

Syllabus, COMM 398, May 26-June 6*

Words are Roads: Communicating about Roads, Development and Nature

An Interdisciplinary Studies (IS) Course** and Environmental Responsibility (ER)** course

Special Fee: \$850

Instructor/Trip Leader: Dr. Steve Hill, Div. of Communication (shill@uwsp.edu), CAC 323, 346-3887

* *Trip dates. Coursework due by June 13; preliminary course meeting scheduled April 29, 7 p.m.*

** *Approved by UWSP general education program, but still requires formal approval by faculty senate (expected May 6, 2015). Course is currently numbered COMM 395 (a topics course) but will also be renumbered as 398 after May 6.*

If

you're staring out the window during this class, it will be as you travel down (arguably) the first coast-to-coast American highway, thinking about, talking about, writing about and engaging in the American dream with your classmates. You'll camp, visit small towns and cities along the route and see their roadside attractions, and share meals and fellowship with like-minded students and new friends we meet along the way. You'll help determine the future of an organization that promotes the very road you're on. And you'll visit one of our most spectacular national icons: Yellowstone National Park.

The purpose of the course is to consider how **words take us from one place to the next**: from vagueness to purpose, from ideas to reality, from nowhere to somewhere – just like roads, which take us from raw nature to development, from workaday life to recreation, and from the world we leave behind to the new one ahead. The road is a metaphor for much of American life, whether celebrated in books, songs, movies or just snippets of communication. Like the smaller and seemingly disconnected roads that came together to form the Yellowstone Trail, words can coalesce to form something grand ... or something destructive. We'll examine those themes as we move on down the trail during its Wisconsin Centennial year.

As part of a small group recreating a trip along much of the original trail, you'll learn how the idea of the trail was promoted and became reality starting with the words of a number of Midwestern dreamers. You'll blog about your trip, perhaps posting pictures and videos, while sharing with the home folks how much fun it can be to study themes of development and nature, economic growth and stagnation, and consumption and enjoyment, among others. You'll read selected works from classic environmental writers like Edward Abbey, Aldo Leopold and John Muir, listen to and discuss music related to our class themes, and share some of your own favorite words that have accompanied you on your own path. Perhaps most importantly, you'll have a chance to make a difference for the Yellowstone Trail Association, which has had 102 vibrant years but, like all groups, has its own challenges for the future. All of this will be part of an effort to answer our central course question: how do we reconcile our desire to enjoy and protect nature with our need for economic development?

Our **projected course learning outcomes** are that students will be able to:

- Conduct thorough research on issues of public significance, using interviews, historic documents, reports, Internet sources, and other appropriate resources and skills
- Demonstrate capability in other core writing skills, such as following appropriate style, organizing and structuring information, listening and observing, and conducting interviews
- Critically analyze news stories, promotional literature, and other historic accounts, as well as contemporary reports and documents, about the importance of and issues related to economic development and tourism in the Midwest and the rest of the United States

- Articulate their understanding of ways various messages about development and environmental protection do or do not reflect principles of ethical communication, practice of citizenship, and appreciation of diverse and global perspectives
- Produce appropriate and ethical journalistic, creative or critical writing and multimedia content on environmental and economic issues of local, regional or national significance through blogs, journal entries and a group report on the future of the Yellowstone Trail Association, the Greenville Agricultural Enterprise Area, or a similar group or issue.

Required Readings and Audio

All readings and other communication artifacts will be available either in hard copy through a course packet or packets, as well as online or electronically through various formats. Among the words we've selected so far are these:

- “Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks.” From Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire*.
- “The Yellowstone National Park.” Ch. 2 of John Muir’s *Our National Parks*.
- “The Land Ethic.” From Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*.
- “The View from the Window.” From Ch. 4 of Greg Summers’ *Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850-1950*.
- *Introducing the Yellowstone Trail : A Good Road From Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound, 1912-1930*. John and Alice Ridge (Yellowstone Trail Publications).
- Portions of *On the Road to Yellowstone: The Yellowstone Trail and American Highways 1900-1930*. Harold A. Meeks (Pictorial Histories Publishing Co.).
- “This Land is Your Land” (sung by Woody Guthrie) and “This Land is Our Land,” sung by Todd Snider, among a number of other musical works.

A list of other words for our consideration is forthcoming.

My teaching philosophy is based on the concepts of community, excellent language skills and relevance. A short explanation of this philosophy is posted on D2L. I hope you’ll read it and understand how respecting this philosophy will contribute to a positive learning experience for our class.

Class Assignments	Points	
1. Journal entries	200	(1,500-2,000 words during course of trip)
2. Blog entries, social media and other promotion	200	(500 words)
3. Summaries of interviews and other research	200	(Approximately 1,000 words)
4. Two oral reports on words important to you	200	(3-5 minutes twice during trip)
4. Contributions to final team report	200	(1,000 words; small teams)
TOTAL	1,000	

(continued)

Grading Policy

Your grade will be based on the percentage of 1,000 points that you earn. Point totals required for grade levels are these:

A: 930 or more	A-: 900-929	
B+: 870-899	B: 830-869	B-: 800-829
C+: 770-799	C: 730-769	C-: 700-729
D+: 670-699	D: 630-669	D-: 600-629
F: Fewer than 600 points		

Sharing your words in a timely way is critical in all areas of life. All work for this class is subject to a 25-percent per day penalty for each 24-hour period that it's late. The clock starts ticking at the time that it's due. If a 50-point assignment is due on Tuesday at 11 p.m., it loses 12.5 points at 11:01 p.m. Tuesday and another 12.5 at 11:01 Wednesday. *Because we'll be on the road while some assignments are due, we'll attempt to build in as much time and flexibility as possible for journal entries, oral reports and blogging/social media/promotion work.* After-trip assignments will also have some flexibility built in, as they will have some dependence on source availability and we will negotiate terms for your group projects. After all, we'll probably need a few extra topics to talk about in the vans!

Unless otherwise requested, all work will be posted electronically to blogs or social media or to D2L dropboxes as MS Word 2003 or later or RTF (*.rtf) files – no Microsoft Works or other noncompatible formats. Work not posted in a compatible format will be counted as late.

Bibliographies:

For the research portion of this class, please use either MLA or APA style to cite your sources in your annotated bibliography. Guidance on these two styles is available from the Purdue Online Writing Laboratory <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> or from MLA or APA guides, which are available in the library.

Statements of University Policy. You are responsible for understanding university policies, especially regarding academic misconduct. That policy can be found at <http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>. Please note that any academic misconduct, including misrepresenting any work in any way, will result in a grade of "F" for the course.

Students with Disabilities: Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible.

Statements of University Policy

UWSP 14.01 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES.

The board of regents, administrators, faculty, academic staff and students of the University of Wisconsin system believe that academic honesty and integrity are fundamental to the mission of higher education and of the University of Wisconsin system. The university has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity and to develop procedures to deal effectively with instances of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Students who violate these standards must be confronted and must accept the consequences of their actions.

UWSP 14.03 ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT SUBJECT TO DISCIPLINARY ACTION.

- (1) Academic misconduct is an act in which a student:
 - (a) Seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
 - (b) Uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- (c) Forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- (d) Intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- (e) Engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance; or
- (f) Assists other students in any of these acts.
- (g) Violates electronic communication policies or standards as agreed upon when logging on initially (See uwsp.edu/it/policy).