American Studies Department, School of Arts and Sciences, and Planning and Public Policy Program, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, both Rutgers University

American Environmental History and Thought, 01:050:201:02 and 10:762:297:01, Fall 2012, 3 credits

Friday, 11:30-2:30, Room A4, Frelinghuysen Hall, College Avenue Campus.

Instructor: Frank J. Popper, Civic Square Building, Room 356, College Avenue Campus, 848-932-2790, fpopper@rutgers.edu, fpopper@rutgers.edu, policy.rutgers.edu/faculty/popper, where more copies of the syllabus are available.

Office hours: Thursday afternoon, before or after class, or by appointment.


The goal of this course is to convey at the mid-undergraduate level the many connections between America’s natural environment, its national development and how Americans thought about both. The course uses classic readings to understand the formation of environmental ideas and their influence on environmental action. The course focuses on major parts of the national economy such as farming, energy, services and government on the one hand and landscapes, land uses and intellectual history on the other. The course analyzes the links between overarching American ideas, development practices and, most important, their on-the-ground consequences.

The sessions will consist of presentations by me and then class discussions. You do three take-home exams, handed out in September, October and November, each for 20% of your grade. In December you do a term paper that counts for 30% of your grade. For all the assignments I expect you to use sources beyond the assigned readings and my presentations. Ten percent of your grade comes from class participation and conscientiousness, including getting work in on time.

The term paper can be on any relevant subject that you pick and I approve. You will find plenty of material from which to choose topics or approaches. The text offers many compelling readings, but only short bits of them. Your paper and the other two assignments should delve deeper into specific authors, periods, events, issues, trends and/or places without doing simple side-by-side comparisons of them. There will be plenty of usable material, and I want you to use your imaginations to come up with adventuresome creative analytic--not solely descriptive--subjects and treatments. Your paper should be in the range of 10-12 pages, not counting notes, references and graphics. All your assignments should be typed double-space.
Wikipedia and other encyclopedias, on-line or off-, are fine places to begin research and poor ones to end it. Use them as starting points if you wish, but please don’t cite them. Doing so always makes your work look bad.

To help class communications I’ve set up a closed Facebook group, “American Environmental History and Thought 2012,” which you should join. If you have a good reason not to join, perhaps because you’re uncomfortable with Facebook, please let me know, and we’ll make other arrangements.

I want your work to reach mid-collegiate writing standards or, if you are a fourth-year student, higher ones and will lower the grade of any that does not. If your first language is not English, I may not hold you to these standards. I expect you to attend all classes, carefully do all the reading for them, and be ready to discuss it. The class is small and conversational, so your preparation will quickly be evident and affect your grade accordingly.

A warning: I rarely recap the day’s reading. If I do, I soon move on to other material related to it. You should be prepared for frequent unpredictable jumps and digressions in class discussion: they all have a point. The best way to anticipate them is to do the reading well. Bill McKibben, the editor of your text, writes in its introduction (pp. XXII-XXIII) that the nation’s environmental writing represents “America’s single most distinctive contribution to the world’s literature.” Relish this writing.

I expect you to understand and live up to Rutgers’ standards of academic integrity explained at academicintegrity@rutgers.edu/students. If you have questions on them, please ask me. Rules of thumb: if you think you may be violating them, you probably are because your conscience or sense of safety is telling you so. To avoid plagiarism, do original work.

Rutgers has a university-wide protocol for student self-reporting of individual absences. Please also get in touch with me directly if you must miss a class.

Schedule

September 7    Introduction.
September 14   Beginnings and endings: Thoreau and his influence, pp. XVII-36, 971-974. For this and other assignments, make sure to familiarize yourself with the relevant part of the chronology on pp. 997-1003. If you are interested in the background of the book’s excellent pictures, see pp. 1005-1013. If you need bibliography on the book’s selections, see pp. 1015-1024.
October 5      First-take home exam due at class, which will discuss the approaches you took to it.
October 12  Great Depression conservationism and its aftermath, pp. 251-347.

October 19  Sixties environmentalisms, pp. 348-472.


November 2  Second take-home exam due at class, which will discuss the approaches you took to it.

November 9  Eighties environmentalisms, pp. 595-724.

November 16 Contemporary environmentalisms, pp. 725-873.

November 23 No class: Thanksgiving.

November 30 More contemporary environmentalisms, pp. 875-974, XXI-36. Note that you should reread McKibben’s introduction, Thoreau and Solnit. Third take-home handed out.

December 7  Third take-home exam due at class, which will discuss the approaches you took to it.

December 14 Term paper due in instructor’s office at noon.