

HISTORY 3723F
The Anthropocene

History of a Human Planet
Fall 2022

Tuesdays, 1:30-4:30pm, location **tba**
in-person course



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

Instructor: **Prof. Alan MacEachern**

Office Hours: **Tuesdays 9:00-11:00am or by appointment**

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This is a DRAFT syllabus, June 2022.
Please see your course OWL site for the final syllabus.

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

The intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, but should the COVID-19 landscape shift, the course will be delivered on-line synchronously (ie, on Zoom at the times indicated in the timetable). The grading scheme will not change. The course will return to an in-person mode of delivery when the University and local health authorities deem it safe to do so.

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 – 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 in particular, 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 site and/or through the Western Libraries system.

Methods of Evaluation:

Further information on all assignments will be provided on OWL.

- **Annotations of readings – 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 be graded out of 3. You will be graded on all 12 weeks, and your top 10 grades will go toward your final mark.

- **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 – 22%**

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

- **Exhibit photo & text – due 29 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."

- **Final examination – December exam period – 30%**

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

Students are to submit all written assignments in electronic form through the course OWL site.

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 photo & text 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 16 December, in order to pass the course.

Course Schedule & Readings:

- 1. 13 Sept **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. 20 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. 27 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. 4 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. 11 Oct **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. 18 Oct **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. 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.
- Week of 31 Oct **Fall Reading Week – no classes**
- 8. 8 Nov **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. 15 Nov **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. 22 Nov **The elephant in the world / Whose Anthropocene?**
 - Andreas Malm, “Corona and Climate,” from *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the 21st Century* (New York: Verso, 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. 29 Nov **Growth & its limits**
 - Jeffrey D, Sachs, “Introduction to Sustainable Development,” *The Age of Sustainable Development* (2015), 1-44.

- 12. 6 Dec **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 [Course Must-Knows document](#), for additional information regarding:

- Academic Offences
- Accessibility Options
- Medical Issues
- Plagiarism
- Scholastic Offences
- Copyright
- Health and Wellness

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