EVST 430.01: Culture and Agriculture

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UG EVST 430 Culture and Agriculture, Spring 2006
2 credits T –Th 3:40 – 5:00
Class runs 1/23 – 4/3

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Culture and Agriculture surveys the treatment of farmers and farming in the Humanities. The course is divided into three parts: specific crops and their effect on history, artistic commentary on agricultural life, and farmer philosophy.

There will be two classes a week, Tuesday and Thursday. I will lecture on Tuesdays. Following the lectures we will have questions and some discussion, on Thursdays we will have a guided discussion based on the readings for the week. A small group (2 –4 students) will lead the discussion. Here’s how that process will work: 1) each person in the small group will individually write three questions to inspire discussion, 2) the small group will meet, before the class on Thursday, and talk through the readings as per their questions. The group will combine redundant questions and create new questions based on themes the group identifies, 3) the group will guide Thursday’s discussion accordingly. Students not in this group will select a meaningful, compelling quote from the reading, write it, and a description of why they selected it, and hand this in for each Thursday class.

Undergraduates will write two 5 page papers. They will choose two of the three parts of the class to address in papers, due dates are in the class schedule. That means you can write a paper on a specific crop history and its historical ramifications, or you can analyze an artistic treatment of farmers and farming – this could be fine art, music, poetry, literature or film, or you can take on a specific piece of farmer philosophy. Whichever of the three topics you choose, you should not write about something we have already discussed in class. I am happy to offer suggestions on any of these topics. Graduate students will write a paper for each part of the class.

Grading
Grading is on a point system, and is a combination of papers, weekly quote paragraphs and class participation. Here’s how it breaks down: undergraduates, 30 points per paper x 2 papers = 60 points total; weekly quote paragraphs (2 points x 9 paragraphs = 18 points) and class participation (22 points). Graduate students will write 3 papers, worth 20 points per paper (60 points), the other requirements are the same as for undergrads. Class participation means your involvement in leading class discussions, your contribution to those discussions, and your comments after the lectures. If you are a very shy person come see me and we will make other arrangements. In order to do well in class participation you absolutely must pay attention to the lectures, do the readings and demonstrate, through your verbal commentary, that you have thought about what you
have read and heard. Good comments will make connections between what you have read and what we have discussed in lecture.

Readings
You need to purchase two books, *Staying Home; Reflections on Food, Farming, and Place*, edited by Kristi Johnson, and *Badlands Child*, by Phillip Burgess. Both books are $15.00. I will bring them to class on Thursday the 25th of January. All of the other readings are on reserve, in hard copy and on electronic reserve (the password is “culture”). Copy a complete set of the reserve readings and put them in a binder. Bring the binder to class so you can reference the readings in discussion.

Class Schedule
1/23: Introduction, and A History of American Agriculture

1/25 : Readings: *Annihilation*, from *Grassland*, by Richard Manning, and selections from *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond

Part 1: Specific Crops and their Effect on History
1/30: Tea, Opium and the Opening and destruction of China

2/1: Readings: *Marijuana; the Desire to Control*, from *The Botany of Desire*, by Michael Pollan, and selections from *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Dan Baum

2/6: The Taming of Johnny Appleseed and the Apple

2/8: Reading: *Sugar and the Triangular Slave Trade*, from *Seeds of Change, Five Plants that Changed History*, by Henry Hobhouse

Part 2: Artistic Commentary on Agricultural Life
2/13: Agrarian Poetry, **PART 1 PAPER DUE**

2/15 Poetry of Wendell Berry (no group questions, all class workshop)
Reading: from All God’s Dangers, The Life of Nate Shaw, compiled by Theodore Rosengarten

2/20 Raphael Chacon, visual artistic impressions of agrarian life

2/22 Readings: from *Badlands Child*, by Philip Burgess. pp. 7, 15, 93, 106, 113, 115
Philip Burgess will come to class to read new material. (no group questions).

2/27 The Photography of Walker Evans from, *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*


Part 3: Farmer Philosophy
3/6 Why are We in this Mess **PART 2 PAPER DUE**

3/8 Readings: Selections from, *The Unsettling of America*, by Wendell Berry

3/13 Columbus and the Weeds He Carried


3/22 The Social Demands of Agricultural Communities