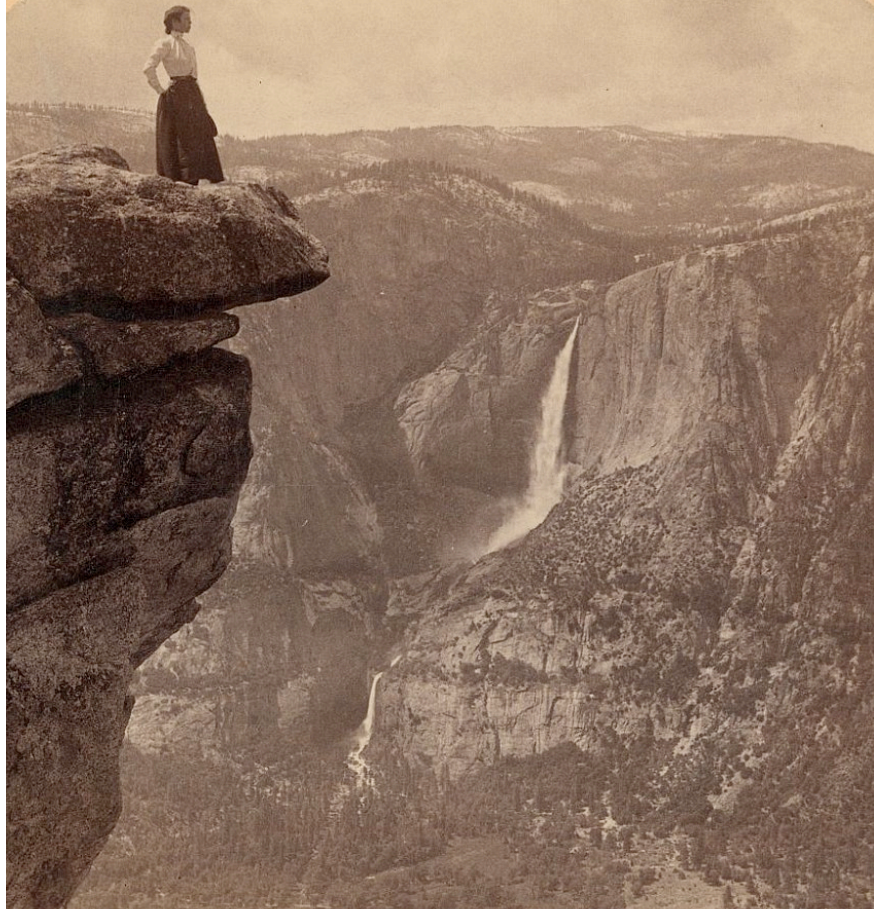


American Environmental History

CC 115

Spring 2016



Time: TR, 10:30 am–12:20 pm; W, 7:00–7:50 am
Place: Mueller Hall, Room LL20
Professor: Josh Kercsmar
Email: joshua.kercsmar@valpo.edu
Phone: 464-5275

Office Hours: MW, 10:15–11:15 am,
and by appointment, Linwood
House, Room 117

Introduction

How have Americans interacted with nature, and how has nature, in turn, shaped American society? This question lies at the heart of environmental history, which seeks to understand the history of human interactions with the natural world. As we delve into this exciting field, we will consider topics such as the decimation of bison, the rise of Chicago, the history of natural disasters, and the environmental consequences of urbanization and industrialization. We will think together about how nature differs among peoples, places, and times; how the meanings

people give to nature inform their cultural and political activities; and how these historical forces continue to shape the American landscape and its peoples.

Our central premise will be that much of the familiar terrain of American history looks very different when seen in environmental context, and that one can learn a great deal about history, geography, and the environment by studying them together. All too often, historians study the human past without attending to nature. All too often, scientists study nature without attending to human history. We will try to discover the value of integrating these different perspectives, and argue that humanistic inquiry is absolutely crucial if one hopes to understand contemporary environmental issues.

In addition to being a history course, this seminar is also a writing course that will teach you how to read, write, and argue well. Just as you cannot separate what you say from how you say it, rhetoric must exist in particular forms—in this case, arguments dealing with the history of human relationships to the natural world.

Course Goals

In this course, you will learn to:

- Frame a claim
- Conduct research
- Provide evidence
- Consider alternative views
- Write in a language appropriate to your intended audience
- Workshop, revise, and edit a text as you take it from a first draft to a polished essay
- Identify academic or argumentative writing as an ethical practice

Required Texts

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, eds., *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008)

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 20th anniv. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003)

Evaluation

Research Essay (250 points): You will write a traditional, print-based essay of 15-20 double-spaced pages on a focused topic of interest to you that somehow engages environmental history. This argument will be supported by your synthesis of a variety of credible sources found through your own independent research. This assignment will introduce you to genres of academic argumentation, the complexities of research, and the process of crafting an original argument within a larger conversation.

Oral Presentation (175 points): You will translate your written argument into a 20-minute oral presentation, to be given during the final week of class.

Participation/Daily Work (175 points): Full participation in all class activities, including (but not limited to) face-to-face class discussion, peer review, and collaborative activities, is a requirement of this course. You must also fully complete smaller assignments designed to support the major research project, including prewriting activities, in-class exercises, Blackboard assignments, and so on. Sleeping during class, unauthorized texting/Web surfing/gaming/etc., or being unprepared (e.g., without a paper for peer review or unprepared to discuss the readings) will lead to your being marked absent for the class period, and you will be responsible for any negative impact on your grade as a result.

Assignment Grading Standards

The specific grading criteria for each major assignment will be provided with the assignment sheet. Generally speaking, however, the grading standards for this class follow the university-wide grading standards and are as follows:

“A-level” work: Clearly meets or exceeds all expectations for the assignment. Maintains a focused, sophisticated controlling purpose throughout the work and demonstrates mastery of major rhetorical principles (audience, purpose, thesis, organization, development, coherence, etc). Demonstrates superior command of the subject matter and presents an original perspective on that subject matter so effectively that the reader enjoys reading the essay *and* learns from it. Captivates readers with clear, powerful, sophisticated writing style from start to finish. Connections between ideas are clear and smooth. Polished and free of sentence-level errors.

“B-level” work: Clearly meets or exceeds nearly all expectations of the assignment. Maintains a focused controlling purpose throughout the work and demonstrates solid command of major rhetorical principles. Demonstrates good command of the subject matter and presents an original perspective on that subject matter in an interesting and enjoyable way, though perhaps not as sophisticated as the “A-level” work. Writing style is clear and engaging through most of the work. Connections between ideas, overall, are clear and smooth. Polished and free of all but a few minor sentence-level errors.

“C-level” work: Clearly meets all basic expectations of the assignment. Maintains a controlling purpose, though at times the essay’s focus may drift. Demonstrates an adequate command of major rhetorical principles. Demonstrates a fair command of the subject matter and presents a perspective adequately, though it may not be as original and/or compelling as the A- or B-level essays. Connection between ideas are adequately made. May contain a few patterns of sentence-level errors, but not severe enough to interfere with communication. **Note: many students are surprised to receive a “C-level” grade when they have “done everything listed on the assignment sheet.” Simply meeting the minimum requirements constitutes a basic “passing” grade; to get a “B” or an “A,” you must exceed those minimum requirements through more sophisticated execution.

“D-level” work: Work is below “average,” meaning it does not clearly meet basic expectations of the assignment. Controlling purpose or thesis may be weak. Demonstrates some command of the subject matter, but may not present that information effectively. Perspective presented may

not be original or truly argumentative. Connection between ideas may be rough or confusing. May contain patterns of sentence-level error that are severe enough to interfere with communication.

“F-level” work: Work does not meet minimum expectations for the assignment. Shows little to no controlling purpose or thesis. May demonstrate inadequate command of the subject matter, and information may not be presented in a clear and appropriate way for readers. Perspective may be unoriginal, difficult to follow, or not truly argumentative. Connection between ideas may be very rough and difficult for readers to follow. May contain numerous patterns of sentence-level error that are severe enough to interfere with communication.

Attendance Policy

The success of this course depends upon your attendance. Many of the activities such as peer workshops and essay critiques cease to be productive when students are absent. For this reason, you are allowed three unexcused absences without any penalty to your grade. After that, each additional unexcused absence will result in your final course grade being lowered by one third. If you miss nine or more days of class (3 weeks), then you may fail the course. Each fourth tardy will count as an absence.

Technology Usage Policy

There will be points throughout the semester when you will be encouraged to use laptop computers and other devices in support of class activities. I will let you know when use of these technologies is acceptable; otherwise, you should turn off all electronic devices at the start of class and should refrain from texting, instant messaging, Facebooking, gaming, online shopping, checking e-mail, listening to music, or engaging in any other unapproved use of technology during class time. If you are caught violating this policy, you will be considered absent for that class period and will be responsible for any negative impact on your grade that may result.

Disability Statement

Please contact Dr. Sherry DeMik, Director of Disability Support Services, at 5456, if you believe you have a disability that might require a reasonable accommodation in order for you to perform as expected in this class. Dr. DeMik will work with you and me to make sure you receive any accommodation as the result of a disability.

Statement of non-discrimination: Valparaiso University is a community that strongly promotes mutual respect among its diverse members. The university does not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, age, disability, national origin or ancestry, sexual orientation, or religion. This policy governs every aspect of university life, including the classroom. Discrimination will not be tolerated in this or any other class on campus.

Academic honesty: I take very seriously Valparaiso University’s honor code, which applies for all of your work. I urge you to make sure you are familiar with the guidelines regarding cheating, plagiarism, and other matters related to academic honesty. Helpful information is available at

<http://www.valpo.edu/student/honorcouncil/> and <http://libguides.valpo.edu/c.php?g=335210&p=2254691>. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Council (<http://www.valpo.edu/student/honorcouncil/reportform.php>) Students who are found to be in violation of the academic honesty policy will be subject to severe academic sanctions, including failure of the course, suspension, and expulsion. Please see me if you have questions.

WEEK 1: WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY?

Tues., 3/15: Introduce course and each other. Discuss Cronon, preface and chs. 1-3. Walk through McIntyre Court.

Thurs., 3/17: SHORTENED CLASS! (Meet from 11:30 – 12:20)
Read Merchant, *Major Problems in Environmental History*, 33-69

Fri., 3/18: Introduce research paper and annotated bibliography assignments. Generating possible research topics.

Read Po-Yi Hung and Abigail Popp, "[Learning to Do Historical Research](#)"
Read Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 4

WEEK 2: STARTING RESEARCH

Tues., 3/22: NO CLASS! Visiting U. of Idaho.
Read Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, chs. 5-7
Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 9-15

Wed., 3/23: NO CLASS! Visiting U. of Idaho.
Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 36-82

Thurs., 3/24: Introduction to resources for research. Practice locating sources. The research process. Role of audiences.
Read Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 8, afterword

WEEK 3: ANALYZING ARGUMENTS AND INTERPRETING SOURCES

Tues., 3/29: Summary, response, and analysis. Chicago format and citation overview. Introduce concept maps and exploratory drafts.

Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 84-99
Read Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say (TSIS)*, 30-40, 55-67
Read Carolyn Merchant, *Major Problems in Environmental History*, 122-135.

Using the strategies you read about in Booth and *TSIS*, summarize and respond to one of the essays in Merchant. Be sure to note the strengths of your chosen essay, as well as any weaknesses you may detect. **DUE Tues., 3/29, by 8:00 am in Blackboard.**

DUE in class: 1-paragraph research topic proposal

Wed., 3/30: Read Mark Kishlansky, “How to Read a Document”

Read Carolyn Merchant, *Major Problems in Environmental History*, 103-121

Select a source from Merchant and (to the extent possible) interpret it using Kishlansky’s questions to guide you. **DUE Wed., 3/30, by 11:59 pm in Blackboard.**

Thurs., 3/31: NO CLASS! Conference in Seattle.

Read Anne Lamott, “Shitty First Drafts”

Work on your concept maps and exploratory drafts.

For at least THREE sources you locate in support of your research project, compose a paragraph (one per source) that offers (1) basic citation information for the source, (2) information about the source’s audience, purpose, and context, and (3) discussion of how you see this source being helpful to your paper. **DUE Thurs., 3/31, by 11:59 pm in Blackboard.**

WEEK 4: DOING RESEARCH AND MAKING COUNTERARGUMENTS

Tues., 4/5: Mini-conferences. In-class research time. Discussion of Merchant.

Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 105-38

Read Carolyn Merchant, *Major Problems in Environmental History*, 163-73

Bring completed, printed copy of your concept map and exploratory draft. I

will be having mini-conferences with individual students to discuss these items.

Use the rest of class time to continue searching for materials for your research essay.

Begin drafting your research essay. Tip: set a small, DAILY writing goal for yourself (e.g., 30 minutes per day, 1/2 page per day, etc.) between now and the day the paper is due, to help make the process more manageable.

Wed., 4/6: Quoting. Counterarguments.

Read *TSIS*, 42-51, 78-90

Apply strategies you read about to your draft (or at least plan how you’ll do so).

Thurs., 4/7: MEET IN LIBRARY. Presentation by Nora Belzowski. In-class research time.

Continue working on your annotated bibliography.

Continue drafting your research paper.

WEEK 5: SYNTHESIZING, INTRODUCING, CONCLUDING

Tues., 4/12: Discuss synthesis. Writing synthesized body paragraphs in support of claims.

Read about [synthesis](#).

Read Carolyn Merchant, *Major Problems in Environmental History*, 300-323

Write a paragraph that could appear in your research paper (intro, body paragraph, whatever) that synthesizes sources in support of a claim. **DUE Tues., 4/12, by 11:59 pm in Blackboard.**

Finish your annotated bibliography. **DUE Tues., 4/12, by 11:59 pm in Blackboard.**

Wed., 4/13: Strategies for intro/conclusion, saying why it matters.

Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 232-247.

Read *TSIS*, 92-100.

Thurs., 4/14: Workshop. Tying it all together. Introduce oral presentation assignment.

Read "[Writing Transitions](#)" and apply some of the suggested strategies to your draft.

DUE in class: 3-page development of your thesis (for peer review)

Craft an introduction or conclusion for your essay that uses some of the strategies mentioned in Booth and *TSIS*. **DUE Thurs., 4/14, by 11:59 pm in Blackboard.**

Continue drafting your research essay, paying special attention to the development of your supporting body paragraphs. Be sure to organize your paragraphs by point (not by source) and synthesize sources in support of your claims. Be prepared to **bring an "up" draft of your research essay to one-on-one conferences next week.**

WEEK 6: INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

WEEK 7: REVISING

Tues., 4/26: Workshop. Improving transitions, clarity of thought.

Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 203-210.

DUE in class: 10-page draft of your research essay (for peer review)

Taking the feedback from your peers into account, continue working on your research essay.

Wed., 4/27: Finishing touches.

Read Booth, *Craft of Research*, 249-269.

Thurs., 4/28: Rhetoric beyond the page.

WEEK 8: ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Tues., 5/3: Oral presentations.

Thurs., 5/5: Oral presentations.

Finish your research essay. DUE Thurs., 5/5, by 11:59 pm in Blackboard. Be sure to double-check the requirements listed on the assignment sheet.