

First Year Tutorial  
Fall 2004  
TTh 8:10-9:50  
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*The Tutorial, taken in the fall semester of a student's first year, 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.

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, hybrid corn, the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, and other innovations created an astonishingly productive industrial agriculture. The agricultural "boom" of the 1970s created expectations for continued growth, but it also led to low commodity prices and inflated land values, which in turn caused the "farm crisis" of the 1980s. Heavily leveraged farmers went bankrupt in large numbers and often left farming, which in turn threatened the small businesses, banks, and schools in their communities. Industrial agriculture also caused a number of environmental problems, among them high rates of soil erosion, soil and water pollution, waste disposal from animal confinement operations, and problems associated with genetically engineered crops. The results of these developments, in the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have been larger and fewer farms, concentrated corporate ownership of the means of agricultural production, suburban sprawl, and the Wal-Martization of rural America.

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, 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.

*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. I will inform you of additional opportunities..*

*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

Osha Gray Davidson, *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto* (1996, University of Iowa Press).

William K. Stevens, *Miracle Under the Oaks: The Revival of Nature in America* (1995, Pocket Books).

Neva Hassanian, *Changing the Way America Farms* (1999, University of Nebraska 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

8:31: short essay due

9/2 or 9/7: oral reports

9/9: academic honesty exercise due

9/14: first paper due

9/30: rewrite of first paper due

10/26: second paper due

11/18: topic of final paper

11/23 or 11/30: oral reports

12/2: first draft of final paper

12/10: final draft of paper due

throughout semester: volunteering

## Syllabus

date assignment

### **SECTION A: INTRODUCTION**

8/26 ***What Was Here***

Daryl Smith and Paul Christiansen, "Prairies," in Tom C. Cooper (ed.), *Iowa's, Natural Heritage* (Iowa Academy of Science, 1982)(handout)

Lance M. Foster, "*Tanji Na Che*," in Robert Sayre (ed.), *Recovering the Prairie* (University of Iowa Press, 1999).

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

**8/28 (Saturday): Farm tours, an annual event sponsored by the Center for Prairie Studies, attendance urged unless you are on an athletic team or must be away from campus.**

8/31 ***How It Changed***

**Due: 200 word essay on a sensory impression you had visiting Krumm Preserve.**

Herbert Quick, "The Plow Weds The Sod," Chapter XIII of *Vandemark's Folly* (1922, reprinted 1987, University of Iowa Press).

Johanna Harris Haines, "Recollections of Seventy Years in Iowa," Manuscript (1928), Grinnell College Archives, Burling Library.

College Archives Orientation (Catherine Rod)

9/2 ***How It Changed, cont'd***

Hamlin Garland, "Wheat and the Harvest," from *A Son of the Middle Border* (pub. 1917).

**Student reports on the historical development of Grinnell and Poweshiek County**

9/7 ***How It Changed, cont'd***

Dorothy Schwieder, "Town Life in the Middle Land," from *Iowa: The Middle Land* (1996, Iowa State University Press).

**Student reports, cont'd**

### **SECTION B: DECLINE**

9/9 Osha Gray Davidson, *Broken Heartland*, Preface, Chapters 1 and 2

**Due: academic honesty exercises**

**9/11 (Saturday): Farm Tour: an annual even sponsored by the Center for Prairie Studies event, attendance urged unless you are on an athletic team or must be away**

9/14 **Paper due: early development of Grinnell and Poweshiek County**

Davidson, Chapters 3 and 4

9/16 Davidson, Chapters 5, 6 and begin 7

9/20 (Monday) small group meetings to critique papers

9/21 Davidson, Chapters 7 (finish), 8, and Coda (1996)  
Small group meetings to critique papers

9/22 (Wednesday) small group meetings to critique papers

## **SECTION C: RENEWAL**

9/23 Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in *A Sand County Almanac and Other Essays* (1949, reprinted 1989, Oxford University Press).

9/28 **Meet in conjunction with Mr. Levandoski's tutorial to discuss the implications of Leopold's "land and community ethic" using Grinnell as an example (see handout).**

### ***1. Prairie / Habitat Restoration***

9/30 **Paper rewrites due**  
William K. Stevens, *Miracle Under the Oaks*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

10/5 Stevens, Chapters 3, 4, and 5  
Field trip to CERA (Larissa Mottl)

10/7 Stevens, Chapters 6, 7, and 8

10/12 Stevens, Chapters 9, 10, and 11

10/14 Stevens, Chapters 12, 13, and 14

## **10/16- FALL RECESS**

**10/24**

10/26 **Paper due: critical review of *Miracle Under the Oaks***

### ***2. Civic Agriculture***

10/28 Andrew Kimbrell, "Seven Deadly Myths of Industrial Agriculture," in Andrew Kimbrell  
*The Fatal Harvest Reader* (2002, Island Press).  
Neva Hassanein, *Changing the Way America Farms*, Chapter 1

11/2 Hassanein, Chapters 2 and 3

11/4 Hassanein, Chapter 4

11/9 Hassanein, Chapter 5

Field trip to B&B Farms (Barney Bahrenfuse)

11/11 Hassanein, Chapter 6

### ***3. Community Revitalization***

11/16 Vitek and Jackson, Preface and selected chapters from Part I

11/18 **Due: written prospectus of final paper**  
**Meeting with Bill Menner, director of Grinnell Renaissance, and Mr. Levandoski's tutorial to tour site of renovated Strand Theater and learn its history**

11/23 Vitek and Jackson, selected chapters from Part II  
**Student reports on volunteer experiences and their role in renewal**

11/25 **THANKSGIVING RECESS**

11/30 Vitek and Jackson, selected chapters from Part III  
**Student reports on volunteer experiences and their role in renewal**

12/2 **Due: first draft of final paper.**

12/7 Working on final paper; individual meetings with Mr. Andelson

12/9 Working on final paper; individual meetings with Mr. Andelson

12/10 **Due: final draft of final paper due**

## *Paper Assignments*

- 8/31: Write a 200 word essay describing one or more of your sensory impressions during our visit to the Krumm Preserve. You have five senses, and you can report on any of them. Make this short “note” engaging to read and coherent.
- 9/14: Write a 1000-1250 word (roughly 4-5 pages) paper about the development of Euro-American society in Grinnell and Poweshiek County between *circa* 1850 and 1930. Your task is to synthesize the information and interpretations you have gleaned from a wide variety of sources: a novel (Quick), informal oral history (Haines), a literary reminiscence (Garland), a film (Smith), historical scholarship (Schwieder), and various primary sources (student reports). Develop a thesis, support it with evidence and reasoning, and cite the sources of ideas and words of others. Your treatment of this topic should include an assessment of whether the sources present a complementary or a conflicting picture of this place and period. Papers should present a thesis, be clearly organized and well written, and should accurately cite all sources.
- 9/30: Rewrite of history paper, responding to all of the questions, comments, and corrections suggested by the instructor and the other students who read your essay.
- 10/26: Write a critical, which is to say an *evaluative*, review of William K. Steven’s book, *Miracle Under the Oaks*. Assume that the “anonymous reader” of your review has not read the book but is familiar with basic principles of ecology. First, you should identify Stevens’s main claims. A critical review then entails a consideration of at least two things: (1) the author’s evidence, and (2) the logic of the author’s argument. The evidence is probably the easier of the two to assess. Does the author introduce sufficient evidence in support of his or her argument? Insofar as you can determine, does the evidence seem accurate? Are there any obvious biases in the way the author uses evidence? With regard to logic, there are a number of questions that broadly entail whether the author’s conclusions and final claims follow from his or her premises and evidence. *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools*, which will be provided to you, will help you think about this.
- 11/18: Prospectus of final paper due, explaining the main questions you wish to address, your initial thoughts on your thesis, and an indication of what sources you will use.
- 12/2: First draft of final paper due. The details of this assignment will be given in early November. In general, it will involve your assessment about the claims of decline and the prospects for renewal or improvement – of the landscape, agricultural system, and communities – in the rural Midwest.
- 12/10: Final draft of final paper due.