

SIS Freshman Seminar Spring 2015, Tuesdays 9 – 11:35

Environment and Imagination: Planetary Crisis in Fiction and Literary Non-fiction

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Office hours: Tuesday afternoons, many Wednesday mornings, and by appointment other days.
Please tell me if you plan to stop by. Email and phone consultation also welcome and encouraged!

This seminar draws on novels, literary non-fiction, political analysis, film, and scholarly classics to explore our planet's past and future, developed North and developing South.

The planet-wide environmental crisis requires a multi-disciplinary response. The course focuses on the differences between the empathetic learning that fiction and imaginative work provide as compared with analytical, scholarly work. The course is divided in four parts of three weeks each, organized along temporal and spatial differences. The first part second uses the lenses of history and philosophy to go deeply into the issues; the second part encourages us to imagine future scenarios; the third focuses on the developing world; the fourth and final section turns to the developed world, ourselves, and impacts of consumption and commodity chains. Each section includes at least one work of fiction or literary non-fiction, in an effort to awaken our capacity for emotion and empathy as an important tool for understanding. By the end of the semester, you should have a rich array of intellectual tools with which to approach a highly complex subject, and know which approaches are most pertinent for you.

Course goals: To cultivate a love of reading; to develop analytic understanding of the assumptions and methodologies of various scholarly disciplines; to develop critical thinking skills and an understanding of multiple perspectives; to develop an appreciation for the complexity of global environmental problems with respect to justice and responsibility; to develop a position on the differences between creative works and analytical approaches as vehicles for insight, education and social change.

Requirements: This is a block class. Attendance at all sessions is mandatory. Blackboard postings, when required, are also mandatory as a way of starting the discussion and ensuring that all students have done the reading. There are two required papers. Grades will be based on: Attendance and in-class participation 25%, Blackboard postings 35%, Paper One 15 %, Paper Two 25 %.

A note about the Blackboard postings: You should post "reactions" to the week's readings by noon the Monday before class to allow discussion to unfold. The style of this posting can be informal – it is a way of giving you a chance to digest and respond to complex materials, and provide us with a basis for the week's discussions. You get extra appreciation for posting early, and you are free to post as often as you like. Comments should be grammatically correct and without spelling mistakes, so compose your comments as a word-processing document, run the checking functions, and then cut and paste.

A note about the papers: The first paper topic will be assigned, and it will be 5-7 pages, 1.5 or 2 spaces, 12-points. The second paper, of similar length, will be on a topic chosen in consultation

with Prof. Shapiro. Citations can be any style but must be internally consistent. Bibliography should be included. Always find an interesting title and paginate (i.e., use page numbers!).

All five required books should be purchased on line. Used copies are fine, any edition OK.

Margaret Atwood, *Maddaddam*

Amitav Ghosh, *Hungry Tide*

Mark Kurlansky, *Cod*

Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

All students will abide by the academic integrity code (available on line at my.american.edu). Don't even THINK about plagiarizing. If you have difficulty meeting a deadline or feel under undue pressure, please consult with me.

NOTE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school-specific information.

WEEK ONE Jan 13: COURSE INTRODUCTION

PART ONE: HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

WEEK TWO Jan 20: Introduction to Environmental History

* Crosby, Alfred W. 1995. "The Past and Present of Environmental History." *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4: 1177-1190. (E-reserves.)

* David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, "Introduction: Themes and Issues in the Environmental History of South Asia," From *Nature, Culture and Imperialism* pp. 1-20 (E-reserves).

* Lynn T. White, Jr., "The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," (*Science*, Vol. 155, No. 3767, Mar 10, 1967, pp. 1203-1207). (E-reserves.)

WEEK THREE Jan 27: Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*

WEEK FOUR Feb 3: Mark Kurlansky, *Cod*

FIRST PAPER TOPIC DISTRIBUTED: Reactions to several readings

PART TWO: SCIENCE AND FUTURE STUDIES

WEEK FIVE Feb 10: Scholarly/policy analyses of the future.

National Intelligence Council Global Trends 2030 at:
<http://publicintelligence.net/global-trends-2030>

Tellus Institute: www.tellus.org. Browse website and read “The Century Ahead: Search for Sustainability.”

Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,” *Rolling Stone*, August 2012. Course Documents.

In class: view “Wall-e”

WEEK SIX Feb 17: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

WEEK SEVEN Feb 24: Margaret Atwood, *Maddaddam*

FIRST PAPER DUE (Hard copy required)

SPRING BREAK

PART THREE: CONSERVATION & SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

WEEK EIGHT March 17: Introduction to Environmental Justice

*William H. Durham, "Political Ecology and Environmental Destruction in Latin America," in William H. Durham and Michael Painter, eds., *Social Causes of Environmental Destruction in Latin America*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, pp. 249-264. (E-reserves.)

“The Earth Charter” (google and read the document)

In Class: view “Drowned Out” (Film on the Narmada Dam)

FINAL PAPER TOPIC DISTRIBUTED

WEEK NINE March 24: Introduction to NGOs; environment and development

* Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, “Introduction,” pp. 1-38. (E-reserves.)

* Mac Chapin, “A Challenge to Conservationists,” *Worldwatch Magazine*
<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/565>

<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/1832>

PAPER TOPIC AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

WEEK TEN March 31 *Hungry Tide*

PART FOUR: COMMODITY CHAINS, ENERGY, JUSTICE AND CONSUMPTION IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD

WEEK ELEVEN April 7: Introduction to “Northern” issues

*Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca, “Confronting Consumption,” in *Confronting Consumption*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002, pp. 1-20. (E-reserves.)

*Bunyan Bryant, “History and Issues of the Environmental Justice Movement,” in Gerald R. Visgilio and Diana M. Whitelaw, eds., *Our Backyard: A Quest for Environmental Justice*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 3-24. (E-reserves.)

www.storyofstuff.com (view the video)

www.ecofoot.org (calculate your footprint)

Center for a New American Dream www.newdream.org (browse)

WEEK TWELVE April 14: TBD

ELECTRONIC DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER DUE

WEEK THIRTEEN April 21 REPORTS! FINAL PAPERS DUE on April 28 or earlier, (Hard copy required). I will be available on the day of the scheduled final exam.