American Environmental History  
History 3550

Bulletin Description: Environmental history in the US from colonial times to the present.

Description of the Course and Its Goals:
American Environmental History is an introduction into the study of the natural environment, the way it interacts with our lives, and the way we think about it. Over the semester we will attempt to examine four major themes:

1. How the country’s landscapes and natural resources have helped to shape the American story. We will try to uncover some of the roles “nature” played in early settlement patterns, Indian displacement, early agricultural, natural resource extraction, transportation, and other economic activities.

2. To borrow from two authorities in environmental history, William Cronon and Roderick Nash, we will also devote significant time to an examination of changes wrought in the land over the past several centuries and shifting patterns in the American mind about what constitutes a natural environment and the place humans occupy in it. We will trace these changes by examining subjects like native American use of the land, European colonists, the role of water in the development of the American West, and the growth of the environmental movement.

3. The course will also introduce students to current literature on specific topics of interest to environmental historians: rivers, agricultural practices, and the impact of industrialization and urbanization on the natural ecosystems, especially how American’s have shaped their landscapes, impacted climate, and altered the flora and fauna of backyards and communities.

4. Finally, we will examine a range of contemporary environmental perspectives. Are we: creating an environmental catastrophe, part of a continuing process of change and adaptation or, making wise and reasoned decisions about environmental policy? This will bring us into the realm of environmental activists, and contemporary politics—each group has divergent agendas and schemes to address the sustainability of our culture and lifestyle.

Reading Assignments:
You will be assigned an average of 100 pages of reading per week [some weeks more, some less. You should look ahead and plan accordingly.] I have chosen texts and articles I find to be both interesting and enlightening. The books chosen can be purchased at the AU Bookstore or from various on-line sources. Reading assignments are to be completed on Thursdays unless otherwise noted in the syllabus or in future class announcements.

Required Texts for the Course:
Stephen Pyne, How the Canyon Became Grand  
Marc Reisner, Cadillac Desert  
Rachel Carson, Silent Spring  
Bill McKibben, The End of Nature

Additional Readings:
There will be additional assigned readings on e-reserve and the web

Graded Requirements for the Course [Total points 490]
1. Reading Journal: 50 points

2. Final Project: 100 points
The specifics for this assignment will be discussed generally during the first day of class, and later in detail.

3. Mid-term Exam: 100 points
The exam will cover the readings, class lectures, and discussions up to and including Oct. 2. The exam will consist of brief IDs and essays.
4. Final Exam: 150 points
The exam will cover the readings, class lectures, and discussions from the entire semester with more emphasis on the material since the mid-term. The exam will consist of brief IDs and essays.

5. Quizzes: up to 50 points
To encourage you to keep up with reading, I may give unannounced quizzes over the course of the semester. The quizzes will be given on Thursdays, at the beginning of the discussion sessions. The quizzes will be multiple choice or short answer in nature and will cover the reading assignments for the week.

6. Class Participation: 40 points
The success of this class is highly dependent on participation and the exchange of ideas and perceptions. Participation can take various forms and will be different for each person. Some examples of “participation” include: asking relevant questions, verbally examining a concept or perception, listening actively, and bringing sources like brief articles from the newspaper or a web site to share with the class. Obviously, behaviors like sleeping and talking with your classmates indicates a lack of attention and focus. Likewise, civility in the classroom is crucial to enlightened discussion. Students who show disrespect for the ideas and expressions shared during lectures and discussions will fare poorly in their discussion grade. Grading for class participation is necessarily a subjective assessment. I will gladly discuss with you, during office hours, our assessment of this aspect of your grade during the semester.

Class attendance is required. I will take attendance each class period, partly as a way of learning your names, and partly as a record. Poor attendance (more than 3 unexcused absences) will reduce your participation grade by 2 points per absence.

Final grades will be determined on a 10-point scale: A=90-100% (441-490 pts), B=80-89% (392-440), C=70-79% (343-391), D=60-69% (294-342), F=0-59% (0-293)

Students may withdraw (although with a W on their transcript) until midsemester.

Make-up Exams:
If you miss the mid-term you should make every effort to contact me before the exam. If you cannot do so, contact me immediately after the exam. You must make arrangements for the make-up within one week of the exam, and you may only take a make-up with a valid university excuse.

Please note: There will be no make-up opportunity for the reading quizzes, not even with an authorized excuse. One of the quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the semester. If you miss a quiz, that score will serve as your dropped score.

Due Dates:
1. Reading, papers, and assignments are due, unless otherwise stated, at the beginning of the class period on the date noted in this syllabus.
2. Late assignments will drop the equivalent of one-half letter grade per day.
3. Exceptions to these rules may be made in circumstances beyond the student’s control. Each student must discuss any such circumstance with me.

E-Mail and Telephone Communications:
Auburn University has recognized e-mail as the official form of communication. It is imperative that students in this class regularly check their TigerMail accounts for communications about the course. Student e-mail will be answered within 24 hours, except on weekends or university holidays. E-mail or the telephone cannot be used to discuss grades. If the nature of a student e-mail is too complex to answer electronically, you will be asked to come during office hours or to make an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

Students with Disabilities:
Students needing accommodations should arrange a meeting the first week of class. Come during office hours or email for an alternate time. Bring the Accommodation Memo and Instructor Verification Form to the meeting. Discuss items needed in this class. If you do not have an Accommodation Memo but need special accommodations, make an appointment with The Program for Students with Disabilities, 1244 Haley Center, 844-2096 (V/TT)
Academic Dishonesty:
Cheating, forged excuses, or plagiarism will result in disciplinary action, which can range from a lowered grade, to failing the course. The offense will also be reported to the University Academic Dishonesty Committee, which has the power to remove a student from the university. Students should become familiar with the policies regarding plagiarism in The Tiger Cub. It is very important to understand plagiarism when working on any writing assignment. I will gladly assist any student who is unclear about what constitutes plagiarism.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

PART I: COLONIAL AMERICA

Week 1. Introduction to the Course and Early American Environments
Introduction

Week 2. Old Worlds and New
Reading Assignment:
1. Charles Mann, "America Lost and Found." (http://www7.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0705/feature1/index.html) Note: if this url doesn’t work, go to the National Geographic site and search for the author or title. Be sure to look at the illustrations that go along with the article. There are other interesting add-ons to the electronic article, which you might want to look at.
2. Cronon, chaps. 1-3
Ecological Imperialism
Discuss Mann and Cronon

Week 3. Indians and Settlers
Reading Assignment: Read Cronon, chaps. 5-8
The Ecological Indian
Finish discussion of Cronon; talk about term projects

PART II. MAKING AMERICA BEAUTIFUL: IMAGES OF NATURE AND THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

Week 4. Perceptions and Images
Reading Assignment: How the Canyon Became Grand pp. xi - 101
American images of nature
Discuss reading

Week 5. Paper Discussion Week
All paper proposals (including outline and bibliography) should be submitted to my office.
Individual meetings, NO CLASS
Individual meetings, NO CLASS

Week 6. National Parks
Reading Assignment: How the Canyon Became Grand, pp. 101-161
National Parks
Discuss reading

TURN IN JOURNALS

PART III: NATURAL RESOURCES

Week 7. Industrial Waters
Reading Assignment: [e-reserve] Theodore Steinberg, Nature Incorporated, chap. 4
Early Industry
Discuss Steinberg

Week 8. Exam Week
Exam review
MID-TERM EXAM, BRING A BLUE BOOK (100 points) or blank paper and a stapler.
Week 9. Water 1
Reading Assignment: Marc Reisner, Cadillac Desert, Introduction, chaps . 2-3
Water in the West
Discuss Reisner

Week 10. Water 2
Reading Assignment: Reisner, chaps 10, 12, epilogue
Film: Cadillac Desert
Discuss Reisner

Week 11. Mining and Pumping the Resources of the Earth: Coal
Reading Assignment: Erik Reece [e-reserve]
History of Coal
Film: Matewan and Kill-o-watt Ours

Week 12. Mining and Pumping the Resources of the Earth
Discuss Reece reading
History of Coal, cont.

PART IV: MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Week 13. Environmental Movements
Reading Assignment: Silent Spring, Chaps Chapters 1-3, 8, 17
Rachel Carson and environmental movements
Discuss reading

Week 14: The End of Nature
Reading Assignment: The End of Nature, all
Discuss Part I
Discuss Part II
FINAL PAPERS DUE

Week 15: Sustainability
The new environmentalism
Sustainability

FINAL EXAM: Time and date as listed on university final exam schedule, regular classroom. Bring a bluebook.

Reading Journal: 50 points
You will keep a journal of your reading for the class. Please buy a “lab book” for this purpose. These are bound (not spiral) notebooks approximately 7 x 9 inches in size. You can get them at any of the campus bookstores. Include in your journal the thesis of each reading, the main points the author makes, any particularly important examples the author uses, and a general outline of the reading. Keeping this journal will not only help you understand the reading better, but will also help you study for the exams. You will probably want to take notes in this journal when we discuss the reading. Please do not keep your lecture notes in the journal. The journals will be collected twice during the semester and graded at those times. They will be evaluated based on whether or not you have followed the above directions and whether or not you have understood the reading. You are free to go back to your journal entries after we discuss the reading in class. BUT DO NOT REMOVE PAGES THAT YOU THINK MIGHT BE WRONG AFTER THE OUR DISCUSSION. I am interested in seeing your progress in understanding the course material, not that you “got it right” the first time. The journal is not an exam, it is a place for you to come to think about the reading.

Final Paper: 100 points
Choose a topic of current relevance, ideally of relevance to a place you know, and write a 10-page paper about its history. You will use 6 to 8 different sources, and those sources should include books, journals and magazine articles, newspaper articles, and web articles. No more than 25% of your sources should come from
websites. On-line newspapers, magazines, and journals will not be considered as web sources. You must consult at least two books on the subject.

Your paper should include a clear statement of purpose or research question, a discussion of the extent and potential consequences of the problem, a history of the problem, the people involved in creating and solving the problem, and the people most affected by the problem. Most of the current environmental problems have a significant political component, please address this if it is relevant.

The paper will be graded on: clarity of research question, appropriateness of resources, depth of discussion and analysis, writing style.

Topics:
• Water quality or quantity
• Land fills
• Toxic waste
• Pollution (air, land, water)
• Power generation
• Oil scarcity
• Coal
• Climate change

There are many other relevant topics. Please check with me before pursuing something not on this list.