

HISTORY 9833B
Environmental History:
People & Nature through Time
Winter 2025

Instructor: Prof. Alan MacEachern

Office hours, Mondays, 9:30-11:30am, Lawson 2268

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This is a summer 2024 DRAFT syllabus.
Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for the final version.

Course Description:

Environmental history considers how humans have thought about and acted toward nature through time, and how nature itself has changed. Besides introducing the main concepts and debates in the field, “People & Nature through Time” traces a global environmental history, with special emphasis on the concept of the Anthropocene - the era in which humans have made intense, effectively permanent environmental changes on a global scale.

Enrollment Restrictions:

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in History, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student’s home program.

Course Materials:

Seminars are built around a series of readings, together averaging around 300 pages per week. Readings have been made available on the course OWL Brightspace, on the internet (linked off the syllabus), and/or through the Western Libraries online system.

Methods of Evaluation:

Seminar participation – 30%

This is a seminar course, and student participation is essential to its success. Students are expected to read all assigned readings and participate in every class.

Book reviews – 2 x 10% = 20%

Twice during the term, students are to write a 750-word book review of a monograph that is being read in whole or in part for the class. (The review is to be of the whole book.) Each review should describe the book’s topic and argument; discuss the significance of its methodology, theoretical framework, and/or findings within the broader literature; assess its strengths and weaknesses; and indicate what questions it raises for further research. Students can submit the reviews on OWL any time prior to the book being discussed in class.

Image essay – due 11 Feb – 10%

In week 6, the class discusses historical images of nature (and people), as seen in photographs, advertising, etc. Students are to write a 750-word essay on an environmental image of their choice – although it cannot be one discussed in detail in any of the assigned readings for that week’s class. They are to treat the images, as Joan Schwartz states in one of the week’s readings, “not as illustrations but as primary sources.” Students are asked to include a copy of the image in their Word doc.

Major essay – 40%

Students are to write an approximately 4-5000-word research paper, with a primary source component, on an environmental history topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor. In keeping with the course, the essay can be on any period and place in history. Bear in mind the importance of having a manageable topic, however, as well as an available and manageable source base.

introduced in class – 18 or 25 March – 5%

In an OWL Forum in advance of one of these classes, students will describe their research essay in progress and raise any issue they are facing. In class, they will lead a short discussion to seek input for improvement.

final essay – due 8 Apr– 35%

****The fine print:***

All assignments will be discussed further in class.

All written work is to be submitted through the OWL course site in Microsoft Word form (not as an Adobe pdf, please), preferably with a file name “Last name assignment” (ex. “Smith book review 1”). There is no need to submit a paper copy.

Requests for accommodation on medical, non-medical, or compassionate grounds are to go to the graduate chair, who will consult and communicate with the instructor.

The image and final essays, if submitted late, are penalized 5% per day. The nature of the book reviews mean that they will *not* be accepted after the book (or a portion of it) has been discussed in class. The final date to submit material for the course is 21 Dec. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Course Schedule and Readings:

1 7 Jan -- Introductions

2 14 Jan -- Introduction to Environmental History

- Colin Coates and Graeme Wynn, “Introduction,” *The Nature of Canada* (2020), 3-23.
- William Cronon, “[The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.](#)” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (1995), 69-90.
- Alan MacEachern, [The Miramichi Fire: A History](#) (2020).

3 **21 Jan -- The Anthropocene**

- Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” [Global Change Newsletter](#) 41 (2000), 17-18.
- Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), preface & ch.2.
- Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (2016).

4 **28 Jan -- Indigenous People & Nature**

- Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (2019).
- Shepard Krech, “Beaver,” in *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (1999), 173-209.
- Lyle Dick, “People and Animals in the Arctic: Mediating Between Indigenous and Western Knowledge,” in [Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History](#), eds. Alan MacEachern and William J. Turkel (2009), 76-101.

5 **4 Feb -- Energy**

- Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (1996).
- Jeremy Zallen, [American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light, 1750-1865](#) (2019), prologue, ch.5, and epilogue.
- R.W. Sandwell, ed., [Powering Up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600](#) (2016), ch.1.

6 **11 Feb -- Seeing Nature**

- Finis Dunaway, [Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images](#) (2015), introduction, ch.2-6, ch.12-15, & conclusion.
- Joan M. Schwartz, “Photographic Reflections: Nature, Landscape, and Environment,” [Environmental History](#) 12 (2007), 966-93.

Reading Week

7 **25 Feb -- Climate**

- Sam White, [A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe’s Encounter with North America](#) (2017), introduction, ch.1 & 9, & conclusion.
- Dagomar Degroot, et. al., “[The History of Climate & Society: A Review of the Influence of Climate Change on the Human Past](#),” *Environmental Research* (2022), 1-35.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” [Critical Inquiry](#) 35 no.2 (2009), 197-222.
- Andreas Malm, “Corona and Climate,” *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (2020), ch.1.

8 **4 Mar -- Food & Agriculture**

- George Colpitts, [Pemmican Empire: Food, Trade, and the Last Bison Hunts in the](#)

[North American Plains, 1780-1882](#) (2015), introduction, & ch.1-4.

- Donald Worster, [The Good Muck: Toward an Excremental History of China](#) (2017).
- Vaclav Smil, “Understanding Food Production,” *How the World Really Works* (2022), ch.2.

9 11 Mar -- Inequality

- Brittany Luby, [Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory](#) (2020).
- Rob Nixon, [Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor](#) (2011), introduction.
- Mike Davis, “A World’s End: Drought, Famine, and Imperialism, 1896-1902,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 1999.

10 18 Mar -- (Environmental) History as Literature // essay works-in-progress

- Stephen J. Pyne, [Voice and Vision: A Guide to Writing History and Other Serious Nonfiction](#) (2009), introduction, ch.1-4 and 21-22.

11 25 Mar – Critters // essay works-in-progress

- Stephanie Rutherford, [Villain, Vermin, Icon, Kin: Wolves and the Making of Canada](#) (2022), introduction, ch.1-3 & 6.
- Jennifer Bonnell & Sean Kheraj, eds. [Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History](#), eds. (2022), introduction, ch.1, 3, 4, 10, 11, & epilogue.
- Erica Fudge, “A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals,” *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (2002), 3-18.

12 1 Apr -- Where to from Here?

- Etienne S. Benson, *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms* (2020), introduction, ch.5, & conclusion (1-16, 135-62, & 193-213).
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015).
- Christof Mauch, [Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear](#) (2019).

Additional Statements

Accessibility Options:

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction. Request for Accommodations/Medical Issues.

Students are entitled to their privacy and consequently they do not need to disclose personal information to their course professors. In the event that students feel the need to discuss personal information, they should see the graduate chair. Unlike undergraduate students, graduate students cannot be referred to Social Science Academic Counselling to have their medical or non-medical circumstances evaluated and to receive a recommendation for accommodation. Those facilities are for undergraduates only, and there is no process beyond the department to secure recommendations for accommodation. Our process is that faculty should deal with routine requests for extensions. However, a student's request for accommodation (on medical, non-medical, compassionate grounds) should go to the graduate chair, Prof. Francine McKenzie (fmckenzi2@uwo.ca) who will consult and communicate with faculty. Additionally, faculty and students should communicate with the grad chair about any case in which work is not submitted before grades are due. In the event that the graduate chair is also the course professor, then a request for accommodation can be taken to the department chair.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Instructors must indicate whether the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools/software/apps is acceptable, permitted in specific situations, or unacceptable in their course. Instructors may refer to the Centre for Teaching and Learning for resources on the use of generative Artificial Intelligence.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these

traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca

Copyright

Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. You may not record lectures, reproduce (or allow others to reproduce), post or distribute lecture notes, wiki material, and other course materials publicly and/or for commercial purposes without my written consent.

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.

For more information on plagiarism and other scholastic offenses at the graduate level see:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.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 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>).

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 are 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 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.

If a history graduate course professor suspects course work of possible plagiarism, or if a graduate supervisor suspects a cognate or thesis of possible plagiarism, the faculty member will meet with the student. If the issue is not resolved, the student then meets with the graduate chair to discuss this situation, and so that the student can present or respond to evidence. Afterwards the graduate chair will decide about whether misconduct has occurred and any penalties; this will be communicated in writing to the student within 3 weeks. The student may appeal this decision to the Vice-Provost (Graduate) within 3 weeks of the issuance of the chair's decision. If the student does not appeal, the Vice-Provost will review the case. The Vice-Provost may confirm, affirm, vary, or overturn the graduate chair's decision or penalty.

Information on the appeals procedures for graduate students can be found here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

- Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health

and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/> and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>

- Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>

- Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html

UWO has many services and programs that support the personal, physical, social, and academic needs of students, in a confidential environment. The Student Development Centre (SDC) has trained staff and an array of services to help students achieve their personal, academic and professional goals. See: [Academic Support & Engagement - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact, Heidi Van Galen, Department Manager, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84963 or e-mail yangalen@uwo.ca.