

**HISTORY 4708G (001)**  
**Histories of the Circumpolar Norths: “The Last Imaginary Places”**  
**Winter 2024**

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This is a **draft** syllabus. Please see the course site on OWL for a final version.

**Course Description:**

This course examines the circumpolar Norths - Alaska, Kalaallit Nunaat, Nunavut, Siberia, Saami homelands and more. These regions have long been coveted by resource-hungry southerners and home to "Northerners", Indigenous and otherwise. Coverage includes indigenous lives, southern imperialism, and how various Norths were conceived and re-conceived in the South.

**Prerequisite(s):**

2.0 courses in History at the 2200 level or above.

**Course Syllabus:**

This course examines the history of regions long imagined as *Ultima Thule* -- the circumpolar norths – a huge swath of land, water and ice including but not limited to Alaska; the Yukon and Northwest Territories, provincial norths and Nunavut in Canada; Kalaallit Nunaat; Iceland, the Faroes, Svalbards; the Saami & settler homelands of Scandinavia and the taiga and polar reaches of “northern” and Siberian Russia.

These northern regions are considered both from “south looking north” and “north as homeland” perspectives. For Indigenous or long-term “settler society”, the circumpolar north was home – a complex place of diverse peoples and cultures who nonetheless shared many characteristics. For the temporary sojourner from the south, the norths were “exotic” places offering resource wealth to be taken home.

Beginning with a brief examination of “imagined” and physical norths, this course then introduces Indigenous societies and impositions by more peopled southern states. Southern approaches are examined, beginning with feeble, often fatal explorations followed by more influential economic, spiritual, judicial, political-administrative and environmental impacts.

Southern culture, too, pushed north, although the norths also “pushed back,” with real *and* imagined norths serving as national symbols like the “True North Strong and Free.”

The course then considers more recent norths. While resource exploitation persisted, by the Second World War the Norths were deemed strategically important; increased foreign policy attention led to the persistent southern insistence on “our” norths, attitudes persisting in recent claims of the Arctic Ocean and even the North Pole! Such insistence contrasted with new attitudes toward Indigenous peoples that gradually challenged southern control: self-determination, land claims, and more. International goals and resulting tensions also come into play; today, for instance, China is a prominent factor in the Norths despite what geography might suggest.

In the end, then, students should better grasp the multilayered histories of the circumpolar norths, moving beyond imagined places to regions influenced by and influencing global history. These are large goals for a half-course -- the project relies heavily upon you and your classmates – I will **expect informed student participation on a regular basis**. Given the breadth and challenge of the coverage, that discussion should be enlightening.

**Course Materials: TENTATIVE**

**Texts** [tentative – most reading via OWL]

Charles Emmerson. *The Future History of the Arctic*. Public Affairs Publishers. 2010.

Shelagh Grant. *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2010.

John McCannon. *A History of the Arctic: Nature, Exploration and Exploitation*, 2010. Reaktion.

**Course Evaluation: TENTATIVE**

Participation	25 %
Seminar “Lead” [including notes]	10
Comparative Northern Approaches Paper	10
Essay Topic Proposal	5
Essay	35
Final Exam [take home]	15

**Students must receive at least 40% for Participation/Lead work and submit both course essays and Final exam paper to pass the course, notwithstanding other grades.**

Make-up exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Extensions for late papers / other work worth less than 10 % will only be available for reasons deemed suitable under the regulations established by the University. See the information at the end of this paragraph. Be sure to consult with the Professor **as soon as possible**. Longer absences or missed work of greater mark value will require documentation be submitted by the student directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office and not to the instructor. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted. For more detail: Social Science Academic Counselling on [Absence & Academic Consideration](#), the university's policies on [Academic Consideration for Medical Illness](#), and the Department of History's own [Undergraduate Policies and Statements](#)

### Course Schedule and Readings: **TENTATIVE**

#### Section One: Introduction to the Circumpolar North

1. Introduction: North as Concept [in the South]
2. At Home in Northern Environments
3. "Circumpolarity" – Where and whose "North" – Southern reconsiderations?

#### Section Two: Norths in Evolution

4. Contacts from the South - Southern Incursions through the 18th Century
5. "Crusades": Southern Imperialism: 1800 – 1880
6. Seizing Fuller Control – Dealing with the Norths 1880-1945 [3 weeks]
  - a) Taking "Formal" Control
  - b) Taking Practical Control
  - c) The Second World War and the Norths

#### Section Three: The Circumpolar Norths since 1945

7. Expanding Administration / Exploitation of the Norths [2 weeks]
  - a) Cold War and Continuing Foreign Policy Struggles
  - b) Continued Government Impositions, Public and Private Exploitation and Consequences
8. Toward New Norths ?
9. Original Peoples & Modern Norths
10. Discussion of Essays / Conclusions.

## **Additional Statements**

### **Use of Electronic Devices:**

No electronic devices will be permissible for use for the Final examination. Use in lectures at the discretion of the professor – objectionable or distracting use forbidden.

### **Office Hours:**

Each week I will be available for student questions and concerns. Hours tba but likely immediately following class or by appointment.

### **Use of generative AI tools:**

As with earlier technologies like Google or the much more resilient technology known as the book, students will like turn to generative AI tools like ChatGPT. This use is permitted IF the purpose is early development of content, refining ideas, and organization. Such use **must** be cited with proper documentation in the final paper. Moreover, that final submission **must reflect YOUR ideas and writing**. Submission of work done by “others” – technological or human, is not permitted. Given the “ideas from class” format of much of the work, your own work will be, in the end, a better choice. Should the University provide a campus-wide policy concerning AI, these broader policies will replace the above statements.

### **Important Department Policy Note:**

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.