

Learning Goals

Often in historical studies the environment or nature has been ignored or seen as merely the stage upon which history takes place. This course will consider how the natural environment including geology, geography, ecology, soil types, water sources, mineral resources, climate, disease, and wildlife influenced human actions, and were in turn affected by humans. Environmental history incorporates the analysis categories of class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and region. The ways people imagine, perceive, think about, act upon, and react to the environment are influenced by cultural, social, political, and economic factors. As we progress through the course, you will develop an interpretation of environmental history based on the reading, class discussions, and other assignments.

The course will explore several historical categories as we read and analyze primary and secondary source materials from pre-colonial Native Americans through the late 20th century. First, we will examine the inter-relationship between nature and humans including the influence of people's actions on the ecology of a place--such as subsistence agriculture, herding, fur trapping, logging, ranching, mining, industrial activities, urban growth and the reciprocal influence of geography, geology, soils, water, and other natural resources on humans.

Second, we will investigate how people have perceived and thought about the environment. Ideas about the gender of nature, the concept of wilderness, the use or conservation of natural resources, the preservation and national park ideas, altering nature with dams, global warming and population growth will be examined.

Third, we will study the politics and economy of environmental history including laissez faire, utilitarian, conservation, and preservation perspectives that may result in the exploitation of the environment or some mode of sustainable use. How, for instance, did the rapid deforestation of New England in the colonial era change the landscape, alter the climate, affect the streams and fish? And how, then, did people deal with what had occurred?

Fourth, we will consider class, ethnic, race, religion, gender and regional views and actions upon the environment. For example, we will explore how the various Southern plantation types of agriculture--tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar-- affected the ecology and sociology of the people. Then we will compare that with farming in other regions of the nation.

Historical Knowledge

This course will cover familiar territory of U.S. history from pre-colonial people, European entry, slavery and African American experiences, the revolution and early national era, continental exploration, settlement of the various frontiers, Manifest Destiny, industrialization, urbanization, the Great Depression, post World War II affluence, the Cold War and the late 20th century. However, these issues will be studied from a new perspective of taking the environment into account. The course involves the historical comprehension of "links between past and present" as students discover through study and research how the environment influenced and was influenced by people in the past, and how humans shaped the environment in which we live now. The course also develops an understanding of "broad patterns of historical development in both the pre-modern and modern world." This course results in the discovery of many dynamic themes in American environmental history including: Wilderness as Evil and Forbidding to Wilderness as Spiritual Sanctuary; Abundance of Natural Resources versus Limits on Natural

Resources; Nature as Female to be Exploited versus Nature as Mother Earth to be Preserved; Utilitarian Economics versus Preservation Aesthetics; Progress versus Preservation; Environmental Discrimination versus Environmental Justice; Unlimited or Laissez Faire Development versus Sustainable Development.

Historical Thinking

U. S. Environmental History examines themes such as “the story in history and the relationship between historical narrative and myth.” For example, the course investigates the myth that Native Americans lived in ecological harmony with the earth and explores the historical reality of Native Americans’ relationship with nature. The course takes into account “the broad cast of historical actors, women and men, elites and ordinary people, classes and ethnic groups---and their role in making history.” The perceptions and actions of women, men, slaves, workers, and immigrants’ views of and actions upon nature will be considered and evaluated. The course addresses “key historical concepts, such as causation, chronology, sequence and consequence, and their place in analyzing the interplay of change and continuity over time.” The course looks at human actions as they were permitted or constrained by ecological factors and explores how human decisions changed the environment. For example, how did the damming of most of the West’s rivers change the ecology of the region, feed urban growth in the West, and create a water empire, as one historian called it?

Historical Skills

By employing a wide range of evidence and disciplinary methods, students will construct an interpretation of America’s environmental past. They will make use of the critical skills historical study teaches including reading secondary sources for the argument, primary research, analysis and communication--written and oral. They will learn to assess primary documents including maps and how to use them to create a narrative analysis of a specific topic. Through individual reading, inquiry, research, thought, and writing students will gain knowledge about the course material. The process will be aided by the professor’s lectures, slides, and interpretations and in-class seminar discussions and presentations.

Student Assessment

The course will employ various teaching methods including, lecture, discussion, small group work and individual research, writing and oral presentation activities. Various assignments will reach the multiple learning styles of the students. To keep students reading, thinking and participating, short writing assignments in the form of in-class quizzes, reaction papers, and short essay assignments will be administered throughout the semester.

A larger research project using interdisciplinary primary sources augmented by secondary material will provide the students the opportunity and challenge of doing environmental history. The professor will assist the students in choosing, organizing and focusing on a particular topic through three stages of planning, research and writing including a short formal proposal essay, an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and the final paper. The instructor will provide written comments and guidance at each stage making it possible for each student to have a successful research experience. The final exam will include maps, geographical and historical knowledge assessment.

Learning Activities

Environmental History challenges the student to see history from a different perspective, to consider the human/environment interaction over time in various geographical and chronological periods. Through the study of the course material and individual research, students will broaden their understanding of how the environment and human lives have changed over time. They will see how the environment was manipulated by people to create various cultural/social/political entities. They will be able to compare and contrast how people in different geographic regions were influenced by environmental limits and how they came to live productive lives within those limits. Students will identify themes explain the continuities and changes in those themes from the colonial period to the present. The course uses various disciplinary approaches, theoretical influences, methodological debates, and historiographical controversies. The main text opens with a discussion of conflicting historiographical and theoretical approaches to Environmental History study and carries these arguments throughout the course. The interdisciplinary nature of the course requires student researchers to use traditional historical sources such as journals, diaries, government documents, newspapers, legal cases, and oral interviews. They also will learn to use non-traditional sources borrowed from other disciplines including maps, photographs, art, archaeological data, scientific reports, soil surveys and more. It makes for exciting and challenging research. Ultimately students will learn to think historically while considering how the consequences of decisions made in the past about the environment affect their lives and regions presently.

Course Description

This course is an historical study of the interaction between humans and the environment from the pre-colonial era to the present in the United States. The interdisciplinary nature of the subject makes it interesting and valuable to scholars in many fields. In fact, understanding environmental history often requires some knowledge of the sciences, geography, anthropology, archaeology, and sociology or access to experts in these fields. This course will look at a wide range of environmental history topics from Native American relationships with nature, the Romantic era of art and literature, agriculture and the environment to urban pollution issues in the late 20th century.

Required Texts

Carolyn Merchant. *Major Problems in American Environmental History*. Heath. 1993.

We will study this book to provide you with a thorough understanding of the various topics, themes, and arguments in environmental history from the pre-colonial era to the present.

The following four monographs will allow you to use your new knowledge to focus on specific issues in the field—wetlands, wildlife, wilderness, nuclear issues, and environmental justice.

Andrew C. Isenberg. *The Destruction of the Bison*. Cambridge University Press, 2000

Ann Vileisis. *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands*. Island Press, 1997.

Diane Wilson. *An Unreasonable Woman*. Chelsea Green Publishing Co. 2005.

Craig E. Colton. *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*. LSU Press, 2005.

Students will develop and improve historical analytical skills through the reading assignments, research writing projects, and oral presentation opportunities in this course. You must use all required books and do all assignments to successfully complete this course. Other readings may be handed out in class or put on reserve. Keep up with the reading!

Course Format

The course will include lecture, discussion, group, and individual projects and assignments. This course requires advanced preparation and participation in the discussions. Attendance is important. The professor will notify any student who is not performing in an intellectually responsible manner. The discussion and small group portions of the course will not happen without being prepared, willing, enthusiastic members. Preparation includes reading all material and taking notes prior to class to facilitate discussion. Attendance is crucial. To ensure regular participation, pop quizzes or in-class reaction papers over the readings will be possible at the beginning of each class. If you come in late, you will miss the quiz. Quizzes are to keep you reading and help you focus for the class discussion. Evaluation will be based on the quality not the quantity of your scholarly, collegial, pertinent comments and analysis of the material under consideration. Talking just to hear your head rattle, or to cover for not being prepared will not be rewarded. Points may be deducted for poor work in class, chronic lateness, sleeping, etc.

Absences

Since the course requires the alert presence of students, 5 points will be deducted from the Participation grade for each class missed no matter the excuse. Plan wisely.

Final Research Paper Project

All students will do a research project using interdisciplinary primary sources augmented by secondary material. You will learn by doing environmental history. The professor will assist the students in choosing, organizing, and focusing on a particular topic

The Project Paper:

The final paper should be 8-10 pages double spaced using Kate L. Turabian's Guide (Chicago Manual of Style) to document your work. Good writing demands many drafts and revisions. Write and rewrite, then have someone proofread it. Use spell check and the writing lab if necessary. Maintain a file of research materials, notes, and Xeroxed sources to be turned in with the project paper. No late papers accepted. Plan accordingly.

Plagiarism

Do not attempt to gain academic advantage through dishonest means. Do not submit a work for credit that includes words, ideas, data, or creative work of others without acknowledging the source. When using another author's words, enclose them in quotation marks and cite the source appropriately. Read the college's Academic Integrity Policy in the student handbook or on the web.

Grades will be based on an average of the following:

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| Participation, active in-class discussion, micro essays and other activities | 100pts |
| Pop Quizzes over Merchant text | 100pts |
| Monograph quizzes for the 4 books 25 points each | 100pts |
| Final Research Project Paper | 100pts . |

Office Hours: by appointment. If you determine that you need academic assistance, contact me immediately. If I cannot help you, I will be glad to refer you to the appropriate service on campus.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

January 17 Introduction

19 Merchant 1
24 Merchant 2 Documents and Essays except for Isenberg essay.
26 Lecture
31 Quiz and discussion of Isenberg, The Destruction of the Bison
2 Merchant 3 Documents and Essays
7 Merchant 4 all
9 Merchant 4 all
14 Merchant 5 all
16 Merchant 6 all
21 Merchant 7 all
23 Merchant 8 all
28 Merchant 8 all
1 Merchant 9 all
March 6-10 Spring Break
14 Merchant 10 all
16 Merchant 11 all
21 video
23 video
28 Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape*, Quiz and discussion
30 Merchant 12 all
4 No class, community service day
6 Lecture
11 Diane Wilson, *An Unreasonable Woman*, Quiz and discussion
13 Merchant 13, all
18 Merchant 14, all
20 Merchant 15, all
25 Lecture
27 Craig E. Colton, *An Unnatural Metropolis*, Quiz and discussion
Final Paper During Finals Week as scheduled by the college..
The Syllabus is subject to change at the professor's discretion.