

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

Tuesdays, 2:30-4:30pm, Lawson 2270C
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).

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 (historygradchair@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):

- The use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT is discouraged in this course and is permitted only for activities such as brainstorming and refining ideas or checking grammar and style. Beyond that, you are not to make use of such tools in the writing of course assignments. **All writing submitted in this course must be your own.** (If in doubt, please ask me for clarification.)

Academic 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: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual Course Outlines 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>).

NOTE: See Policies and Statements on the Graduate section of the History Department Website, https://history.uwo.ca/graduate/program_information/graduate_policies_and_statements.html. This includes additional information on academic support services for health and wellness and gender based sexual violence. You can also find information on other academic policies, including copyright, plagiarism, and accessibility.

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

