

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



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

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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.

○ ***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.

○ ***Essay – due 8 November – 25%***

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

○ ***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**
 - Watch *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (Edward Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal, and Nick DePencier, directors, 2018) through Weldon Library [Criterion on Demand](#) 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. 13 Sept **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. 20 Sept **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. 27 Oct **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. 4 Oct **The Great Divergence & the making of the Third World**

Proposal & annotated bibliography due

- 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. 11 Oct **The discovery of climate change**

- Spencer Weart, “How Could Climate Change?” and “Discovering a Possibility,” *The Discovery of Global Warming* (2003), 1-38.
- 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.

Fall Reading Week – no classes

7. 25 Oct **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.

8. 1 Nov **Food, agriculture, & population**

- Vaclav Smil, “Understanding Food Production,” *How the World Really Works* (2022).
- Darrell Bricker and John Ibbotson, “Preface” and “A Brief History of Population,” *Empty Planet* (2019).

9. 8 Nov **Simplicity, diversity, mobility, & extinction**

Essay due

- Luke Keough, “The Wardian Case: Environmental Histories of a Box for Moving Plants,” *Environment and History* (2019), 219-44.
- Elizabeth Kolbert, “The New Pangaea,” *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014 ed), 193-214.

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

- Jeremy Caradonna, “Eco Nomics,” *Sustainability: A History* (2014), 112-35.
- Jeffrey D. Sachs, “Introduction to Sustainable Development,” *The Age of Sustainable Development* (2015), 1-44.

11. 22 Nov **Whose Anthropocene?**

Exhibit photo & text due

- Andreas Malm, “Corona and Climate,” *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the 21st Century* (2020).
- David Wallace-Wells, “What If We Had Spent the Money On Climate?” 2022.
- Alan MacEachern, “The Alanthropocene,” *NiCHE-Canada.org* blog, January 2018.
- Sean Kheraj, “Culpability and Canada’s Anthropocene: A Response,” *NiCHE-Canada.org* blog, January 2018.

12. 29 Nov [to be determined]

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

- David Wallace-Wells, “Cascades” and “The Anthropoc Principle,” *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming* (2019).

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 for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.