

HIST4990 – Senior Seminar in US Environmental History

University of Georgia
Spring 2009

Call # 04-586
MWF 9:05-9:55 am
102 LeConte Hall

Instructor: Dr. Brian A. Drake
Office: 330 LeConte Hall
Office hours: MWF 2:30-3:30 pm
E-mail: bdrake@uga.edu
ph. 542-6300

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course, not a contract. Deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary

Course Description: Welcome to HIST4990: Senior Seminar in US Environmental History. When you signed up for this course, you might have wondered to yourself: what exactly **is** environmental history? In a nutshell, **environmental history is the study of the interaction between humans and nonhuman nature over time.** Ecologists tell us that all things in nature are linked together. Inspired by this idea, environmental historians argue that human history is about more than just “human things” like politics or war or racial conflicts. History has also been shaped by the intimate relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds. Plants, animals, microorganisms, climate, geography, and so on have all influenced human culture. People have returned the favor by affecting nature as well. Meanwhile, humans have also thought, spoken, and written about the natural world, and their relationship to it, in philosophy, religion, art, science and politics, to name only the major venues.

In this class you will produce a research paper in some aspect of the environmental history of the United States, and in particular one that meets the UGA History Department’s requirements for history majors (see Appendix A). You will also discuss the findings in your paper in a formal class presentation at the end of the semester. To that end, it will be our task in HIST4990 to introduce you to the nuts-and-bolts craft of “doing environmental history” and assist you in producing your research paper and presentation. We will discuss the kind of topics and ideas which are important to the field, useful approaches to finding a paper topic, varieties of sources of evidence, research methods, proper citation and reference methods, and the essential elements of clean, tight historical prose – that is, how to write history without confusing people or boring them to death!

Required Readings: The following **books** are available at the UGA Bookstore, and you should also be able to find them cheaply and easily on the Web. Used books are perfectly acceptable! There will also be a small **coursepack**, available at Bel-Jean’s.

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History*
Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 5th ed.
William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*
Kate Turabian et al, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*

Grade Breakdown: This is a writing-intensive class, and so the bulk of your grade will be related to your research paper. However, I also expect you to do the sometimes-substantial reading in the early part of the course, and to engage enthusiastically in our class discussions. The grade structure for the class will be as follows:

Topic Proposal and Tentative Bibliography of Sources – **10 percent**
Rough Draft – **10 percent**
Rough Draft Comments – **10 percent**
Final Draft – **60 percent**
In-class Presentation – **10 percent**

Late Policy: I expect every assignment to be turned in on time. Assignments turned in late will have their grade lowered by 10 percent for every day they are late, beginning immediately after the class session in which they are due. Exceptions will require extraordinary circumstances and evidence.

A few words on **GRADES AND GRADING STANDARDS:** My grading standards are simple. With modern computers, spell-check, etc, there is little excuse for papers filled with grammatical errors or ones that fail to meet the minimum required length. A typical “C” paper, exam, or essay has few or none of these kinds of weaknesses. On the other hand, while it may be technically solid, typical “C” work does not show much distinction in clarity of argument, creativity, or originality of insight. It may be repetitive, or obvious, or it may simply have no real thesis or “point” to it. It may not support its arguments sufficiently. Severe problems along these lines will result in grades of “D” or “F.” On the other hand, a “B” paper or essay shows a good grasp of reading and lecture material, some creativity and “fresh thinking,” and uses good evidence and examples. It is well organized, too. ***An “A” paper or essay demonstrates deep, penetrating insight and unusually good verbal facility. It is the work of someone who has thought long and hard about the issues, grappled with them, pulled together diverse strands of evidence into a convincing argument, and in general has achieved an impressive level of coherence, clarity, and critical thinking.***

A few words on **MY 24-HOUR WAITING PERIOD, THE TWO-WEEK WINDOW, POINT GRUBBING, CHEATING, and PLAGIARISM:** Students sometimes come up to me with fire in their eyes after I have handed back their exams, angry or upset with their grade and anxious to change immediately. I am a slow and serious grader, and I have definite reasons for the grades I give. Therefore, I have a **24-hour “waiting period”** after handing back graded items, during which I will not entertain questions about grades, giving you the opportunity to think about my comments and corrections. Once that 24-hour period is up, I encourage questions, though you must make an appointment with me to discuss your questions in my office (I don’t discuss them in public, for obvious reasons). I encourage you to have precise questions and reasons for requesting any grade changes. Please be forewarned, however, **that I have little patience for “point grubbing” of any kind**, i.e. whining, pleading, groveling, cajoling, arguing, bullying, shouting, or otherwise pressuring me in an attempt to get a better grade. Finally, **I will no longer reconsider the grade** on any test, paper, journal, or other assignment which has been “handed back” **for more than two weeks.**

In this class we will adhere to UGA’s University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism – **the attempt to pass off another’s written work, from any source, as your own, without adequate reference or citation** — is strictly forbidden, as are cheating on tests, exams, quizzes, etc. ******If I discover a student in an act of cheating or plagiarism, I WILL initiate procedures to charge him or her with academic misconduct and schedule a hearing (indeed, UGA regulations require it), and the possibility of failure in the course will be high due to its writing-intensive nature. I hate to sound vindictive, but these are serious matters and I will not tolerate them. If you have any questions, see me.***

****All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty" [available at http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/culture_honesty.htm.] Each student is responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.****

Okay, everything clear as mud? Here we go...

WEEK ONE – January 12-16, 2009

What is Environmental History? Rethinking History in the Age of Ecology

- **Readings:** Donald Worster, “The Nature We Have Lost,” and “Paths Across the Levee,” in *The Wealth of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 3-29 [CP]
_____, “Doing Environmental History,” in *The Ends of the Earth* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 289-308 [CP]
Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. ix-xii

WEEK TWO – January 21-23 (no class on January 19 – MLK, Jr. holiday)

Nature and the “New World”: Native Americans, “Wilderness,” Colonization and Landscape Change in North America

- **Readings:** William Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,” in J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), pp. 414-442. *This article is available on-line at <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~alcoze/for398/class/pristinemyth.html>*
Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 3-51

WEEK THREE – January 26-30

Turning Nature to a Mart: the Vital Role of Capitalism in US Environmental History

- **Readings:** Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 55-172

WEEK FOUR – February 2-6

Consumption and Its Discontents: Environmental Exploitation and Protection in the Twentieth Century

- **Readings:** Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp.175-285
Mart A. Stewart, “If John Muir Had Been an Agrarian: American Environmental History West and South,” *Environment and History 11* (2005): 139-62 [CP]

WEEK FIVE – February 9-13

Doing the Grunt Work of History: Introduction to the Art of Historical Inquiry

- **Readings:** Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, pp. 1-31, 43-60, 69-120

WEEK SIX – February 16-20

Putting It All On the Page: Writing Style, Theory, and Practice (and, hopefully, some useful examples)

- **Readings:** Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 3-100

- William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1992): 1347-1376 [CP]
- Brian Allen Drake, "Reflections in Black Water: Wilderness Images of the Okefenokee Swamp," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (Fall 1999): 565-82 [CP]
- _____, "Waving 'a Bough of Challenge': Forestry on the Kansas Grasslands, 1868-1915," *Great Plains Quarterly* 23 (Winter 2003): 19-34 [CP]

During the following "work on your own" periods, I will be available in my office for regular editorial meetings, advice sessions, pep talks, pleasant conversations, and so forth. Please keep in regular contact with me regarding the progress of your paper and any problems you might be encountering.

WEEK SEVEN – February 23-27

Work on your own... Proposal/Bibliography Due Friday, February 27th, at 9:05 a.m. in my office

WEEK EIGHT – March 2-6

Work on your own...

*******SPRING BREAK – MARCH 9-13*******

WEEK NINE – March 16-20

Work on your own...

WEEK ELEVEN – March 23-27

Work on your own...

WEEK TWELVE – March 30-April 3

Work on your own... Rough Draft Due Friday, April 3rd, at 9:05 a.m. in my office

WEEK THIRTEEN – April 6-10

Work on your own... Rough Draft Comments Due April 10th, at 9:05 a.m. in my office

WEEK FOURTEEN – April 13-17

In-Class Presentations

WEEK FIFTEEN – April 20-24

In-Class Presentations

WEEK SIXTEEN –April 27, 29, and 30, 2009**

In-Class Presentations - Final Paper Due in class on the 30th