

HISTORY 3723F
The Anthropocene
History of a Human Planet
Fall 2020

online asynchronous course with lecture & seminar components



Robyn Woolston, Habitus art installation, Edge Hill University, 2003

Instructor: **Prof. Alan MacEachern**
Office Hours: **Wednesdays 2:30-4:00 via Zoom, or by appointment**
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This is the FINAL syllabus, September 2020.

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.

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.

This is an asynchronous online course with lecture and seminar components.

Prerequisite(s):

1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above.

Learning outcomes:

By the course's completion, 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,
- situate local and national environmental issues in a global context,
- 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, and
- improve their skills in communicating ideas and arguments through class discussion and written assignments.

Course Materials:

There is no required textbook. Course material is available on the course OWL site and/or through the Western Libraries system.

Methods of Evaluation:

Further information on all assignments will be provided on OWL.

- ***Annotations & Forum discussions – 3% x 10 (of 12) = 30%***

Each week, you will annotate the assigned readings with comments and questions (using the Hypothes.is tool on OWL) and contribute to Forum discussions (also on OWL) and be graded out of 3. You will be graded on all 12 weeks, and your top 10 grades will go toward your final mark.

- ***Past & Present – 5%***

Once during the term, by Monday noon you will provide the class with a link to a news article, video, social media content, etc. that relates the historical material being discussed that week to the

situation today. You will introduce this item – expressly drawing the connections you see between past and present – with either a 250-word text or a 3-minute video.

- ***Exhibiting the Anthropocene – an assignment in stages***

Imagine a museum of the future curating a historical exhibit about today. This class is going to create such an exhibit online.

- ***Proposal & annotated bibliography – due 12 October – 10%***

Each student will select an object that exemplifies the Anthropocene. For this, the first stage of the assignment, you will submit a 250-word explanation of why your object is well-suited for the exhibit, plus an annotated bibliography with a minimum 6 sources that you plan to use in your essay about the object.

- ***Essay – due 9 November – 22%***

You will write a 2000-2500 word historical research essay about your object and its place in the Anthropocene.

- ***Exhibit photo & text – due 30 November – 8%***

You will present their object (or find or take a photograph of the object) and write a maximum 250-word display label for the exhibit.

This assignment is based on the 2018 book *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, which will be discussed in class. In preparation for the assignment, students will read the book’s “Preface” and “The Manual Pesticide Spray Pump.”

- ***Take-home exam – December exam period – 25%***

The Registrar’s Office will post an exam schedule by mid-October. A take-home examination will be distributed on OWL 7 days prior to the Registrar-assigned exam slot, to be completed and submitted on OWL by the Registrar-assigned exam slot. The exam will cover all course material and will consist of short-answer and essay questions.

The fine print:

Students are to submit all written assignments, including the 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 Proposal & Annotated Bibliography and the Essay assignments have a built-in, blanket extension: they can be submitted without penalty up to 7 days after they are due. (However, no extensions will be granted for any reason if requested beyond the original due date.) Beyond that, there will be a 5% deduction per day,

including weekends. Given the nature of the Exhibit assignment, there can be no extensions for it; there will be a 5% deduction per day, including weekends, if submitted late. All assignments must be submitted, by 14 December, in order to pass the course.

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.

Course Schedule & Readings:

- 1. week of 14 September **Introductions**
 - Watch [Anthropocene: The Human Epoch](#) (Edward Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal, and Nick DePencier, directors, 2018) through Weldon Library “Kanopy” database.
 - Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin [henceforth, Lewis and Maslin], Introduction, “The Meaning of the Anthropocene,” *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (2018).
- 2. week of 21 September **Introducing the Anthropocene**
 - Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *Global Change Newsletter* 41(2000), 17-18.
 - Lewis and Maslin, ch.1, “The Hidden History of the Anthropocene.”
- 3. week of 28 September **The case for an early Anthropocene**
 - Lewis and Maslin, ch.4, “Farming, the First Energy Revolution.”
 - 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.
- 4. week of 5 October **Energy transitions (additions)**
 - Lewis and Maslin, ch.6, “Fossil Fuels, the Second Energy Revolution.”
 - 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.

And, in preparation for the exhibit assignment

 - “Preface” and “The Manual Pesticide Spray Pump,” *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, eds. Gregg Mitman, Marco Armiero, and Robert S. Emmett (2018), ix-xiv and 50-8.
- 5. week of 12 October **The Great Divergence & the making of the Third World**

- Lewis and Maslin, ch.5, “Globalization 1.0, The Modern World.”
 - Mike Davis, “A World’s End: Drought, Famine, and Imperialism (1896-1902),” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 10 no.2 (1999), 3-46.
 - Rob Nixon, “Introduction,” *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), 1-44.
- 6. week of 19 October **The discovery of climate change**
 - Spencer Weart, “How Could Climate Change?” and “Discovering a Possibility,” *The Discovery of Global Warming* (2003), 1-38 and 209-10.
 - Leila McNeill, “This Suffrage-Supporting 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.
- 7. week of 26 October **War & the Great Acceleration**
 - 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.
- Week of 2 November **Fall Reading Week – no classes**
- 8. week of 9 November **Food, agriculture, & population**
 - Vaclav Smil, “Nitrogen Cycle and World Food Production,” *World Agriculture* 2 (2011), 9-13.
 - Darrell Bricker and John Ibbotson, “Preface” and “A Brief History of Population,” *Empty Planet* (2019).
- 9. week of 16 November **Simplicity, diversity, mobility, & extinction**
 - Marc Levinson, “The World the Box Made,” *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (2006), 1-15.
 - Elizabeth Kolbert, “The New Pangaea,” *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014 ed), 193-214.
- 10. week of 23 November **The elephant in the world / Whose Anthropocene?**
 - Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1:1 (2014): 62-9.
 - “‘To Halt Climate Change, We Need an Ecological Leninism’ – An Interview with Andreas Malm,” *Jacobin Magazine*, June 2020.

- 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
- 11. week of 30 November **Growth & its limits**
 - Jeffrey D, Sachs, “Introduction to Sustainable Development” and “Planetary Boundaries,” *The Age of Sustainable Development* (2015), 1-44 and 181-218.
 - 12. week of 7 December **The future of the Anthropocene: hope or nope?**
 - David Wallace-Wells, “Cascades” and “The Anthropic Principle,” *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming* (2019).

Additional Statements

Accommodation for missed assignment deadlines with a Self-Reported Absence:

If a student reports an SRA for an assignment (e.g., an essay) the new due date will be 48 hours after the SRA was submitted. For example, if you complete an SRA on March 19 at 3pm, your new due date will be March 21 at 3pm

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 website:

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 Student Accessibility Services 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

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://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf to read about the University's policy on medical accommodation. 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.

Please visit https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/index.html to view all updated academic policies regarding medical accommodations.

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://www.turnitin.com>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

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 another writer's ideas.

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 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 website:

www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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wiki material, and other course materials publicly and/or for commercial purposes without my written consent.

Health and Wellness

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Use of Electronic Devices

Electronic devices are required for participation in the online portions of this course.

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 vangalen@uwo.ca.