

**Oh, What A Rushton! Canoes and Canoeing in
Canton, the Adirondacks, and Cultural Identity
First Year Seminar 188Q**

*Everyone must believe in something.
I believe I'll go canoeing.
Henry David Thoreau*

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Course Meeting Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays 8:30–10:00, Thursdays 2:20-3:50
Canoe Shop: Bewkes 330

Course Overview

*What sets a canoeing expedition apart
is that it purifies you more rapidly
and inescapably than any other travel.
Pierre Elliott Trudeau*

I used to live in Minnesota, and when I informed my former work colleagues that I was coming here to St. Lawrence, one of them, who is an outdoor enthusiast, immediately chirped up, “Oh, that’s the college in Canton New York. Canton New York is where they used to make Rushton Canoes, and those were these beautiful incredibly popular wooden canoes. *Everyone* knows about Rushton Canoes.” An overstatement perhaps, yet there is no denying that Rushton Canoes put Canton on the map: in the late 19th Century Rushton’s were a nationally marketed make of Canoe, Rushton Canoes were familiar to readers of major American magazines, and Rushton canoes have a place in shaping the national consciousness about both the Adirondacks and other American wildernesses. With the 50th running of the Rushton Canoe races happening this May, this course will hopefully be a “good moment” to acquaint you with Rushton Canoes. By considering Rushton Canoes as physical utilitarian objects, we can draw some conclusions about why a vessel can so motivate a person. This will involve considering the aesthetics of boats, the concept of boating, and canoes as cultural icons. The goal of our paddle is ultimately to gain a perspective on the relationship between the object and the human imagination.

Course Readings

*If there's a place, canoe there.
Brent Kelly*

Angus, Chris. “The Nature of the North Country.” *Living North Country: Essays on Life and Landscapes in Northern New York*. Utica NY: North Country Books, 2001. Print. **E-Reserve**

Bond, Hallie. *Boats and Boating in the Adirondacks*. Blue Mountain Lake NY: Adirondack Museum/Syracuse University Press, 1995. Print.

Doty, Paul. "A Red Dress and a Red Canoe." 22 Dec. 2010. Print. **E-Reserve**

Durant, Kenneth, and Helen Durant. "Early Portable Boats." *The Adirondack Guide-Boat*. Blue Mountain Lake NY: Adirondack Museum, 1980. Print. **E-Reserve**

Hart, Henry. "The Stolen Canoe." *The Roster Mask*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998. Print. **E-Reserve**

Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribners, 1997. Print.

Manley, Atwood. *Rushton and His Times in American Canoeing*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968. Print.

Merwin, W.S. "The Duck." *Migration: New and Selected Poems*. Port Townsend WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005. Print. **E-Reserve**

Raffan, James. "When is a Canoe Not a Canoe." *Bark, Skin, Cedar: Exploring the Canoe in Canadian Experience*. Toronto: HarperPerennialCanada, 1999. Print. **E-Reserve**

Stevens, James Thomas. "Three Translations from the Mohawk Canoe Song." *The Iowa Review*. 31.1 (2001): 85. Print. **E-Reserve**

Whedon, Tony. "Canoe Blues." *Prairie Schooner* 76.4 (2002). Print. **E-Reserve**

E-Reserve password: "rushton"

Course Assignments and Boat Building

*I think it much better that, as we all go along together,
every one paddle their own canoe.
Adapted from "Paddle Your Own Canoe"*

The purpose of a First Year Program Seminar is to give you an opportunity to undertake substantive speaking, writing, and research exercises...and we're going to throw in building a couple of canoes on top of everything...

Writing

Aesthetics of Boats I'm willing to bet that when we gather as a class they'll be a consensus among the 17 of us that canoes are beautiful. It's doubtless a reason you enrolled in this particular course, so the question is why—what is it in canoes and canoeing that speaks to the same intuitive senses that art does? You'll answer that question by formulating your version of the aesthetics of canoes in a three page essay. Couple of suggestions for writing this essay—firstly you can comment on the canoe as visual experience, but also draw on paddling as part of

your aesthetics statement. Further, you'll probably do well to write this as a narrative: recollect a canoe (or kayak) that you've had experience with and make this a substantive part of your essay. We'll conference on this early in the semester and we'll do two drafts of this essay.

Coracle Essay and Boat Building Blog. These two intertwined assignments are going to create a course forum on boat building. We are going to be building two canoes based on a Rushton design, and we are going to be building a model coracle. We need to write about this. So, to start, I'd like you to write a two page essay reflecting on building the coracle model. This is a narrative essay about what you thought as you worked with this version of a coracle. Draw from the Durant reading, and draw from your experience. From this, when we start boat building in February, we'll start blogging (I say we because I'm planning on blogging too). The blog is found at <http://blogs.stlawu.edu/turing/>. On February 22nd, which is the date I'm hoping to start on the canoes, pull something out of your coracle essay and post it to the blog: it can be a few sentences, it can be a paragraph. Everyone then needs to comment, by, February 25th, to the tune of five hundred words, on a fellow classmates post. From here you are going to be writing 700 words a week for six consecutive weeks, a time frame roughly corresponding to the time we're building boats. Now, the idea about boat building in an academic course is that it is not a thing apart: it informs the academic work you do. So, in the blog, connect what you're doing with your reading, researching, and writing. Take dissimilar parts of the course and heave 'em all together thinking about boat building (...imagine an aluminum canoe full of steaming chop suey...). Along with these 700 word posts you'll need two 500 word comments (separate from the first coracle comment) up on the blog by April 1st.

Research Project Okay, here's where we really roll up our sleeves and paddle. Working forward from your introduction to Rushton from Manley, Bond, and our guest speakers, you'll be doing original research on Rushton's work and other canoe-oriented topics. Given that the Spring Semester is the Grasse River in late April, things will happen in quick succession. You're going to have to decide on a topic by February 15th. If it's original research, you've obviously got to come up with the idea yourself, but, rivers flow this way and not that, so here's what we're going to navigate:

- **Reading George Washington Sears** It was “Nessmuk's” (Sears' pen name) letters to *Forest and Stream* about his travels in his custom made Rushton *Sairy Gamp* canoe that brought Rushton Canoes national attention. We have all of Sears' writings, and a number of secondary sources on the man, so this project would be one of giving Sears an original reading. Ask yourself questions like, “What do I see in Sears' writing?” “What do I make of Nessmuk?” If you're an aspiring English Major this is the project for you!
- **Paul Jamieson or Atwood Manley Papers** You'll see Jamieson and Manley's names all over this course. We have extensive and interesting manuscript collections by and about both men...this project asks you to get into these collections and make a case about the man you chose to investigate. You'll need to review the manuscript holdings, and figure out what you think is essential—the essential topic and paragraph in the work represented in these collections. This project will require significant time in our SLU Vance Archives. If you are an aspiring History Major or interested in the Adirondacks and conservation, this is the project for you!

- **Building a Rushton Canoe** This project is a sortie into the technical aspects of Rushton Canoes. Take the investigation we've done into how Rushtons are made, and take it further. Make a case about how Rushton canoes work as boats, and make a case about why this construction is so intriguing. You will be expected to take on a research technical questions of canoe making. If you are an aspiring Fine Arts Major, or a boat builder, or simply the aesthetics of canoes appeal to you and then some, this is the project for you!
- **Northern New York Canoe Experience** Finding anything about St. Lawrence, Jefferson, Essex, and Clinton County New York is taxing, but there is a literature about canoes and canoeing in these counties north and northwest of the Adirondacks. Find it and explicate it. What do canoes mean to the people who live in this sparsely populated "roof top" of New York. If you are curious about Adirondack culture, this is the project for you!
- **Canadian Canoe Tradition** While not specifically about Rushton, we are going to speak to the place of canoes in Canadian traditions. This project is an investigation into the cultural place of canoes in Canadian civilization. This work can directly involve the readings we'll do by James Raffan, and/or Linda Hogan and *Solar Storms*. This project will hopefully encourage you to become conversant with the significant traditions that matter to Canadians. If you want to explore canoes in the context of another culture, this is the project for you!

Now, the branches of this river will be traversed by these four canoes:

- **Proposal/Annotated Bibliography** As noted earlier, you're going to have to make up your mind about a research project early. By February 15th you'll need to send me a letter with your proposal...what you think you want to do and why (yes, a letter, paper, envelope, nobody every writes me). Once we've been in touch about your topic, you'll be researching a twelve item bibliography that will be the basis of the essay your write. It can/will include both primary and secondary sources. The annotations need to speak to both what the item is, and why the item is relevant to what you're doing. You'll be creating this bibliography in Refworks software.
- **Functional Outline** This is an exercise that will prompt you to synthesize your research into a structure that works downstream toward a paper. In this case I'm going to submit a separate assignment sheet to you as the FO is very prescriptive, but it's about figuring out your thesis, and how that thesis sequences the research you've done. We will conference on your FO.
- **Rough Drafts** Out of the FO comes a rough draft. Two of them in fact. We'll also have a peer review, in which you share your first rough draft with classmates for criticism. The peer review part is also very prescriptive and will come as a separate assignment sheet. Remember, this project is meant to be a ten page paper, which is...at least...shorter than a war canoe.
- **Final Draft**

Boat Building

Along with the aforementioned coracle, you will be working with a team of eight to build a Wackless Lassie, a plywood canoe based on Rushton's Wee Lassie design. It is a course

requirement that you work on the boat, and we'll be setting up times to build. You will be expected to make time to get to our “boat shop” in Bewkes. These are perfect designs for novice canoe builders and will not consume such blocks of time that the rest of your course work will end up on the bottom of the Grasse River. We'll be working with Bill Short, the Director of the University's HEOP program, and an experienced boat builder. This is our way of picking up tools and meeting J. Henry Rushton.

Speaking

Over the last month of the course, as you are working on your final project, we'll turn our attention in class to imaginative representations of canoes and canoeing. We'll also turn our attention to public speaking, and this will dominate what we do in class. We are going to give class over to two speaking projects:

- **Extempore Speaking** on the poems by Doty, Hart, Merwin, Stevens, and Whedon. You'll have read the poems before class, but your explication of the poems is going to have a 90 second lead time...
- **Talk on Linda Hogan's Solar Storm** As we paddle the course home you'll have an opportunity to read an important novel by Linda Hogen, one wherein a canoe journey is a major part of the plot. You and a partner will create a five to seven minute presentation on a major theme in the book related to the journey the main characters undertake. We will give significant class time to researching, writing, and rehearsing this talk before you give it to the group (although you will doubtless have to work on it out of class). You have complete creative freedom on how you present—but no Youtube. Period. None.

Grading Criteria: Your assignments will be evaluated along these lines: attention to the assignment, care of preparation, concision, engagement, verve (that quality of taking an idea and doing something original) receptiveness to criticism, professionalism, and grooviness of metaphor.

Grading Formula:

Fore and Aft--50%

Aesthetics Paper—15%

Coracle Paper/Blog—45%

Speaking Assignments--40%

Poetry Explications-40%

Hogan Talk--60%

Final Project—50%

Proposal/Bibliography—20%

Functional Outline—30%

Rough Draft—30%

Final Draft—20%

Addendum to the Course Grading

We are going to build stuff, we are going to read, we are going to have lectures and presentations, we are going to argue (hopefully). To do this, you need to be in class: you are allowed **three absences** over the course of the semester. More than that will have an adverse effect on your grade. These three are to cover any circumstances that might take you from class. They are not your freebies--thus if you use all three and then get “the crud” (or have to travel home on family business) the next class you miss will count against you. **If you miss a class on a day where you have a specific responsibility, such as participating in a presentation, you will simply be assigned a 0 for the evaluation of that work.** Do not lobby a case for missing class: make up your mind about when you might be coming and leave it at that. **Further**, because the Spring Semester passes so quickly, **late work is a canoe at the bottom of the river, and I ain't fishing it out. It will not be accepted, don't ask.**

Speaking of being on top of the water and not under it, class participation figures into the grade. If you steadfastly refuse to participate in class I will subtract a half a letter grade, since it is understood that participation is “part of the job.” What do I mean by “participation?” It is not simply talking every day, “participation” is being prepared and looking for opportunities in the conversation where your preparation can energize or alter the flow of shared ideas. You don't have to be continually at the fore, but you need to be engaged with the course dialogue to the extent that your personality is part of the course composite. You can trust that if I am not happy with your participation you will hear from me long before the end of the semester.

Portfolio

At the end of the semester you will need to submit a portfolio...that is, you'll need to provide us with everything you've submitted this semester. Get a folder as we get started and compile the work you do, which will include the blog posts (save an electronic copy for yourself and print that out for the portfolio) and any notes you use for your speaking assignments. You will need to provide copies of my responses to your work. You will need to provide a cover letter for your portfolio, in which you reflect on your semester work (same tone of voice you used in the blog). Write about your work—what surprised you, what might have gone as you expect, and other first impressions of a new university student. Failure to submit a portfolio will have an adverse effect on your grade.

The River Traversed

*An original life is unexplored territory.
You don't get there by taking a taxi –
you get there by carrying a canoe.
Alan Alda*

Jan 25th.

Course Intro, Research Assignment.

Jan 27th.

Reading Plans, Manley text, Appendixes, Durant. [Aesthetics 1st Draft]
Introduction to Archival Research

Feb 1st.

Angus, Manley. [Aesthetics 1st Draft In]

Feb 3rd.

Conferences on Aesthetics First Draft, My Office, ODY.

Sunday, Feb 6th. 4:00 p.m.

Meet At Boat Shop, Bewkes 330. Coracle materials, coracle making.

Feb 8th.

Manley & Bond Texts/Writing From Texts [Aesthetics Essay Due]

Feb 10th.

Raffan, Writing From Text

Meet at 2:00 at the St. Lawrence County Historical Society for “Reading Canoes with Hallie Bond.”

Feb 11th

Coracle Essay Due

Feb 15th

Library Research, Refworks. [Proposals Due, Bibliography Assigned]

Feb 17th

Speakers from Antique Boat Museum

Feb 22nd.

MLA Style Review, [Begin Blog, Boat Building Will Be Ongoing at Set Times]

Feb 24th.

Canoe Building Meeting, Library Research time.

March 1st.

Canoe Traditions [Bibliographies Due]

March 3rd.

Functional Outlines Assignment & Time

March 8th. March 10th

Review of All Things Writing, or Going Over College Discourse in a Barrel.

March 11th.

[Functional Outlines Due]

March 11th-March 19th Spring Break—Go Somewhere Warm and Paddle a Canoe!

March 22nd.

Functional Outline Conferences

March 24th.

Peer Review/Academic Discussion Workshops

March 29th.

Fictional Representations of Canoes, An Introduction.

March 31st.

Peer Review on Rough Drafts [Rough Drafts Due, D'uh],

Introduction to Poetry, Canoe Poems.

April 5th.

Public Speaking, Why Not?

April 7th.

Extemporaneous Poetry Practice

April 12th.

Extemporaneous Poetry Presentations [2nd Rough Drafts Due]

April 14th.

No Class.

April 19th.

Hogan Discussion

April 21st & 26th

Hogan Preparations, Rehearsals.

April 28th.

Hogan Presentations

May 3rd.

Wackless Lassies Waterborne [Final Drafts Due]

May 5th.

Evaluations, Loose Ends...

May 13th. Portfolio's Due.

First-Year Seminars Research Project Learning Goals 2010-11

*The hardest thing to build was the canoe.
The man who could make a canoe was very happy
because the people depended on it so much.
John Kawapit*

With respect to research skills specifically, our learning goals for the spring are that students should:

- Be introduced to ways of conducting productive and imaginative inquiry and research in order to become a part of the various conversations surrounding issues.
- Learn to differentiate among the various ways that information is produced and presented, between popular and scholarly journals and books, between mainstream and alternative publications, between primary and secondary sources.
- Learn how to evaluate and synthesize information, whether gathered from traditional sources, e.g., books and journals, or from websites or electronic media.
- Begin to develop the skills of critical analysis in the interpretation and use of information gathered from any source.
- Be introduced to the ethical obligations that scholars have to both responsibly represent their sources and inform their readers of the sources of their information, as well as learning, and being held responsible for the proper use of, the conventions of scholarly citation and attribution.
- Present the results of your research in written, spoken, visual and/or other forms that demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using the conventions of the mode of communication adopted.

First-Year Program Philosophy and Goals 2010-11

A residentially-based, interdisciplinary first-year program is an ideal environment for beginning the four-year process of developing the complex intellectual and social skills that are at the heart of a liberal education and the habits of considered values and engaged citizenship that such an education should produce. The First-Year Program (FYP) and First-Year Seminar (FYS) are the core of our institutional commitment to improving your ability to engage in critical inquiry and research, to design and deliver written, spoken and/or visual texts that demonstrate rhetorical sensitivity, and to be sophisticated readers, listeners, and viewers of the texts of others. We believe that these same competencies can help develop your ability to communicate across differences (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, political views) as you find ways to live and learn together in the residence halls and as engaged and ethically reflective citizens both during and after your college years. These goals should be understood as

the first step in our work with you over a four-year process of helping you to meet the University's Aims and Objectives.

We hope to help you see that writing, speaking, research, and interacting with others are rhetorical endeavors. Effective communicators are, by definition, rhetorically sensitive. Rhetorical sensitivity means understanding that all communication, whether formal or informal, involves having to make choices about your messages, whether written, spoken, or visual. To become an effective communicator, you need to recognize that the creation of a meaningful and powerful message involves both a creator and an audience, and that therefore the voice you adopt in your communication, and the audience you imagine yourself communicating to, matter a great deal in creating your message. The choices you make in writing and speaking are central in determining how people read and hear your voice. Becoming conscious and reflective about those choices, and their ethical dimensions, is a central goal of the FYP and FYS. Working with you so that you become more rhetorically sensitive means that you should be increasingly able to assess the requirements of a particular task and make intentional decisions about which mode or modes of communication and inquiry would be most effective in addressing it. To do so, you must develop specific writing, speaking, research, and technological competencies. To accomplish these goals, the FYP and FYS will present you with assignments that ask you to engage in a process that involves **recognizing** the rhetorical situation, **planning** communication strategies to address the task at hand, **composing and presenting** the message, and then engaging in **critical assessment** of your own work and that of others. The results of that assessment process will allow you to rethink, restructure, and revise your work. We further recognize that this process is not linear and that the effective creation of texts requires that you move back and forth among these four elements of the message creation process. This is why we require that your writing and speaking assignments be "projects" that include preparatory exercises and multiple drafts or rehearsals, all of which ask you to continue to reflect critically on the choices you have made in constructing your message.

This process of increased rhetorical awareness and skill development is at the heart of the philosophical and pedagogical perspectives that inform the work of the FYP and FYS. Because this process both transcends and integrates a variety of specific skills, the program has a philosophical commitment to designing assignments that ask you to integrate various modes of communication in furtherance of the higher-level rhetorical goals in which they are situated.

To ensure that the program is meeting its stated goals, all FYP and FYS syllabi are read by other faculty in the program to determine if they include a variety of assignments that forward the writing, speaking, research, and literacy goals of the program. All FYP and FYS courses have to be approved by faculty in the program before they are offered.

1/14/11