

ENGW 1105: Wild Words: Writing and Conservation in New Zealand



Meeting Time/Place	T/Th 1 p.m.-2:15 p.m. TBA
Instructor	Kim Todd
Office/Office Hours	T/Th 10 a.m.-11 a.m., Pillsbury 320F
E-Mail	kftodd@umn.edu

Texts	Clare Walker Leslie, <i>Keeping a Nature Journal</i> , 3rd Edition <i>Best American Science and Nature Writing 2025</i> , ed. by Susan Orlean Excerpts from <i>Extraordinary Anywhere: Essays on Place from Aotearoa New Zealand</i> , ed. by Ingrid Horrocks and Cherie Lacey Additional essays and articles, available either online or as handouts
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Supplies	Journal with blank pages, Colored pencils
Course Prerequisites	None
Extra Credit Opportunities	None

Course Description

In this course, we will explore writing about science and nature in a variety of forms, from field journals and science interpretation to audio/video essays, profiles, and creative works inspired by the natural world. These varied writing assignments will allow students to develop the core writing skills of brainstorming, drafting, and revising as well as communicating ideas in different modes for different audiences. Useful for writers, science students, those engaged with environmental issues, and curious adventurers, the class begins after spring break and extends into May with a two-week immersion experience in New Zealand.

An island nation of fiords and volcanoes that has followed a unique evolutionary path, New Zealand is the ideal place to read and write about the natural world. Populated by flightless birds and outsize insects, it has no native land mammals except bats. The country, also called Aotearoa, "The Land of the Long White Cloud," is at the forefront of many scientific debates and challenges, including evolution on islands, the impacts and control of native species, climate change, and reintroduction biology. We will explore Wellington, the capital city, as well as Dunedin, the "Wildlife Capital of New Zealand," a city rich in Māori and Scottish heritage, Victorian architecture, and literary tradition. We will meet with scientists and conservationists working on issues that face both New Zealand and the entire planet. In addition, we will take trips to Kapiti Island, a predator-free reserve, the Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarewa), and the Otago Peninsula, home of colonies of little blue penguins

and royal albatross.

This course meets the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

- Communicating effectively in a variety of genres, from audio presentations to science interpretation, to field journals.
- Engaging diversity by understanding approaches to science, nature, and landscape across cultures, both in New Zealand and the United States.
- Thinking critically about scientific/environmental issues facing New Zealand specifically and the planet more broadly and evaluating sources, including science journal articles, museum exhibits, and op/eds, that purport to offer solutions.
- Employing creativity, innovation, and revision skills in the writing of several short papers and one longer personal essay.
- Navigating international travel, gaining interpersonal skills and independence.

Expected Student Academic Work per Credit

The University Statement on Expected Student Academic Work per Credit states that undergraduate students should expect to spend three hours per credit per week; this means that for a three-credit course like this one, the usual work expectation for students, including class time, is 9 hours per week. Because this course meets on an unconventional schedule (half a semester on campus and then two weeks in New Zealand), this syllabus includes a breakdown of lessons/experiences that add up to three credits, or at least 45 instructional hours. A week abroad will be more work intensive than a week on the Twin Cities campus. According to the Learning Abroad Center guidelines, each hour of formal instruction (in-class instruction, facilitated discussion, guest lectures, and on-site lectures) counts as a full hour for the purposes of calculating instructional time. Informal instruction (site visits, excursions, field trips, community engagement, guided tours) counts for .5 time for the purposes of calculating instructional time. This course contains 57.5 instructional hours.

For more information, see the policy on Expected Student Academic Work per Credit: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/studentwork>

Attendance and Participation

In-class participation is a necessary component of this course. You should plan to be at every class session; absences beyond two classes will affect your grade, and once you have missed three weeks of class (six sessions), it will be difficult to pass. If missing a class is unavoidable, you are still responsible for all material covered, whether you were present or absent. Students are expected to obtain notes from a classmate of class material missed. You may also visit me during office hours for an overview. Make-up work for any missed class consists of a 500-word paper analyzing the reading discussed in the missed class session, emailed to the instructor. For the university's policy on make-up work for legitimate absences, please see: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/studentresp>.

Participation includes doing the readings and coming to class prepared to talk about them. This is

important as part of the class will be in class discussion, both full class conversations and small groups, and good discussions depend on everyone contributing. Plan to contribute thoughtfully in class each day for full participation points. Though you may not be comfortable talking in class, challenge yourself. It is a skill like any other. On the other hand, if you find that you are speaking more than everyone else, be sure you are allowing space for quieter students to make their voices heard.

Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom

Writing requires great concentration, as do face-to-face discussions of your peers' work, so I will ask that you turn off cell phones and other electronic devices in the classroom. This includes laptops, with a few exceptions. If an essay has been assigned in an online format, you don't have to print it out for discussion. Of course, I will make an exception for students who have a documented disability.

Students are not permitted to record any part of a class/lab/other session unless explicitly granted permission by the instructor. If the student does not comply, the student may be asked to leave the classroom. For complete information, please reference the [policy on Student Responsibilities](#).

Field Journal

In this class, we will create field journals—notes of observations, thoughts, questions—kept as a record and as a source for longer pieces. Select a journal that is light, easy to carry, and has blank pages. It should be designated for this purpose, not a section of a notebook you use for multiple classes. Find a place that might be interesting, where you might encounter some aspect of the natural world, and plan to spend about 20 minutes there. You can choose a new place each time, or revisit one place over and over. Use the examples and prompts in *Keeping a Field Journal* for initial inspiration, but over the course of the semester, you will develop your own preferences and style. Each entry should include: the date, the weather, the place, the time, something you note with each of your five senses, something the observation makes you think about or reminds you of, and a question. It should also include both some additional writing and an image (a map, a drawing of a patch of bark, the path of a snail trail over a leaf), though the proportions of each are up to you. You might write four paragraphs of text and a thumbnail sketch or a full-page illustration with three sentences. Some additional tools you might find useful include field guides, magnifying glass, ruler, camera, binoculars. While we are in the Twin Cities, you will do a journal assignment per week. While in New Zealand, we will do a journal assignment a day. Each entry should be a double-page spread in your journal. To submit each entry, you will take a photo of each page and turn it in on Canvas.

Short Papers

We start by writing three short papers for this class, each one about 500 words. By writing about a place, writing a natural and cultural history of a plant or animal, and writing a profile of a scientist, you will master research skills, observation skills, critical thinking skills, and interviewing skills. In addition, you will experiment with energetic prose that will let you take complex ideas and make them accessible to a general audience.

Audio/Video Essay

For this three-minute audio or video essay, you will formulate a question about something you have observed and pose that question at the start of your essay. For example: How can the royal albatross fly for so many days without landing? What makes one non-native species successful in a new ecosystem while another one quickly dies off? Why are New Zealand pigeons so much larger than

their North American counterparts? Then, using information from research and interviews, you will answer the question and provide your conclusions to your listeners or viewers. We will go over examples in class.

Final paper

Your final paper will be a personal essay of roughly 1,500-2,000 words that revises and develops ideas launched in your field journal entries and shorter papers. It will be an in-depth exploration of the way a scientific controversy plays out in a particular place, grounded in specific details, and fueled by your observation and research. All papers should use a 12-point font and traditional margins.

Evaluation

Your grade will be determined according to the following:

- 10%—Place paper
- 10%—Animal/plant paper
- 10%—Profile paper
- 20%—Field journal
- 20%—Final paper
- 10%—Class participation

Grade Definitions

The University uses plus and minus grading on a 4.000 cumulative grade point scale in accordance with the following:

- A (4.000) - Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- A- (3.667)
- B+ (3.333)
- B (3.000) - Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B- (2.667)
- C+ (2.333)
- C (2.000) - Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
- C- (1.667)
- D+ (1.333)
- D (1.000) - Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
- S - Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better

Grade Calculation

Letter Grade	Range
A-	< 93% to 90%
B+	< 90% to 87%
B	< 87% to 83%
B-	< 83% to 80%
C+	< 80% to 77%
C	< 77% to 73%
C-	< 73% to 70%
D+	< 70% to 67%
D	< 67% to 60%
F	< 60% to 0%

For additional information, please refer to the University policy on Grading and Transcripts: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/gradingtranscripts>

Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as: plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask. Review the University's Student Conduct Code.

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, and on-line assignment help tools, such as Chegg(R), cannot be used for assignments in this course, except where requested. Prohibited uses include submitting all or any part of an assignment statement to an online learning support platform; incorporating any part of an AI generated response in an assignment; using AI to brainstorm, formulate arguments, or template ideas for assignments; using AI to summarize or contextualize source materials; submitting your own work for this class to an online learning support platform for iteration or improvement.

Unattributed use of online learning support platforms and unauthorized sharing of instructional property are forms of scholastic dishonesty and will be treated as such.

Student Conduct Code

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the

University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community. As a student at the University you are expected to adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities." Review the [University's Student Conduct Code](#).

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials

Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student interests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community. For additional information, please see the [policy on Student Responsibilities](#).

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult [Board of Regents Policy](#).

Sexual Harassment

"Sexual harassment" means unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature under either of the following conditions: (a) when it is stated or implied that an individual needs to submit to, or participate in, conduct of a sexual nature in order to maintain their employment or educational standing or advance in their employment or education (quid pro quo sexual harassment); (b) when the conduct: (1) is severe, persistent or pervasive; and (2) unreasonably interferes with an individual's employment or educational performance or creates a work or educational environment that the individual finds, and a reasonable person would find, to be intimidating, hostile or offensive (hostile environment sexual harassment). Sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, relationship violence and related retaliation are all prohibited conduct at the University of Minnesota. For additional information, please consult [Board of Regents Policy](#).

In my role as a University employee, I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office that addresses these concerns. This allows a Title IX staff member to reach out to those who have experienced sexual misconduct to provide information about the personal support resources and options for investigation that they can choose to access. You are welcome to talk with me about concerns related to sexual misconduct. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive to your requests for confidentiality and support as possible. You can also or alternately choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include The Aurora Center, Boynton Mental Health and Student Counseling Services.

Disability Accommodations

The University of Minnesota views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

- If you have, or you think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (612-626-1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
- Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations, please contact your access consultant/disability specialist.

Additional information is available on the [DRC website](#) or e-mail drc@umn.edu with questions.

Mental Health and Stress Management

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the [Student Mental Health Website](#).

Academic Freedom and Responsibility

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost.

Additional Code of Conduct for Time Abroad

We will also develop, with the help of the Learning Abroad Center, a specific code of conduct for our time in New Zealand. You are required to abide by the rules of this code of conduct as well as the ones listed here.

Additional Classroom Policies

For a full list of university classroom policies, please see: <https://cla.umn.edu/english/undergraduate/>

advising/classroom-policies

Schedule

We will try to stick as closely as possible to the schedule below, but in some cases, I may have to make small changes, substituting one reading for another or bringing in an additional guest speaker, for example.

Pre-class meeting TBA

Orientation and syllabus distribution

The class meets on the Twin Cities campus, starting after Spring Break, and then continues for two weeks in New Zealand.

KNJ=Keeping a Nature Journal

BASW=Best American Science Writing

AE=Extraordinary Anywhere

Week 1

March 15-19

T Introduction and Writing Fundamentals

Th Discuss Leslie, *Keeping a Nature Journal (KNJ)*, "Preface" and "Why Keep a Nature Journal?" Bring journals to class.

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

Week 2

March 22-26

Grounding in History

T Discuss Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle* excerpt (Canvas); Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* excerpt (Canvas); Leslie, "Setting up Your Journal," *KNJ*

Field Journal Entry #1 Due

Th Discuss Sommerville *Two Hundred Fifty Ways to Start an Argument about Captain Cook* excerpt (Canvas). Evan Roberts class visit.

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

Week 3

March 29-April 1

Writing the Land & Writing Scientific/Environmental Controversy

T Visit from Learning Abroad Center, for Orientation Session. Discuss Plumb, "A River Reawakened," *BASW*; Doyle, "Imagined Foxes" (Canvas); Leslie, "Introduction to Drawing," (*KNJ*)

Field Journal Entry #2 Due

Th Discuss Kolbert, "The Big Kill" (Canvas), and O'Connell, "Why Silicon Valley Billionaires are Prepping for the Apocalypse in New Zealand" (Canvas)

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

Week 4

April 5-9

Writing about Plants and Animals

T Discuss Johnson, "What Slime Knows," (*BASW*), Quammen, "Has Success Spoiled the Crow," (*Canvas*); Leslie, "The Ongoing Journal," (*KNJ*)

Field Journal Entry #3 Due

Th Discuss Hausti, "Thriving Together; Salmon, Berries, and People," *BASW*; Wynn-Grant, "Black Bears, Black Liberation," *BASW*

Short Paper #1 Due—Essay about a Place

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

Week 5

April 12-16

Interpreting Journal Articles

T Discuss Hudson, "Think globally, act locally: collective consent and the ethics of knowledge production," (*Canvas*)

Field Journal Entry #4 Due

Th Discuss journal articles selected by students.

Assignment #2 Due—Profile of a plant or animal

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

Week 6

April 19-23

Interviewing and Profiles

T Discuss Frey, "George Divoky's Planet," *Canvas*

Field Journal Entry #5 Due

Th Discuss Yong, "Dynasty," (*Canvas*); Brown, "How Do You Find an Alien Ocean?" (*Canvas*)

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

Week 7

April 26-30

Other Creative Forms

T Discuss Horrocks, "Dissolving Genre: Toward Finding New Ways to Write About the World" (*Canvas*)

Field Journal Entry #6 Due

Th Discuss Ihimaera, *Whale Rider* excerpt, (*Canvas*); Tuwhare, poems, (*Canvas*).

Short paper #3 Due--Profile of a scientist

[3 hours of in-class instruction]

New Zealand Trip (This is a tentative itinerary that is subject to change.)

May 13—Leave Minneapolis. Flights TBA

May 15—Arrive Wellington.

IFSA Orientation. Walking tour of the capital city. Welcome dinner. **Field journal entry.**

[2 [x.5] hours of informal instruction + 2 hours of formal instruction = 3 instructional hours]

May 16—Tour of Te Papa Tongarewa. Hike Mount Victoria. **Field journal entry.**
[2 [x .5] hours of informal instruction + 2 hours of formal instruction = 3 instructional hours]

May 17—Guest talk with science communicator from Te Papa Tongarewa; Waka tour at waterfront. **Field journal entry.**
[2 hours of formal instruction + 2 [.5 hours] of informal instruction = 3 instructional hours]

May 18—Lecture/session on Writing about Climate Change with Victoria University professor Rebecca Priestly. Students walk to wind turbines on their own. **Field journal entry.**
[2 hours of formal instruction + 2 [.5 hours] of informal instruction = 3 instructional hours]

May 19— Visit Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne ecosanctuary, an urban “island.” Discussion of the history and conservation of endangered species in New Zealand and “The Immense Trees of Ooahaouragee” by Geoff Park. **Field journal entry.**
[3 [x.5] hours of informal instruction + 1.5 hour formal instruction = 3 instructional hours]

May 20—Students explore on their own. **Field journal entry.**

May 21—Kapiti Island day trip.
[5 [x.5] hour informal instruction + 1 hour formal instruction = 3.5 instructional hours]

May 22—Fly to Dunedin. Flights TBA. Dunedin walking tour. Class presentations/discussion of audio/video essays. **Field journal entry. Audio/video essay due.**
[2 [.5] hours informal instruction + 2 formal instruction hours = 3 instructional hours]

May 23— Monarch Wildlife Cruise. UMN class time to develop final essays. **Field journal entry.**
[2 [x.5] informal instructional hours + 2 formal instructional hours = 3 instructional hours]

May 24—Otago Museum visit. UMN class time to develop final essays. **Field journal entry.**
[2 [x.5] informal instructional hours + 3 formal instructional hours = 4 instructional hours]

May 25--Trip to Otago Peninsula; Lanarch Castle/Pyramids hike/Blue Penguins lecture and viewing/visit to Royal Albatross Centre. **Field journal entry. Essay draft due.**
[8 [.5] informal instructional hours = 4 instructional hours]

May 26— Larnach Castle guided tour. Tunnel Beach hike. Peer workshopping of essay drafts. **Field journal entry.**
[4 [x.5] informal instructional hours + 2 formal instructional hours = 4 instructional hours]

May 27—Students explore on their own. Farewell dinner.

May 28—Leave for Minneapolis. Flights TBA.

May 28—Arrive in Minneapolis. (Note all the time gained back!)

May 31—**Final essay due.**