COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Environmental history takes as its foundational premise that human beings shape and alter their environment, and that the rest of non-human nature, in turn, influences societies and cultures the world over. A recent generation of scholars working at the intersection of the histories of environment and of technology have further demonstrated the degree to which technologies mediate this reciprocal relationship. This course will introduce students to both the histories and politics of human-environmental-technological interaction, on the one hand, and the historiography of this nexus on the other. The focus will be on transnational flows and interconnections since 1800, from toxic places and toxic bodies, to nuclear energy, climate change, environmental justice, and the concept of the Anthropocene. Throughout, we'll pay particular attention to how knowledge about the environment is constructed, communicated, and deployed towards particular political and social ends. In the assignments for this course, students will have the opportunity to engage creatively with course themes, readings, and outside research; and to experiment with form, media, audience.

READINGS:

Readings for this course average about a book a week. Some weeks we read a little more, some a little less. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with all the contents of the whole of the assigned text. Students are encouraged to consult Paul N. Edwards’s guide, “How to Read a Book” (posted to Quercus) for suggested strategies for doing so. Books are available for purchase at the U of T bookstore and will be on reserve at Robarts Library. Wherever possible, I have tried to rely on texts available as e-books through UTL. Required articles are available on the course website.

Further readings for each theme we address in this course are listed at the end of the syllabus. These titles are intended to provide a sense of the scope of the field, and to offer a starting point for students who may wish to pursue a particular theme or approach in greater depth.
While I encourage students to purchase paper copies of books, all readings are available online, through UTL, Quercus, or the associated Library Resources for the course. The only exception to this is Richard White’s *Organic Machine*—please purchase this text for the first week of class.

**METHOD OF DELIVERY:**

This course will be taught online. Seminar meetings will take place over Zoom or BbCollaborate during the scheduled seminar period (Th 1-4pm, Toronto time). Every effort will be made to accommodate students working from other time zones, in the absence of reliable internet, and/or enduring other challenging circumstances.

**ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:**

**PARTICIPATION**

*Synchronous Seminar Participation* (15%): As a graduate-level seminar, all students are expected to prepare for and participate actively in class discussions. Grading will be based primarily on quality of contribution to discussion and only secondarily on quantity. Thoughtful, productive, and respectful engagement is expected from all members of the seminar.

*Discussion leading* (8%):

Each week, students will take turns introducing the readings and guiding class discussion. Students will be expected to offer brief (2-3 minute) preliminary remarks before guiding their peers through a given reading or readings by the Socratic method. Sign up for presentations will take place at the first class meeting. Students are encouraged to circulate their discussion questions and themes to their peers via Quercus, and to meet with me in advance of their presentations to discuss teaching strategies/approaches.

*Quercus Discussion Fora* (12%)

Online asynchronous discussion for a will constitute a significant element of this online class. Students will be expected to post a paragraph or two of reflections on each week’s reading(s). The aim here is to raise questions or points of analysis for discussion, not to comprehensively summarize the readings. Students will be asked both to post their own reflections, and to respond to each other’s posts and to generate dialogue and discussion threads in lieu or advance of our synchronous meetings.

*(Written) Assignments* (66%)

Over the course of the semester, students will submit three assignments in a range of media and formats. The assignments are designed to foster creative engagement with the course readings and themes; and to provide an opportunity to experiment with format and media.

1. **Key Word Analysis**:

In this assignment, you will analyze a key word from course readings and discussions. You’ll explore its etymology, its history and politics of use. You’ll need to address questions like, how has this term been used in the past? Does this reflect its current meaning? How and why has its signification changed over time? You’ll want to choose a word that is important to you—that is significant to your intellectual interests—and that has a robust enough history of use to allow you to track any shifting meanings. Alternatively, you may choose a recent neologism and explore how and why it entered the lexicon at a particular moment. You will be expected to do
some (but not comprehensive) outside research. Detailed instructions will be posted to Quercus and discussed in seminar/asynchronously.

LENGTH: 5-7PP, DOUBLE-SPACED
WORTH 16%
DUE OCTOBER 2

2. Envirotech Podcast:
Working in pairs or team of three, depending on class size, you will choose a theme, idea, historical instance, or other concept related to themes of course. You will research it, and design a 15-20-min podcast on the topic. Your podcast can take documentary, interview, or other appropriate form. You may choose to “play” yourselves or to take on the persona of an historical actor (real or presumed). Detailed instructions will be posted to Quercus and discussed in seminar/asynchronously.

Components include:
A storyboard, outline, or script: DUE IN-CLASS & ON QUERCUS OCT 22 (8%)
(Last hour of class will be a peer workshop)
Recorded podcast: DUE ONLINE MONDAY NOV 16 (14%)
Self-assessment: DUE ONLINE MONDAY NOV 16 (4%)
TOTAL: 26%

3. Week Thirteen:
Students will extend the course’s syllabus, designing a thirteenth week. Students will choose a topic that we did not discuss in class (or only discussed in brief), but that is of present concern to matters envirotech. Students will give the session a title, choose readings, outline main themes and questions for discussion. Students will write an essay that explains “the problem,” synthetically weaves together the readings, and explains your rationale for the shape and content of Week Thirteen.

The final meeting of the class will be devoted to critiquing/rethinking the syllabus, the field and, its directions. Your Week Thirteen assignments will provide the basis for this exercise. Detailed instructions will be posted to Quercus and discussed in seminar/asynchronously.

LENGTH: 8-10PP, DOUBLE-SPACED
WORTH 24%
DUE ONLINE DEC 2.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:
Academic integrity will be taken very seriously in this course. All students are expected to abide by U of T’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. Please familiarize yourself with it.

Accessibility Services:
This course welcomes students with diverse learning styles and needs, and I strive to make the classroom comfortable for all participants. Please reach out to me if you think I can facility your belonging in the seminar in any particular ways, and do contact Accessibility Services (https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as) to coordinate any academic accommodation arrangements that might support your learning.
ACCOMMODATING REMOTE LEARNING:
Every effort will be made to make this course accessible despite COVID interruptions of all sorts.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

SEP 10—1. INTRODUCTION: AT THE INTERSECTION OF ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY
REQUIRED:
MULTIMEDIA:
- ESC_ podcast Episode 1: Three Skeleton Key

SEPT 14—2. ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY, OR, IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS CROSBY
REQUIRED:
MULTIMEDIA:
- ESC_ podcast Episode 2: Leningen vs. the Ants

SEP 24—3. SEEING LIKE A STATE, FEELING LIKE A BODY
REQUIRED:

OCT 1—4. IN THE ARCHIVES

**KEY WORD ASSIGNMENT DUE OCTOBER 2**

REQUIRED:

OCT 8—5. (ANTHROPO)CENE(S) I

REQUIRED:


• Tobias Rees, “From the Anthropocene to the Microbiocene,” *Noema* (2020)


**OCT 15—6. (ANTHRO)CENE(S) II**

**REQUIRED:**

• Kathryn Yussof, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2019).


**OCT 22—7. PLANTATIONS**

**PODCAST STORYBOARD DUE**

**REQUIRED:**

• Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Harvard UP, 2013): Introduction (1-17); Chs 3 & 9 (73-96; 244-279)


**OCT 29—8. TOXICS**

**REQUIRED:**

• Elizabeth Hoover, *The River is in Us: Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): Preface (vii-xvi); Introduction, Chs. 1-2 & 5 (1-122; 219-252)


**MULTIMEDIA:**
- TRU, The Land and the Refinery

**NOV 5—9. MANUAL FOR SURVIVAL I**
**REQUIRED:**

**NOV 12—READING WEEK: NO CLASS**

**NOV 19—10. MANUAL FOR SURVIVAL II**
**RECORDED PODCAST & SELF-ASSESSMENT DUE NOV 16**
**REQUIRED:**
- Anna Tsing, Mushroom at the End of the World
**MULTIMEDIA:**
- ESC_ podcast Episode 10: Earth Abides

**NOV 26—11. MANUAL FOR SURVIVAL III**
**REQUIRED:**

**DEC 3—12. MANUAL FOR SURVIVAL IV**
**WEEK THIRTEEN ASSIGNMENT DUE DEC 2**
**NO READINGS**
FURTHER READINGS:

[____]‐CENES

ENVIRONMENT
Ashley Carse, *Beyond the Big Ditch*
Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network*
Gökçe Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert: Energy, Climate Change, and Urban Design in Abu Dhabi*
Leo Marx, *Technology: Emergence of a Hazardous Concept*
Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*

COLONIALISMS

Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*


Kim TallBear, *Native DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*

Janet Vertesi, *Seeing Like a Rover*

**TOXICITY**


**NATURE, LAND & PLACE**


**ORGANISMS**


Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, Multispecies Ethnography


Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*

Stefan Helmreich, *Alien Ocean*


