Syllabus for Hist 180: Global Environmental History

Mon/Wed/Fri - 11:00-11:50
Room: AJLC 120

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Course Goals:
In this course, we will look at how humans have shaped the environment and how the environment has shaped human history from earliest times to the present. Students are expected both to learn the basic facts and chronology of environmental history and also to explore major debates and theories about the interaction between people and the environment over time. This is a very large topic, so we will not cover every region in every period. Instead, we will proceed thematically and chronologically, covering the major issues in the present historiography. This will not be a course on environmentalism or environmental ideas, but on history and the environment itself.

For students in environmental science: Think of this class as a way to apply information and perspectives from the natural sciences to the study of history and to develop writing and critical thinking skills used in the humanities and social sciences.

For students in the humanities and social sciences: Think of this class as a way to acquire historical perspective on contemporary environmental issues, and to think environmentally about economic and social issues. Be prepared to learn (yes, that means memorize!) some basic facts and perspectives about environmental processes. However, don’t worry—this is not a science class and does not assume any prior knowledge.

Format:
The course will be in a lecture-discussion format. Depending upon the topic, some weeks will involve more discussion and participation than others.

Course Policies:
Attendance: Attendance will be taken each class. Students are expected to participate in class and complete the assigned readings each week. Much of the material in the lectures may not be covered in the readings but will be on the exams, and so students should obtain notes for any missed classes.

Honor Code: All course work is governed by Oberlin's Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Honor Code applies to a particular assignment, you should ask me in advance of the due date. Further information about the honor code will be posted along with instructions for particular assignments.

E-mail: I will answer short e-mails Mon-Fri 9-5. If you have any questions that require a long answer, please come by my office during office hours instead. I will give feedback on any draft or outline of your
class work provided you send it in at least 48 hours before the deadline—the longer I have, the better the feedback.

Grading: A (90-100), B (80-89), C (70-79), D (60-69), F (below 60). Plus and minus grades for scores within two points of the next letter grade.

Submitting Work: All written work must be submitted by e-mail. I will mark off 7 points every 24 hours late, weekends included, no exceptions unless you can bring in a note from your class dean explaining that you could not submit the assignment. If you know in advance that you will not be available to submit work on a given day, please contact me well ahead of the deadline.

Assignments and Grades:
Participation: Participation will be 20% of the final grade, based on students’ attendance and class discussion. Students may also earn their participation grade by posting written discussions and current news and journal articles relevant to the class on the course Blackboard site.

Quizzes: There will be four in-class quizzes worth 10% of your grade each (40% total). These will consist of short factual questions. Please see the schedule below for dates.

Essays: In each half of the semester, you will submit one essay of around 1500 words worth 20% of your grade (40% total). You will choose from a list of several topics for each essay, each on a broad theme. Detailed instructions will be posted on Blackboard. Please see the schedule below for dates.

Reading:
Short (10-20 page) weekly readings for in-class discussion will be posted in PDF on Blackboard in the “Weekly Reading” section.

The course books you read will depend on which essay topics you choose. Please see the essay instructions posted on Blackboard for more information. The following books should be available at the bookstore and on reserve loan at Mudd. If for any reason you cannot get the book you need, please contact me:
-Diamond, Collapse*
-Krech, Ecological Indian
-Fernandez-Armesto, Civilizations
-Diamond, Guns Germs and Steel
-McNeill, Something New Under the Sun*
-Economy, The River Runs Black
-Scott, Seeing Like a State
-Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis

(*Everyone should buy these two books regardless of essay topic.)
The following is available through OBIS electronically:
-Richards, Unending Frontier

All other reading for essays will be posted in PDF on Blackboard under “Essay Reading.”
Course Outline:
**For details and up-to-date information, be sure to check Blackboard.

Week 1 - Introduction
- 8/31: Introduction
- 9/2: Historiography, theory, and human nature
- 9/4: Overview of periods, regions, and major topics

Week 2 - Prehistory
- 9/7 (No Class – Labor Day)
- 9/9: Fire
- 9/11: Hunting and Extinctions

**Choose your essay topic and submit a 1-page summary of your thoughts by Fri 8PM.

Week 3 – The Neolithic Revolution
- 9/14: Crops
- 9/16: Animals
- 9/18: Diseases

Week 4 – The Ancient World
- 9/21: Ancient Civilizations
- 9/23: Classical Civilizations
- 9/25: Quiz and Discussion

Week 5 – Collapse
- 9/28 (No Classes – Yom Kippur)
- 9/30: Collapse – Maya and Anasazi
- 10/2: Collapse – Greenland and Easter Island

**Essay outline or rough draft due by Fri 8PM

Week 6 – The Columbian Exchange
- 10/5: The Guns Germs and Steel Theory
- 10/7: Invasive Species
- 10/9: Ecological Imperialism

Week 7 – Crisis and Transformation
- 10/12: The Little Ice Age Crisis
- 10/14: Diverging Ecological Paths in Early Modern Eurasia
- 10/16: Quiz and Discussion

**First essay due by 8PM Friday
Week 8
*Fall Break*

Week 9 – Commodifying Nature
-10/26: The Industrial Revolution and the Commodification of Nature
-10/28: The Neo-Europes
-10/30: Tropical Commodities

Week 10 – Nature and Power
-11/2: Environment and Imperialism
-11/4: Re-ordering Rivers and Wetlands
-11/6: High Modernist Disasters

**Select second essay topic; 1-page summary of thoughts by Fri 8PM**

Week 11 – Upending the Biosphere
-11/9: The Transformation of Agriculture
-11/11: The “Biological coup d’état”
-11/13: Quiz and Discussion

Week 12 – Pollution
-11/16: The Atmosphere
-11/18: The Pedosphere and Hydrosphere
-11/20: The Search for the Ultimate Sink: The Globalization of Pollution

Week 13 – From Coketown to Motown
-11/23: Urbanization
-11/25: Suburbanization and the Environmental Impact of the Automobile
-11/27 (No Classes – Thanksgiving Break)

Week 14 – Reaching Limits?
-11/30: The Return of Malthus?
-12/2: Consumption and Energy
-12/4: Quiz and Discussion

**Second essay outline or rough draft due Fri 8PM**

Week 15 – The Future
-12/7: Global Warming in Historical Perspective
-12/9: Scenarios for the Next Fifty Years
-12/11: Conclusion

Week 16
*Exams 12/15-12/19*