

- Course Title:** **U.S. Environmental History**
Cross-listed as ENS377 and GEO377 (4 Credit)
- Prerequisites:** *none*
- Instructor:** **Dr. Ryan Kirk**, Dept of History and Geography, Dept of Environmental Studies
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E-mail is the preferred form of communication. I will be on e-mail during normal working hours (EST) and will check regularly during evening and weekends.
- Course Web site:** We will use **blackboard** extensively for communication, submission of assignments, and grading. For help getting established on blackboard see:
<https://blackboard.elon.edu> → click on the “Bb Help” tab at the top of the page.
- Required Text:** ***American Environmental History: An Introduction***, by Carolyn Merchant, 2007
(Note: Additional required and suggested readings will be provided in pdf format or html links, and typically consist of journal articles, on-line videos and web sites.)
- Description:** Environmental History is the study of the historical interrelationships between humans and the natural world, and falls at the intersection between history, ecology, sociology and geography. The session will consist of readings and on-line discussion of classic texts, and in-depth analysis of major topics in U.S. environmental history. This course will meet an elective requirement for the ENS Major (register as ENS), the Geography Minor (register as GEO), and may be applied towards the “Society” or “Advanced Studies” options of the General Studies requirements (register as GEO). This course will not count towards the History major or the “Civilization” or “Science/Analysis” General Studies requirements.
- Introduction:** My professional background is in natural resources management (forestry and water management) and geography (land use planning and spatial analysis), so my approach to this material is biased by this perspective. This is also why this course does not count towards the History major. A better title to this course might be “U.S. Historical Environmental Geography”, but that is quite the mouthful! As such, my primary goal for this course is for you to gain a deeper appreciation of how remarkably connected human history has been to the environmental conditions of the places we have inhabited. Thus, we will be stressing process more than product; in other words, I want to you be able to conceptualize the ways we have altered the environment and the ways the environment has altered us. I hope from this approach that you will gain a stronger ability to assess the world around you, long after the details we cover this summer term fade from memory. All of the gradable items are designed to assess this goal.
- Course Objectives:**
- 1) Gain a fuller understanding and appreciation of the interactions between humans and the natural world
 - 2) Understand how resource availability and transportation influenced settlement patterns
 - 3) Identify and describe how geography has influenced economic activities
 - 4) Appreciate and understand the complex environmental functioning in urban areas
 - 5) Define historical epochs of ethical positions concerning how we use the land
 - 7) Improve critical analysis, written communication, and research skills
- Course Flow:** This course is divided into 4 modules, one for each week of the summer term, plus a “finals” period over the last 3 days of the course. Due dates are associated with each module, so you can work on the material at your own pace each week. For each section, you will be expected to read 2-3 chapters of the book (each chapter is around 20 pages) and selected outside readings, watch a lecture with maps supporting the content, contribute substantively to on-line discussions regarding these topics, and research one topic in greater detail to present to your classmates in essay form. During the finals period, you will select from a list of questions and write synthesis essays covering major themes covered over the term.

Statement of flexibility: Given the on-line format, I am very willing to be flexible on due dates for justified individual circumstances, as long as you give me plenty of advance warning. If you have a vacation planned during part of this term, or are working or traveling abroad, please let me know the details and we can negotiate any changes accordingly.

Grades: Grading will be broken down into the following categories:

Component	% of Final Grade
Participation (5% each week)	20%
Research Essays (3 @ 10% each, 800-1200 words)	30%
Place Paper (1500-2000 words)	25%
Final Exam (open notes/open book/open internet)	25%

Participation: Participation consists of two parts: 1) contributing to on-line discussions using the Blackboard Discussion Board, and 2) responding to your fellow student's research essays. The discussions are designed for you to engage your peers in understanding the content. At a minimum, you must contribute 5 substantive comments each week, and they must be on at least two separate days (e.g., you can't submit all comments the night before the due date.) However, I expect many students will submit more than 5. I will act as discussion facilitator by providing leading questions and correcting misinformation, but I will not actively join the discussions. It is worth your time to contribute to the discussions because they will greatly inform your essays and the final exam. Your comments will be graded each week using the rubric found on the last page of this syllabus.

In addition, you will be expected to provide 2 anonymous reviews of your peer's essays each week. The reviews other students give you will not affect your grade; I grade the essays before I grade the reviews. Rather, you will be graded on the thoughtfulness and quality of your reviews to your peers. Reviews will be completed via Blackboard surveys. A sample of the review form is available on Blackboard.

Research Essays: For the first three weeks, you will pick from a set of selected questions and write a position essays based on the readings, the discussions, and your own outside research. The questions for the essays are designed to integrate content from across the module. Essays will be due by 5 p.m. (EST) on each Monday (June 7, 14, and 21). Peer reviews are due with 3 days of the respective due dates (June 10, 17, and 24). More detailed instructions and guidelines for the essays are on Blackboard.

Place Paper: The purpose of this final project is for you to pick a single location in the United States and write a reflective paper discussing the environmental history of that location. You can choose any place you like. Some examples of locations are: your home town, your favorite place to visit, a famous landmark, or a place you hope to move to after graduation. This paper should contain both research on the area as well as critical interpretation based on the themes of this course and the known environmental conditions. For most locations in the U.S., we won't be able to find extensive literature discussing the environmental history, so you will likely have to speculate on plausible explanations. For those of you who are not near a library, I will assist in collecting and scanning portions of pertinent materials from Belk library. There are 3 deadlines associated with the Place Paper. By the end of the 1st week, you should identify the place, create a map of the location using Google maps, and write a brief rationale of why you chose that place. By the middle of the 4th week (5 p.m. EST, Wed June 23), you will submit an annotated bibliography of research on the area and an outline of your critical interpretation of the environmental history to fill in gaps from the annotated bibliography. The final paper is due by 5 p.m. (EST) on Wednesday, July 30. More detailed instructions and guidelines for the paper are on Blackboard.

Final Exam: The final exam consists of a series of short essay questions that span the material covered throughout the term. You are welcome to use any resources available, including the book, discussion board, websites or other library resources. You will receive the questions on Monday June 28, and they are due on at 5 p.m. (EST) on Thursday, July 1.

Grading Policies:

Overall grading is criterion-referenced, in which grades are designed to measure how well students perform relative to predetermined standards. Grades follow the traditional scale and the traditional thresholds are guaranteed: (e.g., > 93% = A, 90-93% = A-, etc). No individual assignments will be curved, but the final grades may be curved upwards (never downwards) at the discretion of the instructor based on how class performance and grade

distributions match expectations. I will work hard to communicate grade status throughout the semester as well as give indications of any potential final curve.

Bonus Points may be added on any of the assignments at the discretion of the instructor, based on any of the following criteria that indicate an "above-and-beyond" effort or quality-level: 1) professional presentation, 2) clarity of argument/presentation, or 3) thoroughness of argument/presentation. Thus, a grade greater than 100% is possible.

Grades on each assignment can be contested to the instructor up to 1 week after the assignment is returned for errors or perceived injustice. Send an e-mail containing sound reasons why a grade should be changed.

Incomplete grades are assigned at the discretion of the professor when, due to extraordinary circumstances, e.g., hospitalization, a student is prevented from completing the work of the course on time. Requires a written agreement between the professor and student *before* June 30, the final day of the course.

Submitting Assignments: Due dates for assignments are listed on the course schedule (below). All assignments are to be submitted electronically on Blackboard, and must be received by the due date and time for full credit. Instructions for submitting assignments are available on Blackboard.

Late Assignments: Extensions on the three research essays may be granted if requested in advance with appropriate justification. **Without an approved extension, essays may be submitted up to 3-days late for 80% partial credit, or up to 7-days late for 60% partial credit.** Assignments will not be accepted later than 7 days after the due date without an approved extension. No late assignments will be accepted for the Place Paper and the Final Exam.

Academic Integrity Policy: Students are expected to abide by the Elon Academic Honor Code (available at <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/honorcpp.shtml>). Alleged violations will be dealt with according to University policy.

Special Assistance: Please inform the professor of any special needs for accessibility and learning, and appropriate measures will be taken to aid success in the course. If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500) for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

How to succeed in this course

The primary key to success is consistent effort and critically engaging the material. It is the nature of on-line courses that learning the material is your responsibility. My primary role this term is to provide guidance, structure and feedback to your self-learning experience. In other words, my role is not to pass along knowledge as is typical in most on-campus courses.

The time commitment for this course is supposed to match the total time for any other full-semester or winter term course. This time should be spent reading and critically reflecting on the material, actively joining on-line discussions, and researching, writing, and editing your assignments.

Schedule Summary

Week	Topics	Readings	Due Items / Notes
Week 1 Jun 1-6	Native American use of the land; EuroAmerican settlement in New England, and the South	* Merchant: Intro, Ch 1-3 * Week 1 lecture video * Deneven's "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492" * Prologue to Nash's "Wilderness and the American Mind."	Research Essay 1 due June 6 Place Paper rationale due June 6
Week 2 Jun 7-13	Settlement of the Midwest and Western U.S.; Evolving Urban Environments	* Merchant: Ch 4-5 * Week 2 lecture video * Harvey's "The West, the Environment, and American History." * Intro to Timothy Egan's "The Worst Hard Time"	Essay 1 reviews due June 10 Research Essay 2 due on Jun 13
Week 3 Jun 14-20	Ethics of land use; Urban Environments	* Merchant: Ch 6-7 * Week 3 lecture video * Section of Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" * Section from Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle"	Essay 2 reviews due June 17 Research Essay 3 due June 20
Week 4 Jun 21-27	Rise of Ecology; Environmentalism and Globalization	* Merchant: Ch 9-10 * Week 4 lecture video * Section from Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" * Section from Eileen McGurty's "Transforming Environmentalism" * Davis' "The ecosystem of globalization"	Essay 3 reviews due June 24 Place Paper Annotated Bibliography due June 24
Week 5 Jun 28 - Jul 1	Final Exam questions sent on Monday June 28; Work on Place Paper		Place Paper due Wed, June 30 Final Exam due Thu, July 1

Detailed Schedule**Week 1 (Tuesday June 1 – Monday June 7)**

Introduction: In the first week, we will define environmental history, explore how environmental conditions influenced the Native American settlement and use of the land, and examine EuroAmerican settlement east of the Appalachian Mountains. We will establish a basic understanding of the geography of the U.S. via the lecture notes and maps (presented as a video presentation).

Readings:

1) From the Merchant Book: Introduction (pages xv – xxii), Ch 1 (3-23), Ch 2 (24-38), and Ch 3 (38-61)

2) Week 1 lecture notes and maps

3) Deneven's "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492"

- *This chapter is from another Environmental History book, and further clarifies what the continent looked like upon the arrival of the Europeans in the New World.*

4) Prologue to Roderick Nash's "Wilderness and the American Mind"

- *Nash's book is a classic study in how humans views nature, and how those views change over time. This brief introduction explores how the term "wilderness" has been defined in America.*

Essay 1 topics: In 800-1200 words, answer one of the following two questions:

- 1) What are the major difference in settlement and land use patterns in The South and New England during the colonial and early nationhood period, and what factors explain those differences?

- 2) What is the legacy of the "Cotton South" as visible today, environmentally, culturally, and geographically?
- 3) Using one Native American group as an example, how did environmental conditions influence the culture of the group?

Week 2 (Tuesday June 8 – Monday June 14)

Introduction: In week two, we will examine the settlement history of the Great Plains and western U.S., areas with limited accessibility. We then examine how our use of the land transformed economic markets.

Readings:

* **Merchant: Ch 4 (62-84) and Ch 5 (89-105)**

* **Week 2 lecture notes and maps**

* **Article by Harvey's entitled "The West, the Environment, and American History."**

* **Introduction from Timothy Egan's "The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl"**

Essay 2 topics: In 800-1200 words, answer one of the following questions:

- 1) What is the role of water in the settlement of the U.S. during the 18th and 19th centuries?
- 2) What is the legacy of the Dust Bowl era on the Great Plains, geographically, economically, and culturally?
- 3) What factors explain the transition of the U.S. "Inland Economy" from a subsistence-oriented model to a market-oriented model in the 18th and 19th centuries?
- 4) What were the Transcendentalists views on the relationships between nature and the economy?

Week 3 (Tuesday June 15 – Monday June 21)

Introduction: Week three looks at the challenges of living in urban environments over a time period when the U.S. population in urban areas increased dramatically. We then look at the rise of competing ethical positions on how we should use the land.

Readings:

* **Merchant: Ch 6 (110-133) and Ch 7 (134-156) (note that we are not reading Ch 8 this term)**

* **Week 3 lecture notes and maps**

* **Section of Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic"**

* **Section from Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle"**

Essay 3 topics: In 800-1200 words, answer one of the following two questions:

- 1) What factors explain the strong trend toward urbanization in the US between 1850-1960?
- 2) How did the ways the U.S. addressed environmental problems associated with large cities evolve from 1850-1960?
- 3) How is Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic view different from the "Preservation vs. Conservation" arguments?

Week 4 (Tuesday June 22 – Monday June 28)

Introduction: Week four focuses on the rise of ecology and environmentalism, both in terms of social movements and in terms of a series of landmark legislative efforts that greatly restrict how we use the land (e.g., the Endangered Species Act and Clean Air Acts). We then examine current challenges of human-environment interactions as they relate to globalization. There is no essay associated with week 5, but the material will be included on the final exam and you are expected to join in discussions. There is no essay due this week in order to allow time for working on your annotated bibliography, which is due Thursday, June 24, 5 p.m. EST.

Readings:

* **Merchant: Ch 9 (177-192) and Ch 10 (193-210)**

* **Week 4 lecture notes and maps**

* **Section from Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring"**

* **Section from Eileen McGurty's "Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice"**

* **Davis's "The ecosystem of globalization"**

Week 5 (Tuesday June 29 – Thursday July 1)

Week 5 is reserved for work on your Place Paper and your final exam. The final exam questions will be provided on Monday, June 28.

The Place Paper is due Wednesday, June 30 by midnight EST. The final exam is due Thursday, July 1 by midnight EST. If have large conflicts during these next several days, there is a small amount of room for flexibility (maybe a day or two more) on these deadlines; contact me with details.

Final exam questions:

Answer the following three questions. Each question is worth 30 points, so the exam is worth 90 points. You can use any resources available to answer these, including the book, external readings, the discussion board, and any additional electronic or library research. There is no word count limitation, but I would estimate that you could answer these clearly in 400-600 words each.

1) Ideas and nature:

The materials for this course catalogued a progression of ideas of how the people of the U.S. have viewed their relationships with the natural world. Briefly synthesize this progression of ideas. Aim for short but clear descriptions of the views, but be sure to cover as many different epochs/milestones in these views as you can.

Grading criteria:

- * Comprehensiveness of epochs or milestones covered (15 pts)
- * Accuracy of descriptions of ideas (10 pts)
- * Clarity of answer, including organization and grammar (5 pts)

2) Technology and U.S. environmental history:

Changing technologies have strongly influenced the environmental history of the United States. Identify three technologies that you believe have had the biggest influence on how Americans have used and impacted the land, and provide brief rationales and supporting evidence for your three choices.

Grading criteria:

- * Appropriate choices (5 pts)
- * Strong rationales and supporting evidence for choices (20 pts)
- * Clarity of answer, including organization and grammar (5 pts)

3) Federal government and national land use:

Identify and discuss three significant ways that the U.S. federal government has influenced how we use and manage the land. These can be legislative efforts (either individual legislation or a group of related legislation) or management programs administered by federal agencies. What was the rationale for the legislation or management programs, and what were the primary intended and unintended consequences?

Grading criteria:

- * Appropriate choices (5 pts)
- * Strong rationales and supporting evidence for choices (20 pts)
- * Clarity of answer, including organization and grammar (5 pts)

Grading Rubric for the Discussion Board Posts. This rubric rates your contributions across all of your posts, with understanding that not all of your posts will meet all of these criteria.

	Needs Work	Developing Work	Accomplished Work	Exemplary Work	Total
Quality of Posts 2 points	Related to topic/largely fact based	Limited understanding of problem but some analysis	Adequate understanding of problem although analysis, synthesis evaluation is limited	Clear analysis, synthesis and evaluation	
Evidence of varied levels of reflection 2.5 points	No reflection may result in 0 for this section	Response shows postings have been read	Recognition of multiple perspectives	Extension and refinement of perspectives, substantial evidence of original thought	
Related new information to prior knowledge (connections) 3 points	No reference to prior knowledge may result in 0 for this section	Attempt, but it is weak and/or limited	Postings reflect prior knowledge related to new information but no evidence of integration of new content	Prior knowledge is actively reference and clearly relates to problem evidence of integration of new content	
Constructive response to other's ideas 1 point	No response to others will result in 0 for this section	Recognition of other's opinions but no evaluation of these	Recognition of other's opinions but limited evaluation	Recognition of other's opinions with examples of analysis / syntheses of those opinions	
Evidence of support for opinions 1 point	No references / studies cited in support of statements made will result in 0 for this section	Attempt to reflect on literature but not clearly stated	Limited evidence of review of literature but attempt is clearly stated	Clear cut evidence of critical review of literature that is correctly cited	
Mechanics of postings (grammar, spelling, organization) .5 point	Poor sentence structure and organization with frequent spelling /grammatical errors	Complete sentences but could improve on organization; has 3 spelling / grammatical errors	Complete sentences but could improve on organization; has 1-2 spelling / grammatical errors	Complete sentences, well thought out organization. No spelling or grammatical errors	

Content adapted from: Magnuson, C. (2005). Experiential learning and the discussion board: A strategy, a rubric and management techniques. *Distance learning*, 2, 2. 15-20.

Final rubric borrowed from Dr. Matthew Buckmaster, Elon University.