Writing on the Edge of the Earth is opportunity for you to explore your ties to place and tribe, examining the networks of relationships that help determine who you are, and that offer you a sense both of community and uniqueness. The relationships you explore may be to other people and animals, to a particular place on the planet, and to the physical and cultural presences that we take for granted, such as the water we drink or the beliefs we embrace. Recognizing how much our identities are constructed by relationship to our social and physical environments — while recognizing how we in turn construct and define those — takes us toward a more complex, big-picture concept of the world and our place in it. This could help us figure out the age-old question: What does it mean to be human?

In this class we will read, write, and talk about issues of how we live and how we are to live on a markedly changing planet. No matter our backgrounds and proclivities, all of us are “plain members and citizens of the biotic community,”¹ the Earth: the only planet we have, the one where the human presence is changing virtually all ecosystems. Because we humans exert such an impact, consider that our notions of community must finally extend beyond humans to encompass the Earth and all that is in it. David Orr, an environmental scholar, writes that “In our time the great question is how we will live in light of the ecological fact that we are bound together in the community of life, one and indivisible.”²

In particular, I have two goals for this class. One is for you to recognize, through writing, sharing writing, reading, service learning, and discussion, how much a part of you your community is, including the Earth itself, how strong its role in shaping your beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. Perhaps such inquiry will help you become more critically aware of what you value in your community and what you’d hope to change. Perhaps all of us, through better understanding our own communities, will better appreciate others, seeing how crucial the ties are that connect us so we may live cooperatively to sustain the living Earth.

The other goal is to make your writing become a part of you. I’d like you to “own” your writing, for you to see it as an essential activity of your life, not just a series of assignments divorced from your “real” life. In order to make writing a part of you, it has to be meaningful to you. Thus you may spend a great deal of this class writing about the most meaningful aspects of your life: yourself and your community.

Two other, more general aims extend beyond this class. First, by writing about the places, communities, and other influences in your life, you can discover meanings about yourself and truths beyond yourself. Second, I hope that such understanding will lead to your awareness of the cultural/societal forces that mold you, those that have negatively affected the Earth, and in turn lead to the assertion of your power to shape and re-shape those forces.

Certain beliefs underlie this class, especially the following:

(1) Writing is discovery.
Although effective writing is communication, the process of writing can move you the writer from what you know when you begin writing to the discovery of deeper levels of meaning. Attainment of meaning does not end with writing; it often begins with writing.

(2) Writing is power.
Your effective writing reveals a voice that speaks the truth about your world. Given an audience, such writing can inform the members of that audience, possibly enlightening them or changing their thoughts, attitude, or behavior.

In this class, you will write for varying audiences and for a variety of purposes, and you must write a minimum of 6000 words. Freewriting, writing in your journals, five out-of-class essays, midterm and final essays, and a portfolio of writings form the requirements.

Freewrites: You’ll do a freewrite as a warm-up in many class sessions. The freewrites will not be graded or corrected and count as part of your journal.

Journals: Buy an 8-1/2” by 11" notebook and write in it seven pages a week, doing assigned exercises and freewriting about virtually anything for the personal journal, and freewriting about the reading for the reading journal. (I’ll give you more information about these.) I will check your journals periodically but will not grade or edit them. However, the journals are crucial to the class requirements. Minimal or no journals means failing the class. Your journals are an essential part of the writing process, so do use them to your advantage to write about, explore, and question issues important to you.

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Five Essays: We will deal with five areas of cultural identity:

Place Tribe
Identity & Conflict Writing About Reading
The Future in 25 Years Problem/Solution

You will write one essay concerning each area, the particular topic always your choice, and the essays must be NON-fiction. I will give you separate sheets outlining due dates, features that constitute a good essay, and specific suggestions to help you with each topic. **Each essay will be 4-6 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12 font, with one-inch margins.** These essays form the bulk (75%) of your final grade. For each one, you must bring a solid draft on workshop days, and you must hand in all essays on time. Two papers behind and you’ll be dropped from the class. One more crucial note: These essays must be your own writing, because that is what the class concerns—not a friend’s or family member’s writing, nor writing cut and pasted from the internet. To take someone else's writing and present it as your own is plagiarism, which could cause your suspension from the college.

Revision is tremendously important to your writing and therefore integral to the class; you will be required to engage in it. Revision does not mean correction of errors but re-seeing the writing to give it what it needs. We’ll be working on this skill all semester.
Group Work: You’ll be reading drafts of your writing in small groups, truly helpful when group members focus on listening and responding to each piece. I’ll be giving you more information about this. Reviewers will be graded. Those who neglect to bring drafts can earn no higher than the equivalent of a C on their final draft.

Midterm and Final Essays: These will be in-class essays, good practice in impromptu writing. They do not count as highly as the five required essays but do count toward your final grade.

Reading: You will be assigned to read Ishmael, The Craft of Revision, Affluenza (all available at the campus bookstore), and our class reader, Writing on the Edge of the Earth (available to buy online at www.universityreaders.com). These are the readings you will write about in your reading journal. I may give you other readings, and feel free to bring in articles you find thought provoking. You may also read from A Pocket Style Manual as appropriate to your editing needs. I encourage you to also read Next of Kin, by Roger Fouts, a recommended book.

Service Learning: You need to devote two different visits to a community effort of your choice -- each time 1½ - 2 hours, for a mere 3 - 4 hours total for the semester. For example, this can be park or beach clean-up, swallow poop clean-up on campus, attendance at a city council or county board meeting, or work with animals not your own. The possibilities are endless! Just talk to me if you’re not sure about the activity you’re choosing. Also, make sure you write about each experience in your personal journal.

Portfolio: All semester you will compile a portfolio of your best essays from the five required essays, plus a special in-class essay that you’ll write just for the portfolio. The portfolio determines whether or not you have met the course objectives for English 100.

English 100L: You are probably already registered for this separate but REQUIRED 1-unit class. The lab is in the Writing Center, behind the library, or at the Watsonville ILC; you’ll find tutors there eager to work with you. They also offer classes of varying units for help with your essays.

Open Access Computer Lab: Register for CABT 510 (no units) to use the computer lab in 1400. In Watsonville you can use the ILC computers in 4410 with just your student ID.

Learning Disabilities: All students needing accommodations should inform the instructor ASAP. Veterans may qualify for accommodations. Wounded Warriors may have acquired injuries which through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entitle the use of accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for students with verified disabilities. To determine if you qualify or need assistance with accommodation, please contact the Learning Skills Program, Room 1073, at 479-6220 or Disabled Student Services, Room 810, at 479-6379.

Sustainability: The planet cannot keep up with human consumption of resources, so let's help her out. For example, you can print your essays on both sides of the paper, or use paper already printed on one side. (Just draw a line through it.) You can give handouts back to me when you're done with them. You can also access assignments on my website: http://arana.cabrillo.edu/~ewagner/course2.html. You can type your journals on computer and email them to me. All of us can recycle paper, metals, and plastic, not leaving them behind in the classroom; turn off lights we see on in unused rooms; close the door when the heat is on.

Attendance/Participation: This course requires active participation each day of class, so it is important for you to attend every class session, arrive on time, and come prepared. Your participation not only enhances your own learning, it benefits other students in the class, especially when the class is doing group work. Your level of participation is reflected in your grade and since you can't participate if you are not in class, absences will also be reflected your grade. Tell me, email me (elwagner@cabrillo.edu), or call me in advance (831-479-6355) for an excused absence if you know you won't be able to make it to class. Otherwise, missing 20 minutes or more of class will constitute an unexcused absence.
Class Discussions: Discussion is integral to this class; it allows your ideas room to spawn and develop. My expectations are that we all will be respectful and considerate of one another. To maximize insight and understanding, during group work or class discussions, refrain from disruptive behavior. Your instructor becomes stupendously grouchy if you’re disrespectful, so please...

- Speak one at a time. **No side conversations or overtalk.**
- Listen respectfully. Plug into the discussion, not iPods, cell phones, or laptops.
- Refrain from sleeping, belching, hocking or boisterous yawning.
- Refrain also from doing other classes’ reading or homework.
- Turn off any device that chirps, beeps, sings, or rings. Live cell phones will be confiscated. **They’re rude!**

Consequences for disruptive/disrespectful behavior are the following:

1st offense: student receives verbal warning

2nd offense: student is removed from class, required to see me during office hours before returning to class. A behavior statement will be agreed upon and a Disruptive Behavior Report will be completed and sent to the Dean of Student Services.

3rd offense: student is dropped from the class. Disruptive Behavior Report is filed with the Dean of Student Services.

Learning Outcomes: Generally, this is what you can expect to learn from this class:

1. You will write essays demonstrating sustained clarity of intention, awareness of audience, and a variety of writing techniques.

2. In the majority of these essays, you will investigate and analyze the obvious and not so obvious influences on your beliefs, behaviors, and identity, your place in this world, and your connection to community both local and global.

3. You will articulate responses to readings in a variety of genres.

Grading/Evaluation: Your improvement in writing is the most important element of this class; grades are secondary. Accordingly, I would prefer not to letter-grade individual papers at least until midterm. Instead, I’d rather write to you or talk with you about the effectiveness and problems of each of your papers, guiding you and offering suggestions for their improvement. We can talk about your progress any time. With the help of your five essays, midterm and final essays, and portfolio, I will reflect on the following, which will determine your final grade:

- your progress in writing, how much it has improved;
- your willingness to revise your writing, to take risks with it, and apply ideas creatively;
- sufficient journals and service learning;
- your class and group participation, including attendance.

Please feel free to talk to me about any problems, questions, or doubts that arise regarding this class. I want to help you and learn from you. Welcome to class and enjoy your writing!