

**HISTORY 3723G**  
**The Anthropocene**  
**History of a Human Planet**  
**Winter 2027**

**Fridays 10:30-12:30, location TBA**



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

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Office Hours: **Mondays 9:30-11:30**

**>>This is a DRAFT syllabus, May 2026.<<**

**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 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):**

Registration in 3<sup>rd</sup> year or above, any module.

### **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 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 – 20%***

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.

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

Students will research and write an [ArcGIS StoryMap](#) to explore how a place in the world has experienced the Anthropocene.

- **Proposal & annotated bibliography – due 5 February – 10%**

For the first stage of the assignment, you are to submit a 250-word description of the place you have chosen – a metropolis? a park or natural area? an industrial site? your hometown? – and why it is well-suited for showcasing change during the Anthropocene. You are also to provide an annotated bibliography of 5 sources (100 words per entry = 500 words) that you plan to use in chronicling a history of the place.

- **StoryMap – due 2 April– 35%**

You will create a StoryMap, based on historical research, that explores your chosen place's experience of the Anthropocene. Note that you are not just describing the place's current environmental situation, but chronicling how it has gotten there. How has the relationship between people and the place changed over time, and how has this changed the place and the people? How does its history exemplify the Anthropocene. Your StoryMap should have 2000-2500 words of text; there is no set limit on the number of photos, maps, etc. you may choose to include.

- **Final exam – April exam period – 35%**

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

Make-up exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see the History Department's [Undergraduate Policies and Statements](#) page for procedures and requirements involving make-up exams.

### **Course-specific Policies:**

- 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.
- Students are to submit all assignments through the course Brightspace page. Please submit them in Microsoft Word, preferably with a file name "[Last name], [assignment]" – ex. "Smith, proposal." There is no need to submit a paper copy.
- All course assignments must be completed to pass the course, and all must be submitted by 9 April.

### **Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI):**

As the linguist Emily M. Bender has noted, teachers don't ask students to write essays because the world needs more student essays. The point of writing essays is to strengthen students' critical-thinking skills; in the same way that lifting weights is useful no matter what sport an athlete plays, writing essays develops skills necessary for whatever job a college student will eventually get. Using ChatGPT to complete assignments is like

bringing a forklift into the weight room; you will never improve your cognitive fitness that way.

~ Ted Chiang, "[Why AI Isn't Going to Make Art](#)," *The New Yorker*, 2024.

A principal goal of a course such as this is to help you improve your research and writing. If you let generative AI do the work in your place, you will not learn, and you will never do the work as well as AI does – which itself can be a low bar.

In this course, while it is recognized that you may be using AI to brainstorm, generate outlines, proofread your drafts, etc., **the writing submitted must be your own**. If you do use generative AI, you are expected to reference it and describe its use in your foot/endnotes. Failure to do so will be considered a breach of academic integrity and a form of academic misconduct. If you have questions about this policy, please speak to me.

I encourage students to take the [Academic Integrity Tutorial](#) on Brightspace to understand Western's expectations around academic integrity.

## Course Schedule & Readings:

1. 8 January                    **Introductions**
  - Watch *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (directors Edward Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal, and Nick DePencier, 2018) through Weldon Library [Criterion on Demand](#) database.
  
2. 15 January                    **Introducing the Anthropocene**
  - Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene,'" *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000), 17-18.
  - Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin [henceforth, Lewis and Maslin], Introduction, "The Meaning of the Anthropocene" and ch.1, "The Hidden History of the Anthropocene," *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (2018).
  
3. 22 January                    **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.
  - And, in preparation for the Mapping the Anthropocene assignment, look through the [ArcGIS Project Gallery](#) for the sort of exhibit we might create.
  
4. 29 January                    **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.

5. 5 February                    **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.

6. 12 February                    **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.

**Reading Week – no class**

7. 26 February                    **War & the Great Acceleration**

- Sunil Amrith, “War on Earth,” and “Freedom’s Promise,” *The Burning Earth: A History* (2024).
- Jan Zalasiewicz et al, “When Did the Anthropocene Begin? A Mid-Twentieth Century Boundary Level Is Stratigraphically Optimal,” *Quaternary International* 383 (2015), 196–203.

8. 5 March                            **Food, agriculture, & population**

- Darrell Bricker and John Ibbotson, “Preface” and “A Brief History of Population,” *Empty Planet* (2019).
- W.E. Rees, “The Human Ecology of Overshoot: Why a Major ‘Population Correction’ Is Inevitable,” *World 4* (2023), 509-27.
- Larry Borowsky, “Telling a Story in 100 Words: Effective Label Copy,” AASLH Technical Leaflet #240; and B. Erin Cole, “[I Am a Historian I Make Exhibits](#),” *Contingent Magazine*, 2019.

9. 12 March                            **Simplicity, diversity, mobility, & extinction**

[Essay due](#)

- Elizabeth Kolbert, “The New Pangaea,” *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014 ed), 193-214.
- Anna Tsing, “Others Without History,” in *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene: The New Nature*, ed. Anna Tsing et al. (2024), 129-44.

10. 19 March **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.

**Good Friday, 26 March – no class**

*Note: 30 March is the last day to drop His3723 without academic penalty.*

11. 2 April **Whose Anthropocene?**

**Exhibit photo(s) & text due**

- Andreas Malm, “Corona and Climate,” *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2020).
- Alan MacEachern, “[The Alanthropocene](#),” *NiCHE* blog, January 2018.
- Sean Kheraj, “[Culpability and Canada’s Anthropocene: A Response](#),” *ActiveHistory* blog, January 2018.

12. 9 April **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**

Please review the Department of History’s shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://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.