



The University of Western Ontario  
**HISTORY 3723F**  
**The Anthropocene: History of a Human Planet**  
**Fall 2018**  
**Thursdays 1:30-4:30, UCC 67**

**Instructor: Prof. Alan MacEachern**

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-2:30, Lawson 2268

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**FINAL syllabus, 2018 09**

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**Course Description:**

Humans of late have exerted so much influence on the Earth, and created what are essentially permanent changes to it, that some scientists and scholars argue we are in a new age not just in *human* history, but in *Earth* history: the Anthropocene. This seminar course is a global environmental history of the recent past.

**Prerequisite:**

1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above.

**Course Syllabus:**

Humans have been exerting so much influence on the planet of late, and creating what for all intents and purposes are permanent changes to it, that some have argued we are living in a new age not just in human history, but in Earth history: the Anthropocene. There has been considerable debate as to when the Anthropocene can be said to begin – some have dated it to 1945, some to the late 18th century, and a few to as much as 8000 years ago – but, regardless, the concept offers a new way of conceiving human history.

History 3723 introduces the concept of the Anthropocene, discusses arguments as to the age's origins, traces the environmental history of Earth over the past 2+ centuries in particular, and explores ideas to create a more intentional Anthropocene to ensure people's and the planet's survival.

The class meets for 3 hours once a week. The first 2 hours involve a short lecture, a short student-led introduction to the topic, and seminar discussion. In the 3rd hour, we discuss assignments, and develop research and writing skills.

**Learning outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

- Discuss the concept of the Anthropocene, assess what defines it and how it has been dated, and assess its explanatory value within the field of history.
- Consider contemporary environmental issues from a long-term perspective.
- Locate primary and secondary sources useful in answering a focused research question.

- Analyze primary source texts in relation to one another.
- Analyze secondary sources, including their argument, methods, strengths, limitations, and significance for the field and/or implications for broader public discourse.
- Continue to improve their writing skills.

### **Course Materials:**

The following required texts are available in the Western Bookstore and through the Western Libraries system.

- Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin, Paul Warde, eds. *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change* (2013).
- J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (2014).

Supplementary course material is available on the course OWL site, on the internet (linked off the syllabus), and/or through the Western Libraries system.

### **Methods of Evaluation:**

- ***Participation – 25%***

Student participation is essential to the success of a seminar course. You are expected to read all assigned readings and participate in each class. Attendance is not in and of itself participation: participation requires speaking, and speaking requires knowledge of the material under discussion.

- ***“Past and present” assignments – 2 x 10% = 20%***

Twice in the term, each student will provide, 1 day ahead of class, a news article, the URL of a short video or social media content, or other contemporary item that relates to the week’s topic, and introduce it briefly at the beginning of class. Within a week, the student will submit a maximum 750-word essay exploring the relevance of the contemporary item to the broader topic’s past and present.

- ***Research essay, due 29 November – 30%***

Each student will use a primary source (or sources) as the foundation for a research paper of approximately 2500 words on a topic related to the Anthropocene, selected in consultation with the professor. (Any of the individual primary source readings in the Robin, Sörlin, and Warde book would be a good basis for this essay.)

In the 1 November class, each student will give a 10-minute presentation introducing their draft essay, raising any issues they are facing, and seeking input for improvement. No accompanying draft needs to be submitted to either the class or professor, although you are welcome to provide a handout.

- ***Take-home exam, due 13 December – 25%***

This exam will be distributed on 6 December, to be completed and returned within a week. Students will be given six questions and asked to write essays on three.

***The fine print:***

Students are to submit all written assignments, including take-home exam, in electronic form through the course OWL site. The Faculty of Social Science's policy statement on plagiarism and the use of plagiarism detection software is attached to this syllabus.

The research and "past and present" essays all have a built-in, blanket extension: they can be submitted without penalty up to 7 days after they were due. Beyond that, there will be a 5% deduction per day, including weekends. There is no extension for the take-home exam. All course material must be submitted by midnight 13 December.

Students with special requirements are advised to contact the [Student Development Centre](#). The SDC will handle all documentation and make arrangements with the instructor for academic accommodation. Students encountering serious problems that might affect their performance in a course should inform Academic Counselling in their home faculty immediately. See also the Faculty of Social Science's policy statement on medical accommodation, which is appended to the plagiarism statement attached.

**Course Schedule and Readings:**

- **Week 1 – 6 September**                    **Introductions**
  
- **Week 2 – 13 September**                **Introducing the Anthropocene**
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 3-14 and 483-490.
  - McNeill and Engelke, 1-6.
  
- **Week 3 – 20 September**                **The case for an "Early Anthropocene"**
  - William Ruddiman, "Introduction" and "Humans Begin to Take Control" sections, *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum: How Humans Took Control of Climate* (2010), 5-12 and 63-114.
  
- **Week 4 – 27 September**                **Energy transitions and the importance of fossil fuels**
  - R.W. Sandwell, "An Introduction to Canada's Energy History," *Powering Up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600* (2016), 3-37.
  - McNeill and Engelke, 7-40.
  
- **Week 5 – 4 October**                    **The Great Divergence and the creation of the Third World**
  - Rob Nixon, "Introduction," *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), 1-44.
  - Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2001), 1-59.
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 40-53.
  
- **Week 6 – Fall reading week**
  
- **Week 7 – 18 October**                    **The discovery of climate change**
  - Spencer Weart, "How Could Climate Change?" *The Discovery of Global Warming* (2003), 1-19.
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 291-4, 303-15, and 327-36.
  - Leila McNeill, "[This Lady Scientist Defined the Greenhouse Effect but Didn't Get the Credit, Because Sexism](#)," *Smithsonian.com*, 5 December 2016.

- Kyla Mandel, "[This Woman Fundamentally Changed Climate Science – and You’ve Probably Never Heard of Her](#)," *ThinkProgress.org*, 18 May 2018.
- **Week 8 – 25 October**                      **War and the Great Acceleration**
  - McNeill and Engleke, 155-84.
  - Jan Zalasiewicz et al, "When Did the Anthropocene Begin? A Mid-Twentieth Century Boundary Level Is Stratigraphically Optimal," *Quaternary International* 383 (2015), 196–203.
  - Ian Angus, "War, Class Struggle, and Cheap Oil," *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System* (2016), 137-51.
  - Isao Hashimoto, "[1945-1998](#)" time-lapse map of every nuclear explosion since 1945 (2003).
- **Week 9 – 1 November**                      **Food and agriculture**  
*[Presentations on research essays in progress]*
  - Meredith McKittrick, "Industrial Agriculture," *A Companion to Global Environmental History* (2012), 411-32.
  - Vaclav Smil, "Nitrogen Cycle and World Food Production," *World Agriculture* 2 (2011), 9-13.
- **Week 10 – 8 November**                      **Population**
  - McNeill and Engelke, 40-61.
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 15-39 and 54-62.
- **Week 11 – 15 November**                      **Mobility and diversity**
  - Elizabeth Kolbert, "The New Pangaea," *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014 ed), 193-214.
  - McNeill and Engelke, 82-101.
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 363-80 and 409-31.
- **Week 12 – 22 November**                      **Growth and sustainability**
  - McNeill and Engelke, 103-54.
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 63-6, 187-93, 101-17, and 195-203.
- **Week 13 – 29 November**                      **Whose Anthropocene?**  
*[Research essay due]*
  - Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," *The Anthropocene Review* 1:1 (2014): 62-9.
  - Alan MacEachern, "[The Alanthropocene](#)," *NiCHE-Canada.org*, 15 January 2018.
  - Sean Kheraj, "[Culpability and Canada’s Anthropocene: A Response](#)," *NiCHE-Canada.org*, 29 January 2018.
- **Week 14 – 6 December**                      **Planning the Anthropocene**  
*[Take-home exam distributed]*
  - James R. Fleming, "The Climate Engineers," *Wilson Quarterly* 31 (2007), 46-60.
  - McNeill and Engelke, 184-211.
  - Robin, Sörlin, and Warde, 506-25.

## **Additional Statements**

### ***Academic Offences:***

Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitute a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com).

### ***Accessibility Options:***

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

[www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated\\_exams.html](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html)

### ***Medical Issues***

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Please go to:

[https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical\\_accommodations\\_link\\_for\\_OOR.pdf](https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_accommodations_link_for_OOR.pdf)

to read about the University's policy on medical accommodation. This site provides links the necessary forms. In the event of illness, you should contact Academic Counselling as soon as possible. The Academic Counsellors will determine, in consultation with the student, whether or not accommodation should be requested. They will subsequently contact the instructors in the relevant courses about the accommodation. Once the instructor has made a decision about whether to grant an accommodation, the student should contact his/her instructors to determine a new due date for tests, assignments, and exams.

Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation: [http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical\\_accommodation.html](http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical_accommodation.html)

### ***Plagiarism:***

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be

included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](http://Turnitin.com).

The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of Publication and page number. Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writer's ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source; these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction, your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases, in their suspension from the University.

### ***Scholastic Offences***

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

[www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### ***Support Services***

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western, [http://uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### ***Use of Electronic Devices***

No electronic devices are permitted during tests and examinations.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact, Heidi Van Galen, Administrative Officer, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84963 or e-mail [yangalen@uwo.ca](mailto:yangalen@uwo.ca).