HISTORY 3723F
The Anthropocene
History of a Human Planet
Fall 2024

Instructor: Prof. Alan MacEachern
Email: amaceach@uwo.ca
Office: Department of History, Lawson Hall 2268
Office Hours: Mondays 9:30-11:30 or by appointment

This is a summer 2024 DRAFT syllabus.
Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for the final version.
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, others to as much as 8000 years ago – but, regardless, the concept offers a new way of conceiving human history.

History 3723 – an in-person course with lecture and seminar components – 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, and explores ideas to create a more intentional Anthropocene to ensure people’s and the planet’s survival.

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 Brightspace site and/or through the Western Libraries system.

Methods of Evaluation:
Further information on all assignments will be provided on OWL Brightspace & in class
Participation, including “Past & Present” assignment – 30%

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.

Once during the term, each student will place on the OWL site – at least 1 day prior to class – a news article, a link to a short video or social media content, or another contemporary item that relates to the week’s topic and/or readings. In class they will introduce this piece, drawing the connection between past and present, and open things up for discussion.

• 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.

  o Proposal & annotated bibliography – due 11 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.

  o Essay – due 8 November – 25%
    You will write a 2000-2500-word historical research essay about your object and its place in the Anthropocene.

  o Exhibit photo & text – due 22 November – 10%
    You will find or take a photograph of your 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.”

• Final examination – December exam period – 25%

The 3-hour exam will cover all course material and will consist of short-answer and essay questions.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Absences, Late Assignments, & Course-specific Policies:
• All assignments, with the exception of the Past & Present presentation, have a built-in, blanket extension: they can be submitted without penalty up to 3 days after they are due. (No further extensions will be granted if requested after the original due date.) Beyond that, there will be a 5% deduction per day, including weekends. No assignments will be accepted after 6 December and all assignments must be submitted to pass the course.

• Students are to submit assignments through the course OWL site in Microsoft Word – not as an Adobe PDF, please – preferably with a file name “Last name assignment” (ex. “Smith proposal”). There is no need to submit a paper copy.

• The Faculty of Social Science’s policy statement on plagiarism and the use of plagiarism detection software is outlined in the History Department’s Undergraduate Policies and Statements page.

• 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.)

Course Schedule & Readings:
1. 6 Sept  Introductions
   o Watch Anthropocene: The Human Epoch (Edward Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal, and Nick DePencier, directors, 2018) through Weldon Library Criterion on Demand database.

2. 13 Sept  Introducing the Anthropocene
   o Lewis and Maslin, ch.1, “The Hidden History of the Anthropocene.”

3. 20 Sept  The case for an early Anthropocene
   o Lewis and Maslin, ch.4, “Farming, the First Energy Revolution.”

4. 27 Oct  Energy transitions additions
o Lewis and Maslin, ch.6, “Fossil Fuels, the Second Energy Revolution.”
And, in preparation for the exhibit assignment

5. 4 Oct  The Great Divergence & the making of the Third World
Proposal & annotated bibliography due

6. 11 Oct  The discovery of climate change
o Leila McNeill, “This Suffrage-Supporting Scientist Defined the Greenhouse Effect but Didn’t Get the Credit, Because Sexism,” Smithsonian.com, 5 December 2016.
o Kyla Mandel, “This Woman Fundamentally Changed Climate Science – and You’ve Probably Never Heard of Her,” ThinkProgress.org, 18 May 2018.

Fall Reading Week – no classes

7. 25 Oct  War & the Great Acceleration

8. 1 Nov  Food, agriculture, & population
9. **8 Nov**  
**Simplicity, diversity, mobility, & extinction**

*Essay due*


10. **15 Nov**  
**Growth & its limits**


11. **22 Nov**  
**Whose Anthropocene?**

*Exhibit photo & text due*

- David Wallace-Wells, “What If We Had Spent the Money On Climate?” 2022.

12. **29 Nov**  
[to be determined]

13. **6 Dec**  
**The future of the Anthropocene: hope or nope?**


**Additional Statements**

Please review the Department of History’s shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at [history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html](http://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.