GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE ENHANCEMENT GRANT COMPETITION 2021–22

1. Proposer Name(s) and Academic Title(s)

Alexander Menrisky, Assistant Professor in English, affiliate faculty in American Studies

2. Email Address(es)

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3. Is this a new course or a currently existing course?

This is a new course.

4. List the course title and course number of the proposed/enhanced course and name of the sponsoring department or program.

ENGL 3XXXE(W)* Environmental Justice Writing. (*This course will be developed with both a W and non-W option.)

5. Describe your project and the work that will be done during the grant period on course content, course design, and/or teaching approach.

Project Description: ENGL 3XXXE(W) Environmental Justice Writing will provide students from across the university with opportunities to observe and critique a variety of rhetorical and literary strategies for representing the asymmetrical impacts of environmental changes (including qualityof-life issues such as water contamination and broader challenges such as global climate changes) on marginalized peoples, as well as advocating from within these communities and/or on their behalf. It has long been documented that the impacts of ecological change are distributed unevenly along lines of race, class, gender, and ethnicity due to existing social inequities—a pattern typically known as environmental injustice. Communities facing such challenges have in turn been at the forefront of movements for environmental justice, or "the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment." This course will focus chiefly on how twentieth and twenty-first century Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and women writers have wrestled with the asymmetrical burden environmental crisis places on their communities and, more specifically, how they have communicated that burden in nonfiction, fiction, poetry, images, film, and other genres, as well as advocated for solutions and alternatives. In doing so, this course will further UConn's general education aims by bringing together antiracist and decolonial pedagogy and environmental literacy, critically examining environment through the lens of race and other social forms, and, by the same token, examining social inequities through the lens of environmental change.

The proposed course will be offered in both non-W and W formats, both of which will require students to consider and respond to local forms of environmental (in)justice and connect them to course materials, fostering students' engaged citizenship within their broader social-environmental context in Connecticut. Overarchingly, the course will survey a variety of literary and nonliterary genres—including but not limited to novels, memoirs, journalism, poetry, film, and scientific and sociological analysis—applying methods from literary and writing studies to interdisciplinary material and facilitating students' ability to unravel and articulate the entangled legacies of racism, settler colonialism, heterosexism, and ecological harm. The course might be taught from a global

or national perspective, depending on instructor. In either case, the course will introduce students to local evidence of environmental injustice. The goal is to situate course content in students' own environment—to borrow a phrase from environmental justice activist Diana Allard, where they "live, work, and play." In non-W sections, students will reflect on connections between this evidence and our course texts during class discussion and in short reflective papers. In W sections, students will conduct research into a local or regional issue and complete a longer written project in which they contextualize and analyze the matter in light of course readings and concepts. The reading list in W sections will be minimally truncated to facilitate a robust drafting, peer and instructor review, and revision schedule toward the end of the semester, to make writing instruction itself central to the course. (See prospective assignment details below.)

The course is intended to serve nonmajors across the university looking for E and/or W courses as well as majors. Because conversations about environmental (in)justice increasingly circulate in fields as diverse as engineering, healthcare, political science, and others beyond environmental and literary studies, this course will appeal to a wide variety of students who aim to address both environmental change and social inequality across their careers, as well as offer practical writing instruction and W credit at the same time. As such, the course will participate in interdisciplinary conversations fostered by CLAS and other units on campus that aim to promote environmental, antiracist, and decolonial literacies—and will ideally serve as a bridge among them. (It will also fill gaps within English offerings—see below.) The course could be offered at any UConn campus.

Work During Grant Period: As this is an entirely new course, the chief work to be completed during the grant period will involve reviewing potential interdisciplinary course texts that appeal to students across the university while also challenging them to consider the intersections among ecological damage and social inequalities, gathering evidence of local environmental (in)justices, researching similar course offerings at peer institutions, reaching out to potential collaborators—namely, environmental justice activists in the region who might be willing to share materials or even visit the class to speak about local challenges—and ultimately crafting the syllabus, designing modules, and developing assignments that can serve the academic and career goals of a variety of students from across the university. Relatedly, I will also use the time to explore strategies for student-directed learning, so that students in W sections will develop research and writing projects that are relevant to their academic/career interests. Course development and syllabus/assignment construction will take place in May, June, and July of 2022. The CAR will be submitted and ready for C&C review in early Fall 2022.

In addition to the work necessary for designing the individual course, I also plan to use the grant period to engage in activities that will benefit the larger university community. Specifically, I would like to use the resources provided by this grant to plan and host a dialogue among local (i.e., the Hartford metro and surrounding areas) environmental justice activists and faculty, staff, and students interested in regional environmental justice initiatives. This conversation—in the form of a symposium or workshop—would not only be available to the wider university community (and perhaps, ideally, the broader public community beyond it) but might also build off the momentum of interdisciplinary units on campus (such as Environmental Studies, the Humanities Institute, and El Instituto) to establish a working group made up of university affiliates interested in engaging environmental justice work in nearby communities in ongoing ways. As such, communicating with these units will be part of the work I do during the grant period as well, not only to attract participants to a single event, but also to foster this sort of interdisciplinary community for the long term, and even to explore potential collaborative service-learning opportunities.

6. How do you intend to evaluate project objectives once the course, as proposed, is offered? Please identify intended learning outcomes and assessment tools.

Learning Outcomes: Student learning objectives will be driven by the Environmental Literacy and, in the case of the W option, Writing Competency pillars of the course. Students will:

- Read, interpret, and synthesize arguments, reports, artworks, and other narratives by people of color who have disproportionately experienced the effects of environmental change
- <u>Debate</u> the roles played by language, art, and structural inequality in environmental history and politics
- <u>Analyze</u> rhetorical and artistic strategies for communicating interrelationships among environment, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other social forms
- <u>Compare</u> environmental justice writing across historical, cultural, and disciplinary contexts (including the context of Southern New England)
- <u>Identify</u> important names, concepts, and rhetorical strategies within intellectual and activist debates and artistic traditions related to environmental (in)justice
- (*W option*) Explain, analyze, and contextualize a local or regional matter of environmental (in)justice through research-based writing and argumentation
- (*W option*) Practice and reflect on writing as a process and means to understanding through drafting, peer review, conferencing, revision, and metacognition

Assessments: In both W and non-W sections, students will be assessed for comprehension, critical engagement, and retention of course material through a combination of reading annotation (using the annotation software Perusall), and discussion-based activities (e.g., small-group deliberation, debates, open-form conversations, etc.). Students will also demonstrate their knowledge in a combination of analytical and short reflective papers focused on course texts. Depending on the material at a given point in the semester, in these assignments students might synthesize readings, explore specific passages in depth, respond to local instances of environmental injustice that resonate with our course texts, present low-stakes research on a relevant topic, and/or draw larger conclusions about environmental (in)justice in an American context and the representational strategies by which a variety of writers have approached it. The analytical paper(s) will assess students' capacity to compare, contrast, analyze, and synthesize peer-reviewed research with their own interpretations of course material. The reflective paper(s), alongside in-class discussion, will provide students an opportunity to draw attention to relevant events and movements outside the space of the classroom, which might then be connected to the main themes of the course.

In *W sections*, students will complete a series of scaffolded writing assignments building to a final community focused writing project. Students will still complete low-stakes writing assignments as in non-W sections, but prompts for these will be far more focused toward exploring and developing ideas related to a single local/regional matter of environmental (in)justice of the student's choice, discovered through class reading and/or discussion, dialogue with peers, and/or personal research. It is this project that much of the grant period will be spent developing. My goal is to design an assignment arc that clearly connects course material to local resonances in Connecticut or Southern New England more broadly, but also remains flexible enough that multiple instructors could adapt it to their own teaching styles and student needs, including service-learning pedagogy if desirable. Regardless, the course will incorporate peer review activities related to student writing goals.

Evaluation: Assessment of the course's success will be performed the semester following the first in which the course is offered (presumably Fall 2023). Beyond evaluating and reflecting on data

such as enrollment numbers, formal course evaluation, and informal student testimonials and/or surveys, student writing will be measured against the learning outcomes above in the form of data derived from assignment rubrics.

7. Describe how the course will fit into UConn's General Education curriculum. How will the course serve the broad goals of UConn's General Education program?

This course will be accessible to students from a wide range of majors, including students at regional campuses. Not only does it speak to UConn's priorities in terms of addressing matters of environmental sustainability and antiracism, but it also seeks to foster conversation among these areas of urgent social concern by cultivating competencies in open dialogue, rigorous textual and social analysis, rhetoric and argument, interdisciplinarity, critical yet flexible thinking, sustained writing, and engaged citizenship through active engagement with matters of environmental justice throughout Connecticut and New England.

8. Describe how the course meets the specific criteria for the given priority areas of this year's competition (EL, JEDI).

As a course that centers environmental (in)justice and writing related to it, *ENGL 3XXXE(W)* will address EL and JEDI criteria in tandem. On the one hand, this deep consideration of how threats to environmental health have disproportionately impacted marginalized peoples meets EL criteria by foregrounding interactions between human society and the natural world, as well as the ethical dimensions of solutions to environmental challenges that place certain populations at greater risk, through a sustained exploration of literary, legal, theoretical, and other texts, examples, and frames. On the other hand, it meets JEDI criteria by centering the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized writers and communities who have witnessed environmental injustice firsthand in the form of existing social inequities and the legacies of settler colonialism, and also promoting antiracist and decolonial perspectives through research and writing that actively considers and engages with real-world, regional matters of environmental (in)justice.

9. Describe how the course will fit into the general education plan for any departments involved in its development.

The Department of English is committed to designing and offering new courses in both of the two priority areas for this year's grant competition—environmental literacy and antiracist pedagogy—for students across the university as well as students within the major, as part of a larger effort to establish bridges between the humanities and the natural and social sciences and, more broadly, to foster critical thinking and writing skill sets among students across disciplines. Three new hires in the department (including myself) reflect these priorities. This course not only contributes to this general education plan, but also seeks to bring these two priority areas into conversation.

10. For which content areas (CA1-4), competencies (W, Q), or literacies (Environmental – E) will the course be proposed and how will it address the specific criteria for courses in these content areas and/or competencies?

CA1: This course approaches matters of environmental (in)justice through the lens of the arts and humanities, focusing specifically on literary and nonliterary writing and other works produced by marginalized writers. As such, it not only emphasizes cultural production, but also requires

students to reflect on sociocultural tendencies and traditions, their causes and effects, and their ethical implications. It also requires students to situate this material in the context of Connecticut, prompting them to reflect on their own relationships to these phenomena as informed citizens.

E: This course will offer an introduction to environmental (in)justice and literary and nonliterary representations of it, thereby exploring human interactions with environment in terms of social inequalities. Material will prompt reflection on social systems, public policy, and ethical dilemmas within the environmental movement and American social politics writ large. We will also therefore consider the social and rhetorical dimensions of environment itself: how it is defined, how power acts both on it and on marginalized peoples in intertwined ways, how beliefs about it take shape and change through language, and how arguments about it are made.

W: In W sections of the course, ENGL 3XXXE(W) will center writing as a process of composing, responding, and revising. This focus will include drafting, peer and instructor review, and formal finalization of 15+ pages of writing about environmental (in)justice, cultural production related to it, and Connecticut's own history of it. Writing assignments will likely include rhetorical analyses, literature reviews, research papers, and potentially public-facing applications (assessments are largely to be determined during the grant period). Short, informal writing assignments will also be included. The writing elements will be integrated with the environmental literacy elements.

11. How will the course add to and/or enhance existing course offerings? Does the course fill other important curricular gaps? How does it compare to current offerings or pedagogy? What will be distinctive about the course?

This course will be designed to fill gaps among the English department's own E offerings, as well as within the university catalog at large. English currently offers ENGL 2635E Literature and the Environment, a broad survey of literary environmentalism that might or might not address matters of environmental (in)justice, depending on the instructor, but whose primary focus is not antiracist or decolonial perspectives on environment. Nor does the course center writing as practice. Several faculty in the department recently proposed ENGL 2055EW Writing, Rhetoric, and Environment to address this second gap by combining environmental literacy with rhetorical analysis, but, much like the case of ENGL 2635E, antiracist and decolonial perspectives are not its focus, either. ENGL 2055EW broadly focuses on the rhetorical elements of environmentalist texts, rather than the historical processes that have shaped them—including histories of social inequity.

ENGL 3XXXE(W) will not only contribute to the department and university's E courses but will also do so by offering instruction in community-oriented writing from an antiracist perspective. It is for this reason that the course will stand alone as an attractive offering accessible to students across disciplines: it will fill a gap in combined W/E courses on campus that center training in writing and rhetoric, rather than merely add a writing component to a topical E course. While topical courses in environmental justice have been offered elsewhere across the university, there is currently no course number dedicated to environmental justice broadly conceived. (The Department of Political Science offers POLS 3240 on "Climate Justice," more specifically.) Furthermore, previous topics courses have surveyed environmental justice from sociological, political, and anthropological perspectives, but none has focused specifically on rhetoric, writing, and other artworks by environmental justice artists, intellectuals, and activists across genres—both as a topic of study (how environmental injustice is communicated by existing writers) and as a practice (how students can themselves write about and with environmental justice movements).

In addition to contributing to the university's general education goals and the department's efforts to support these goals, the course will also contribute to English major requirements by filling this gap. The department recently redesigned its major so that students specialize in specific "tracks," one of which is "Literature of Place and Environment." Currently, the department offers far fewer courses in fulfillment of this track than all but one of the others. *ENGL 3XXXE(W)*'s antiracist and decolonial approach to environmental studies will not only enrich this track but also might contribute to others, such as "Literature, Antiracism, and Social Justice."

12. Why are you the most qualified person/team to teach this course? If this is not your primary field of study, what resources will you use to help you develop this course?

I am a new hire in the Department of English at the Assistant Professor rank. My research and teaching experience to date lie within the parameters of both writing studies and the environmental humanities broadly, and I have published extensively on the intersections among environmental rhetoric and social forms such as race, class, and gender. My position within the department was designed for a new faculty member who would update existing offerings and design new ones that specifically build bridges among environmental themes, antiracist and decolonial pedagogies, and writing instruction. As a seasoned scholar of environment and teacher of writing across curricula, I am well prepared to develop and teach this course with both majors and nonmajors in mind.

13. Will your course serve as a model to assist others in their efforts to improve the general education curriculum? If so, how?

This course will not only serve as a model for humanities courses that seek to engage with the sciences and social justice alike, but also all W courses that seek to *center* writing on their syllabus, rather than merely include a writing component. Furthermore, it will offer a template for other instructors seeking to situate their course content in the context of Connecticut and Southern New England more broadly, in order to foster engaged citizenship among our students.

- 14. Is your proposal linked to any others being submitted in this competition? No.
- 15. Has this course ever been submitted for this grant in the past? No.
- **16.** Has this course been funded by this grant in the past? No.
- 17. Has this course or will this course be funded by any other non-departmental source? No.

18. Additional documents.

Please see completed Budget Form attached. As this course is new, a syllabus is not yet complete. However, a tentative outline of assignments can be read above, and I have attached a preliminary schedule of course units and potential readings for each. Much of the grant period will be spent reviewing these readings and finalizing a schedule.

Lastly, Clare King'oo will send a statement of support to GEOC@uconn.edu shortly.

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE ENHANCEMENT GRANT COMPETITION 2021–22

Proposer Name (s): Alexander Menrisky

Course Proposal Title: ENGL 3XXXE(W) Environmental Justice Writing

Email Address of Department Fiscal Manager: melanie.hepburn@uconn.edu

Fiscal Year 2022	Amount Requested	Fringe for Summer Salary	Total
Faculty Salary (calculate a fringe rate of 25.8%)	\$4000	\$1032	\$5032
Supplies	\$500 (books)	n/a	\$500
Other	\$1000 (possible funding for local activist symposium and honoraria for speakers)	n/a	\$1000
Total	•		\$6532

Justification:

The resources provided by this grant will chiefly support reading and research for the purposes of developing an interdisciplinary reading list across the literature of environmental justice that will enable students across the university to explore different social and disciplinary perspectives on the asymmetrical human impacts of ecological change as well as the rhetorical strategies deployed across these traditions. During this period, I will also craft a more polished syllabus, design course modules, and develop assignments for both non-W and W sections (please see the proposal itself for details related to what I envision these assignments will ultimately be). Regarding the book budget: I will ask publishers for free desk copies first, use the budgeted \$500 only if necessary, and return any remainder.

In addition to my own course research and development, I intend to use funds provided by this grant to plan and host an event featuring local and/or regional environmental justice activists (chiefly but not exclusively from the Hartford, New Haven, and New London metro areas), during which speakers and other participants will share their experiences, link them to broader movements for and writing about environmental justice in the United States and abroad, and identify areas of success and for improvement. The event might proceed as a panel symposium, roundtable, or workshop, depending on conversations with interested participants. I intend for it to serve multiple, interrelated needs: to enrich the development of the course, to explore potential service-learning opportunities, and to establish a broader, campus-wide conversation about environmental justice writing and activism in Southern New England. I have budgeted for modest honoraria for speakers (given that travel should not be an issue) as well as for incidentals related to the event. I envision organizing and advertising the event in July and August of 2022 and hosting it during the fall 2022 semester.

Preliminary reading and initial contact with potential speakers will take place in May. Course development (including schedule and assignments) will span June, July, and early August.

Preliminary Reading List by Unit

Note: The readings listed on this tentative course schedule largely represent options. A substantial portion of the grant period will be devoted to surveying these texts, selecting excerpts and required texts, and finalizing a schedule. Overarchingly, though, the possibilities presented below represent the sort of interdisciplinary conversation and appeal I hope to foster in this course. As I research, read, and consult with colleagues at UConn and other institutions, the entries on this schedule will change. Regardless, engagement with all course texts will be partially evaluated through required annotation either in the form of discussion posts or use of Perusall. Potential readings are organized on the schedule below by unit. Full (literary and film) texts are listed first, then short works such as essays and scholarly articles, and finally texts that will likely be excerpted, if chosen at all (texts of this final sort are marked below with an asterisk).

This tentative schedule also represents a *non-W section* of the course. As of now, I expect non-W sections to feature a series of short (~3-page) analytical and reflective papers associated with units 3-6, culminating in a final, longer paper that will synthesize course reading with outside research conducted by students. As I mentioned in the proposal, in **W sections** the reading schedule will be slightly truncated to make space for a robust drafting, peer review, and revision schedule building up to the final paper. Overarchingly, though, the course will proceed as follows: (1) introductions to the concept of environmental injustice and the activist and literary writing that has represented and contested it; (2) surveys of the origins of environmental injustice in the United States—and the movements for justice that have formed in response—in settler colonialism and the legacies of chattel slavery; (3) two "case studies" that examine two very prominent contemporary patterns of environmental injustice and the writing traditions that have arisen in response to them—namely, Latinx writers who have documented the health disparities experienced by migrant farmworkers due to the combination of pesticide use and limited worker protections, and Appalachian writers who have taken on the human impacts of mountaintop removal, fracking, and other techniques for fossil fuel extraction—and (4) summative, forward-thinking analysis of rhetorical strategies for grassroots environmental justice work—and, in W sections, interpretation of local initiatives in light of course material, and potentially even active involvement in them, if future instructors opt to integrate a service-learning assignment arc.

Unit 1: Introductions (WEEKS 1-2)

- Julie Sze, Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger
- "Principles of Environmental Justice"
- Giovanna Di Chiro, "Environmental Justice"
- Julie Sze, "The Literature of Environmental Justice"
- Christopher W. Wells, Environmental Justice in Postwar America*
- Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, & Rachel Stein, eds., The Environmental Justice Reader*
- Luke Cole & Sheila Foster, The Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*
- Ronald Sandler & Phaedra Pezzullo, eds., Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*

Unit 2: Representing Environmental (In)Justice (Week 3)

- Julie Sze, "The Literature of Environmental Justice"
- Terry Tempest Williams, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women"
- Rob Nixon, Slow Violence*
- Jeffrey Myers, Converging Stories: Race, Ecology and Environmental Justice in American Literature*

Unit 3: "Origins" 1: Settler Colonialism & Indigenous Sovereignty (Weeks 4-5)

- Linda Hogan, Solar Storms
- Amanda Strong, Biidabaan
- Kyle Powys Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice"
- Kyle Powys Whyte, "Is It Colonial Déjà Vu?"
- Nick Estes, Our History Is the Future*
- Leanne Betosamosake Simpson, As We Have Always Done*
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass*
- Simon Ortiz, Woven Stone*
- Dina Gilio-Whitaker, As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice*
- Winona LaDuke, All Our Relations*

UNIT 4: "ORIGINS" 2: ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY (WEEKS 6-8)

- Jesmyn Ward, Salvage the Bones
- Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower
- Spike Lee, When the Levees Broke
- José Casas, "Flint" (documentary)
- Beasts of the Southern Wild
- Robert Bullard, "The Threat of Environmental Racism"
- Robert Bullard, "Confronting Environmental Racism in the Twenty-First Century"
- Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism"
- Cedric Johnson, "The Neoliberal Deluge"
- Christopher W. Wells, Environmental Justice in Postwar America*
- Luke Cole & Sheila Foster, The Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*
- Dorceta Taylor, Toxic Communities*
- Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie**
- Robert Bullard, ed., The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution*
- Robert Bullard, ed., Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*

UNIT 5: CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDY 1: FOOD JUSTICE & LATINX ENVIRONMENTALISMS (WEEKS 9-10)

- Helen María Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus
- Cherrie Moraga, The Hungry Woman
- "Dolores" (documentary)
- Priscilla Solis Ybarra, "Active Subjectivity in Migrant Farmworker Fiction"
- Alison Alkon & Julian Agyeman, Cultivating Food Justice*
- Priscilla Wald et al., eds., Latinx Environmentalisms*

UNIT 6: CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDY 2: EXTRACTION & ENERGY ENVIRONMENTALISMS (WEEKS 11-12)

- Ann Pancake, Strange as This Weather Has Been
- Karen Tei Yamashita, Tropic of Orange or Through the Arc of the Rainbow
- Josh Fox, "Gasland" (documentary)
- Shannon Bell & Yvonne Braun, "Coal, Identity, and Gendering Environmental Justice Activism"
- Greta Gaard, "Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach"
- Rebecca Scott, Removing Mountains*
- Jeffrey Lockwood, Behind the Carbon Curtain*

UNIT 7: WRITING AS ACTIVISM: MUTUAL AID & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (WEEKS 13-14)

- Just Transition: https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/
- Indigenous Environmental Network: https://www.ienearth.org/
- Ross Gay, "Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude"
- Julian Agyeman, Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice*
- Stephen Bass, Hannah Reid, David Satterthwaite, & Paul Steele, eds., Reducing Poverty and Sustaining the Environment: The Politics of Local Engagement*
- William M. Bowen, Environmental Justice Through Research-Based Decision-Making*
- C. A. Bowers, Educating for Eco-Justice and Community*
- Peter Brand, Urban Environmentalism, Global Change and the Mediation of Local Conflict*
- Robert Bullard, ed., *Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice, and Regional Equity**
- Jason Corburn, Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice*
- Andrew Dobson, ed., Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice*

UNIT 8: CONCLUSIONS (WEEK 15)

• Final discussions and instructor/peer review for written assignments.