Course Structure:
In this course we will discuss the role of the environment in human history from the very beginnings to the present day. We will look at both the human impact on the environment and the environment’s impact upon history. Since this is such a big topic, we will approach each era in broad terms, and the reading will concentrate on one major theme for each week.

Assignments:
Throughout the course, students will be expected to keep up with environmental issues in the news and to submit substantive articles (see below).

For your first assignment, you will write an essay from a list of topics to be assigned.

For your second assignment, you will have to post current articles or editorials (or links to them) from respectable newspapers and magazines on environmental topics to the course Blackboard site. I am looking for articles that deal with long-term developments or writings that make significant points about history and the environment—not the latest report on emissions. There are many such articles every week, dealing with topics such as deforestation, the food crisis, or invasive species. I also encourage students to post comments about their own and other articles. You will select one or more of these articles and write an essay that:

1) discusses the historical background to the environmental issues in the article(s) and discusses any parallel events in history;
2) identifies and analyzes the authors’ assumptions about history and the environment;
3) considers how a more historical perspective could (or could not) help us think about those environmental issues today.

You must first clear your essay topic with me in advance—proposals are due before Thanksgiving. You are bound by the honor code in this and all other assignments, and you may NOT write on any topic for which you have written any paper in another class.

This first essay is due 11/4 and the second is due 12/9. Each essay should be 4-5 regular double-spaced pages.

Grades will be:
20% Midterm
25% First Essay
10% Submission of articles, discussion, and proposal
20% Second Essay
25% Final
Course Policies:

Attendance: 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 the professor in advance of the due date.

Turning in Assignments: Assignments may be handed in at class, office hours, or by e-mail. Late work will be counted 8 points off every day late, including Saturdays and Sundays—no exceptions apart from serious emergencies.

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.

Course Books:
For each week, you will be expected to complete the required reading before the second lecture. Recommended readings are listed as a guide for interested students and as suggestions to help with the class essays. I will be happy to suggest shorter articles on particular topics as well. Reading for this class is about 70-120 pages per week, and most of the books are very engaging and readable.


Week 1: The Big Picture

Lectures:
9/2: What is environmental history and why does it matter?
9/4: Human evolution, human nature, and human ecology

Theme:
What is “nature”? How can we distinguish “natural” from anthropogenic environmental change? What constitutes environmental degradation?

Required Reading:

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 2: Getting Started**

**Lectures:**
9/9: Primitive harmony or overkill?
9/11: The Neolithic Revolution

**Theme:**
Consider the idea of the “ecological Indian” (or similar ideas of indigenous peoples living in harmony with the earth): Is it accurate? How might it still be used in contemporary environmental debates?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 3: The Ecology of Ancient and Medieval Civilizations**

**Lectures:**
9/16: Classical civilizations: the Mediterranean and China compared
9/18: Disease and history: from the Plague of Justinian to the Black Death

**Theme:**
What difference do religion and ideology make in environmental policy? Is there anything special—anything better or worse—about Western attitudes towards the environment?

**Required Reading:**

(*Elvin (1998) "The Environmental Legacy of Imperial China")


**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 4: Environmental Disasters and the Collapse of Early Civilizations**

**Lectures:**
9/23-9/25: Environmental disasters and the collapse of early civilizations

**Theme:**
Why did some societies fail to adapt to environmental change? Do historical examples hold any relevance for present policy?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 5: The Columbian Exchange**

**Lectures:**
9/30-10/2: The Columbian Exchange

**Theme:**
What has been the environmental significance of species introduced by humans? Can or should we get rid of Old World invaders in the New World (and vice versa)?

**Required Reading:**
Crosby, Alfred. *Ecological Imperialism*. Cambridge, 1986. (chapters 1, 2, and 7-9, 11, 12)

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 6: No Lectures**

**10/7: In Class Midterm**

**10/9: Yom Kippur—No Classes**

**Week 7: Early Modern Expansion**

*Lectures:*

- 10/14: Diverging ecological strategies: England and Japan compared
- 10/16: The Little Ice Age crisis

*Theme:*
Why did some societies develop to become more wasteful of resources than others? Does economic growth have to mean more resource consumption?

*Required Reading:*

*Recommended Readings:*

**Week 8: No Class**

**Fall Recess 10/21-10/23**

**Week 9: Science, State, and the Environment**

*Lectures:*

- 10/28: The control of nature
- 10/30: The origins of environmentalism and ecology

*Theme:*
Why have some environmentalists focused on scientific principles of resource management and others on spiritual reverence for the natural world? Which approach has better served environmental protection?

*Required Reading:*
**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 10: Industry, Capitalism, and Commodities**

**Lectures:**
- 11/4: Environmental aspects of the industrial revolution
- 11/6: The commodification of nature

**Theme:**
Is industrial capitalism the source for our environmental problems, or have markets and technologies offered solutions to our resource constraints?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 11: Imperialism and Environmental Change**

**Lectures:**
- 11/11: The West and East Indies
- 11/13: Africa

**Theme:**
How did Western empires go wrong in their development schemes for the tropical world? Could modern development plans in tropical countries have made better use of local environmental conditions and local knowledge?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Weeks 12-13: The Twentieth Century**

**Lectures:**
- 11/18: The acceleration of change
- 11/20: New chemicals and pollutants
- 11/25: Capitalism, socialism, and the environment

**You must submit a proposed topic for your essay before Thanksgiving**

**11/27 is Thanksgiving—no class**

**Theme:**
Is the environmental destruction of the last century fundamentally different from that of past times? What has changed and what hasn’t? Will the twenty-first century present entirely new problems or an acceleration of past trends?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 14: Malthusian Prospects?**

**Lectures:**
- 12/2: The “population bomb” and environmental alarm
- 12/4: Emerging environmental problems in the Third World

**Theme:**
Which has been worse for the environment: wealth and consumption or poverty and population growth? Is it fair to demand that developing countries adopt cleaner technologies when the West caused so much pollution during its own industrialization?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 15: The Road Ahead**
Lectures:
   12/9: The modern environmental movement and international treaties
   12/11: Global warming and the future of environmentalism

**second essay due Tues, 12/9

Theme:
Why have some environmental initiatives succeeded while others have failed?

Required Reading: