THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of History
Winter 2013

Hist 9470B
Themes in European Environmental History
From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century

COURSE DIRECTOR: Pierre Claude REYNARD (preynard@uwo.ca)
MEETINGS: Wednesday, 13:30 to 15:30 (LH 1218)

NOTE: This is an updated (26 Nov. 2012) version of our syllabus - Some minor adjustments possible early in January 2013 - Most notably according to the number of students.

Course Description
Was Ancient Greece ruthlessly deforested? Did Christianity make us stewards of nature? Should we blame the Scientific Revolution for irreparably distancing humans from nature? May the formidable climatic swing from the Medieval Optimum to the Little Ice Age help us navigate current concerns? How did European settlers transform whole continents?

The length, density, and intensity of human occupation of the small Western tip of the great Eurasian landmass eventually known as Europe expose the most crucial of the myriad connections between humans and the environment. The aggressive and immense reach of European expansion make many of the key questions related to these often explosive connections relevant well beyond Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century, few areas of the planet could escape the incalculable consequences of choices made in Europe, and a new environmental consciousness eventually matured in response to these transformations. This course will put this relatively recent development in its “long” historical context.

Assignments / Grading schedule:
1. Participation to our weekly meetings - including weekly postings of comments and questions on Required Readings: 30%
2. Book-Analysis (oral presentation 10-15 mins. and written copy): 15%
3. “Focus” presentation (oral presentation 15-20 mins. and written copy - research a chosen topic and craft a short paper - individual or group project according to the number of students): 20%
4. Final Essay due at end of term (25%) with a brief presentation of research, plan, and key arguments to the class (5%): 35% = 100%

ALL WEEKLY READINGS WILL BE POSTED ON COURSE WEB-SITE (or available on-line through our library).
Week 1 - Introduction - Wed. 9 January 2013
Overview of the course. Administrative imperatives and details; schedule of assignments, expectations, etc.

Week 2 - Perspectives on Environmental History - Wed. 16 Jan.
We will take a few minutes to schedule the Book Analyses (starting Week 4 - plan your selection)

Over the coming two weeks, we will consider the basic parameters defining Environmental history. To do this, we will read, compare, and discuss two sets of thoughts on the state of environmental history published some 15 years apart. We want to tease out the key themes that have retained the attention of historians in this new field, map out the most important trends and evolutions ... and anticipate some notable pitfalls.

READ and post comments:
(Available on line through our library)

Week 3: Perspectives on Environmental History (continued) - Wed. 23 Jan.
We will continue our discussion around the themes at the core of this field.

READ and post comments:
Environmental History, 10, 1, 2005: 30-109, Anniversary Forum “Next in Environmental History” (30 short essays).
(Available on line through our library)

Week 4: Pre-historic and Ancient Civilizations - Wed. 30 Jan.
We will take a few minutes to schedule the Focus Presentations (starting Week 7 - plan your selection)

What key concepts do we encounter when we turn to these contexts, that are so different from our own situation and recent past? How relevant can they be, taking into account these fundamental distinctions?

READ and post comments:
Book-Analysis 1 (Choose from):

**Week 5: Greco-Roman civilizations and the Mediterranean Environment - Wed. 6 February**

These Classical civilisations are seen as the foundations of our Western world - is that true with regard to attitudes and practices towards the environment?

**READ and post comments:**


**Book-Analysis 2:**


**Week 6: Medieval Europe. Expansion in Context - part 1 - Wed. 13 Feb.**

We will take a few minutes to schedule the Final Essay Research Presentations (starting Week 9 - plan your selection).

The first two or three centuries of the second millennium (CE), may be seen as a first sustained and profound episode of economic and demographic expansion, particularly with regard to the impact of human enterprise upon the natural environment. In this light, we must consider the scope of the transformations attempted, the limits of this movement, as well as the thoughts and attitudes that it reveals.

**READ and post comments:**


READ and post comments:

Book-Analysis 4:

Focus Presentation 1: Natural Disasters - Starting suggestions:
*Environment and History*, 9, 2, 2003 - Special issue on catastrophes (articles on medieval and early-modern Europe).

Week 8: The Rise of Modern Science - Wed. 6 March

The Scientific Revolution transformed the way in which Europeans thought about the world surrounding them. This process was naturally slow, and it was initially limited to the elites of European societies, but it eventually came to constitute one of the more important dimension of modernity - with crucial implications for our relationship to the environment.

READ and post comments:

**Book-Analysis 5:**

**Focus Presentation 2:** Cabinets of curiosity - of collectors and monsters - Starting suggestions:

**Week 9: European Expansion and “Environmental Imperialism”** - Wed. 13 Mar.
In “discovering” the rest of the world, Europeans were confronted with environments and practices that were very different from those that they were familiar with, and these milieus often proved vulnerable to the kind of interventions that European conquest and control implied. Tropical milieus, in particular, posed new challenges to European thinkers.

READ and post comments:
PLUYMERS Keith, "Taming the wilderness in sixteenth- and seventeenth century- Ireland and Virginia", *Environmental History*, 16, 4, 2011: 610-632.


**Book-Analysis 6 (Choose one):**

**Focus Presentation 3: Commons** - Starting suggestions:

Final Essay Research Presentations (1)

**Week 10: A Gendered Perspective? - Wed. 20 Mar.**

Environmental history has grown in parallel to the rise of women’s history - What connections have been made?

READ and post comments:


**Book-Analysis 7 (Choose one):**

**Focus Presentation 4: Rivers - Starting suggestions:**
MAUCH Christof and Thomas ZELLER, eds., *Rivers in History* (Univ. of Pittsburgh P., Pittsburgh, 2008).

Final Essay Research Presentations (2)

**Week 11: “Privileged Environments” - Forests, Rivers ... - Wed. 27 Mar.**

Forests (and rivers) have long been considered worthy of special attention by various levels of authorities, for several reasons that may not have much to do with their environmental qualities.

READ and post comments:


**Focus Presentation 5: The Age of Heroic Explorations - Starting suggestions:**

**Final Essay Research Presentations (3)**

**Week 12: Enlightened Ambitions - Wed. 3 April**

In the 18th century, “improvement” projects multiplied. A developing economy, stronger state structures, and a new-found confidence in human abilities to transform nature for the better, combined to put the taming of rivers, the draining of marshes, the building of canals, and many other ventures, on the public agendas of many Western European nations.

**READ and post comments:**

**Focus Presentation 6: Impact of Economic Development - Starting suggestions:**

**Final Essay Research Presentations (4 and 5)**

**Week 13: Climate History - Wed. 10 April**

Can we learn from past experiences?

**FINAL ESSAYS DUE TODAY**

**READ two or three or four of the following - and post comments:**