

HISTORY 9833A
Environmental History:
People & Nature Through Time
Fall 2025

Instructor: Prof. Alan MacEachern

Office hours, Mondays, 9:30-11:30am, Lawson 2268

Email: amaceach@uwo.ca

this is a summer 2025 DRAFT syllabus

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, this course traces a global environmental history, with special emphasis on the concept of the Anthropocene – the era in which humans have made intense and effectively permanent environmental changes on a global scale.

Learning Outcomes / Objectives:

By the end of the term, students should be able to

- Identify major concepts, debates, and methodologies in environmental history,
- Consider contemporary environmental issues from a historical perspective,
- Conceptualize, research, and present in written or other form a major project in environmental history.

Course Timeline & Format:

This is an in-person seminar course. The timeline is as detailed in “Course Schedule & Readings,” below.

Enrollment Restrictions:

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in History, as well as any student who has obtained special permission from the instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student’s home program. If you are in a department other than History and would like to enroll in the course, please contact History graduate program coordinator Kara Brown (kbrow@uwo.ca).

Course Syllabus:

No previous courses in or familiarity with environmental history is required. Attendance and participation in all class sessions is expected.

Course Materials:

Methods of Evaluation:

Seminar component

Participation – 30%

This is a seminar course, and student participation is essential to its success.

Writings on readings – 5% x 3 = 15%

Four times during the course, students will be given time in class to answer a question about one of that week's readings. Students' 3 highest grades will count toward their final mark.

Project component

Students are to create a work of environmental history with a primary source component. Students can choose what form the project takes. For example, it may be

- a traditional History essay, advancing toward being an article in a scholarly journal. (If so, it must be written as if for a specific journal, in accordance with that journal's submission guidelines, and be at least 2/3 the length of the journal's minimum word-count requirement.)
- an [ArcGIS StoryMap](#). (If so, it must be set to the Public setting and be of 4000 words or more, plus images and, potentially, maps.)
- one or multiple episodes of a podcast, the plans for a museum exhibit, a series of blogposts,

In keeping with the course, the project may be on any period and place in history, and any topic big or small. Bear in mind the importance of having a manageable topic as well as an available and manageable source base. Importantly, the project must seek to offer an original contribution to knowledge. Students should discuss their proposed project with the instructor.

work-in-progress – 23 or 30 Oct – 5%

In a Brightspace Discussion at least 24 hours in advance of class, students will provide a 250-500-word description of their work-in-progress project, being sure to raise any issues they are facing. In class, they will lead a short discussion of their work-in-progress to seek input for improvement.

submitted final project – 27 Nov – 40%

Students may submit a draft – even what they hope to be the final draft – of their project until 13 Nov, and I will return it with comments and a provisional grade by 20 Nov. They may accept that grade or resubmit the project by 27 Nov.

reflective practice essay – 4 Dec – 10%

Students are to write a 750-word essay, reflecting on the process of creating their

project.

***The fine print:**

All assignments will be discussed further in class.

Written work – final essay, StoryMap script, etc – is to be submitted through the Brightspace site in Microsoft Word (not as a PDF), preferably with a file name “Last name assignment” (ex. “Smith essay”). There is no need to submit a paper copy for any assignment.

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.

If submitted late, the image essay and research papers are penalized 5% per day. The final date to submit material for the course is 15 April. All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

Course Schedule & Readings:

1. 4 Sept – Introductions

- To give you a sense of my conception of environmental history: Alan MacEachern, [The Miramichi Fire: A History](#) (2020), prologue, introduction, & conclusion (xi-13 & 177-83).

2. 11 Sept – 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.
- Etienne S. Benson, *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms* (2020), introduction, ch.5, & conclusion (1-16, 135-62, & 193-213).

3. 18 Sept – 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. 25 Sept – 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. 2 Oct – 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.

6. 9 Oct – Climate

- Sam White, [A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America](#) (2017), introduction, ch.1 & 9, & conclusion.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," [Critical Inquiry](#) 35 no.2 (2009), 197-222.
- Jo Guldi, "The Climate Emergency Demands a New Kind of History," *Isis* 113 no.2 (June 2022), 352-65.

7. 16 Oct – 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.

8. 23 Oct – (Environmental) History as Literature // 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.

9. 30 Oct – works-in-progress

Reading Week

10. 13 Nov – 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.

11. 20 Nov – 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.

12. 27 Nov – Animals

- 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.

13. 4 Dec - Where to from Here?

- Anna Tsing, "Histories," part 3 of *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene: The New Nature*, eds. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena, and Feifei Zhou (2024), 125-92.
- Christof Mauch, [*Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear*](#) (2019).
- Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (2016).

Additional Statements

Health/Wellness Services:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their graduate chair, or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html

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.

Requests for Accommodation / 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):

All writing submitted in this course must be your own. You may experiment with generative AI tools for educational purposes, but such tools should not otherwise be used for writing assignments in this course. Any use of such tools must be clearly acknowledged and explained.

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 www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.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>).

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 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.

Note: See also Policies and Statements on the Graduate section of the History Department website, history.uwo.ca/graduate/program_information/graduate_policies_and_statements.html. This includes information on other academic policies, including copyright, plagiarism, financial aid, and food resources.