile, the region developed a prosperous economy of mostly small towns built on an agricultural base of family-owned farms. Perhaps nowhere in America did society more closely approximate Thomas Jefferson's agrarian ideal.

Beginning in the 1930s and accelerating after World War II, major technological and economic changes gradually transformed the region, starting with its agriculture. Increasingly sophisticated farm implements, hybridization, use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, specialized cropping systems, and, more recently, confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), genetically modified crops (GMOs), growth stimulating hormones (GSHs), and the use of global positioning system (GPS) have created an astonishingly productive industrial agriculture. Despite its productivity, however, this agriculture is not without its problems. Critics charge that midwestern agriculture has caused unacceptable rates of soil erosion and become too chemical-intensive, too specialized, too dependent on fossil fuel for both the production and long-distance transportation of food, and, in a variety of ways, unhealthy. There has also been a shift toward larger and fewer farms, and crop and livestock production has become increasingly controlled by a handful of large corporations. Traditional family farms and traditional small towns and small town economies are being replaced by corporate farms, suburban sprawl, McDonalds, and Wal-Mart.

After briefly examining the history of these changes, this tutorial will focus on the current efforts of many people to reverse what they see as negative trends in environmental quality, agriculture, and community life in the Upper Midwest. Farm activists, community

organizers, prairie enthusiasts, proponents of local food systems and “slow food,” artists, and people with no particular label are engaged in a wide variety of activities that converge around the goal of renewing the natural and cultural life of the Heartland. Field trips to local farms and prairie preserves will supplement class readings, as will various arts programming during the semester in conjunction with the “Roots of Renewal” exhibition at the college’s Faulconer Gallery.

*Students in this tutorial will also be expected to **volunteer** a minimum of six hours during the semester in some community or environmental service organization. You will each receive a copy of the Community Service Center’s handbook, The Cool Stuff To Do While You’re in Grinnell, which lists many volunteer opportunities. In addition, I will inform you of opportunities involving prairie restoration, the local food system, and other activities.*

*I maintain extensive **office hours**, generally 8:00 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday through Friday, except when I am in class and during the lunch hour. You are welcome to drop by at any time for consultations about our class, your other classes, or your life at the college in general. If you wish to be assured of my availability at a particular time, you may schedule an appointment by phone, e-mail, or in person. If necessary, you may telephone me at home at other times, at 236-8530.*

Required Texts

Robert Wolf, *The Triumph of Technique: The Industrialization of Agriculture and the Destruction of Rural America* (2003). [NB: you’ll need to buy this from me.]
William K. Stevens, *Miracle Under the Oaks: The Revival of Nature in America* (1995, Pocket Books).
Dana L. Jackson and Laura L. Jackson (eds.), *The Farm As Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems* (2002, Island Press).
William Vitek and Wes Jackson (eds.), *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place* (1996, Yale University Press)
Other readings will be provided by the instructor.

Due Dates

9/2 or 9/4: oral report
9/5: 750 word paper
9/11: 500 word paper
9/23: 750-1,000 word paper
10/14 or 10/16: lead discussion
10/30: 1,000 to 1,250 word paper
11/13: oral reports/written reports
12/2 or 12/4: oral presentations
12/15 (about): 2,500 word paper

Syllabus

date assignment

SECTION A: DECLINATIONS

Declination: 1. A sloping or bending downward. 2. A falling off, especially from prosperity or vigor; a decline. 3. A deviation, as from a specific direction or standard. 4. A refusal to accept.

- 8/28 Daryl Smith and Paul Christiansen, "Prairies," Chapter 7 in Tom C. Cooper (ed.), *Iowa's, Natural Heritage* (Iowa Academy of Science, 1982)(handout)
Poem: "The Flower-Fed Buffaloes" (1913), Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)(handout)
Poem: "Standing By a Field of Virgin Prairie" (1995), Michael Carey (handout)
- 8/30 Farm Tours: an annual Center for Prairie Studies outing, attendance **required** unless you are on an athletic team and must be away from campus.
- 9/2 Oral reports: each student will present an oral report on one chapter of James J. Dinsmore's *A Country So Full of Game: The Story of Wildlife in Iowa*, which is available as an "e-book" through Burling Library's catalog. Six students will present reports on Tuesday on mammals (from Chapters 2-9) and six on Thursday on birds (from Chapters 10-17). The reports are intended to provide each of you with an initial experience presenting a small amount of information orally before a group. Reports will be evaluated in terms of style, accuracy of information presented, and handling of questions. Students are welcome to use overhead transparencies from the book or other sources as part of their presentations.
- 9/4 Oral reports continued, Chapters 10-17 of Dinsmore, *A Country So Full of Game*
- 9/5 Paper Due: each student should submit a 750 word essay (two to three pages, but learn how to do a word count on the computer if you don't already know how) on the cause and character of the degradation of the native tallgrass prairie ecosystem that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Synthesize information from readings, student oral presentations, and the instructor's lecture material. Use in-text citations to indicate the sources of factual material in your paper. For example, if you cite something from Smith and Christiansen's chapter, put the author's name(s), date, and page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence, like this: (Smith and Christiansen 1984:163). If you cite a student's presentation, put the student's name, the words "oral communication," and date of his or her presentation in parentheses at the end of the sentence: (Alice Jones, oral communication 8/30/03). We will not worry about a bibliography for this assignment.

Field Trip: Reichelt Prairie (wear long pants and *closed shoes* for maximum comfort; if there is heavy dew, expect your pants to get wet).

- 9/6 Exhibition Opening: attend the opening of the Faulconer Gallery's art exhibition, "The Roots of Renewal," on September 6th. Spend at least 45 minutes looking at the items in the show. This is **required** unless you are on an athletic team and must be away from campus. In that case, see the exhibition as soon as possible. The exhibition will be the basis for one or more assignments in this class. A series of other artistic and intellectual events related to "Roots of Renewal" are scheduled throughout the semester and can be noted on the Faulconer Gallery website.
- 9/9 Robert Wolf, *The Triumph of Technique*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
- 9/11 Introduction to Library Resources and Use, Catherine Rod (College Archivist)
 Wolf, Chapters 3, 4 and 5
Paper Due: topic to be announced (500 words).
- 9/16 Wolf, Chapters 6 and Conclusion
 Poem: "Progress" (1979), James Hearst (1900-1983)(handout)
 Poem, "Just a Dumb Farmer" (1994), Mary Swander (handout)
- 9/18 Discussion of student writing; student critiques of one another's writing.
- 9/23 Paper Due: 750-1,000 word critical review of *Triumph of Technique*. Your assignment in this essay is to develop your own assessment of Wolf's book. What is his main thesis? Does he have any secondary theses? How well does he develop his argument from the standpoint of logic? How well does he support his argument from the standpoint of evidence? In short, assess Wolf's critical thinking by demonstrating your own. Give in-text citations of page numbers in the book (e.g., Wolf 2003:25) and create a bibliography at the end of the paper in which you cite all sources used. Some students may be asked to present their papers orally to the class.

SECTION B: *RENEWALS*

Renew: 1. To make new or as if new again; restore. 2. To take up again, resume. 3. To repeat so as to reaffirm. 4. To regain (spiritual or physical vigor); revive.

- 9/25 Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in *A Sand County Almanac and Other Essays* (handout)
 Dana L. Jackson, "The Farm As Natural Habitat," in Jackson & Jackson, *The Farm As*
- 9/30 Franklin A. Kalinowski, "Aldo Leopold As Hunter and Communitarian," in Vitek and Jackson, *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place*
 Drake Hokanson, "Introduction" to *Reflecting a Prairie Town* (handout)
- 10/2 William K. Stevens, *Miracle Under the Oaks*, Introduction, Chapter 1 Tour of Drake Hokanson's exhibition of photographs with the photographer, Community Art Gallery, Grinnell Community Center, east side of Park St. between Fifth and Fourth Avenues.
- 10/7 William K. Stevens, *Miracle Under the Oaks*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2 and 3
Film: "Where the Sky Began" (viewed in class)

- 10/9 Field Trip: Conard Environmental Research Area, **Larissa Mottl** (CERA Manager)
Stevens, Chapters 4, 5 and 6
- 10/14 Stevens, Chapters 7, 8, and 9; pairs of students lead discussion on each chapter; guest appearance by **Prof. Jackie Brown** (Biology, Faculty Director of CERA)
- 10/16 Stevens, Chapters 10, 11, and 12; pairs of students lead discussion on each chapter; guest appearance by **Chris Baer** (Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development office)
- 10/18-10/26 FALL RECESS!!!
- 10/28 Stevens, Chapters 13 and 14; concluding discussion
For the second hour, students will meet in small groups and each share a brief description of the thesis of his or her upcoming paper.
- 10/30 Paper Due: 1000-1250 word essay on some aspect of prairie or savanna restoration efforts as presented by Stevens, Mottl, Brown, and Baer. You may choose to focus on the biological aspects, the social aspects, or some combination of the two. You might consider trying to answer one or more of the following questions in your paper, but feel free to explore others: Why do people get involved in prairie restoration efforts? In what ways is environmental restoration different from environmental preservation? Are the results worth the time and money they take? Why or why not? What is significant about the volunteer involvement in prairie restoration as opposed to having it all in the hands of professionals? *An important goal in this paper is to bring together several different points of view, comparing and contrasting them.* Give in-text source citations, and include a bibliography at the end of the paper listing all sources cited.
- 11/4 Jackson and Jackson, *The Farm as Natural Habitat*, Introduction, Chapter 1
- 11/6 Jackson and Jackson, Chapters 2, 3, and 5
- 11/11 Jackson and Jackson, Chapters 6, 7, and 8
Field Trip: Barney Bahrenfuse's farm WSW of Grinnell
- 11/13 Oral Reports: six students will give oral reports on Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 of Jackson and Jackson. Each report should last approximately ten minutes and should be about equally divided between a summary of the article and a critical assessment of the ideas it contains, suggesting how (a) desirable and (b) feasible they seem to you **and why**. Each report will be followed by a period for questions and answers.
Written Reports: Students not giving oral reports this day should each search the web and locate an organization in your home state or country (if other than the United States) that promotes alternatives to conventional, or industrial agriculture. Write a 4-500 word summary and critical assessment of this organization's goals, methods, and achievements. If you cannot locate an organization in your home state or country, find

one in a neighboring state or country. Be sure to identify the web address in your report.

11/18 Jackson and Jackson, Chapters 16 and 18, concluding discussion.

11/20 Vitek and Jackson, *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place*. The class will decide collectively how we want to deal with the many short essays in this book: who reads what, whether there are reports, how discussions will be structured, and so forth.

As you can tell from the subtitle, the essays in this book deal with community, a social phenomenon, and its connection to place, a phenomenon at once geographical and mental or, better yet, emotional. Many of the essays are about community and place in the Midwest, and therefore they relate to Stevens's book, the essays in Jackson and Jackson's book, and the artistic creations in "Roots of Renewal." The final paper for the tutorial will be a 2,500 word essay dealing with place and its role in human life. It should be a synthesizing essay, drawing from our readings, field trips, the art in "Roots of Renewal," your own experiences of community and place at home and in Grinnell. I am asking that your essays strike a very difficult balance between the descriptive and the proscriptive, the analytical and the personal, the ideas of other people and your own and, as far as your own are concerned, both your intellectual and your emotional thoughts. Admittedly, this is a tall order. I am looking for your ability to absorb and assess the ideas of others, to let them stimulate your thinking, and to weave all together into a penetrating statement of your views of the significance of community and place in our lives and the need for efforts to renew or revive their importance.

11/25 Vitek and Jackson, discussion of essays
Visit Grinnell Historical Museum

11/27 THANKSGIVING RECESS!!!

12/2 Vitek and Jackson, discussion of essays
Re-visit "Roots of Renewal" as a class; six students present individual commentaries on an art work of their choosing (the art installation pieces can also be used). The presentations, of about 5 minutes, should be your interpretation of the work. If possible, you should contact the artist in advance (by phone or e-mail) and pose questions, the answers to which you can incorporate into the interpretation of the work that you give.

12/4 Vitek and Jackson, discussion of essays
The rest of the class presents individual commentaries on an art work of their choosing.

12/9 Vitek and Jackson, discussion of essays

12/11 Concluding discussion

During Final Exam Week: Final paper due, 2,500 words.