

**HH4006:  
The Green Earth: Issues in Environmental History  
Semester 1, 2019-2020**

Instructor: Asst. Prof. Miles Powell  
Study Year: 4  
Pre-requisite: HH1001  
Academic Units: 4 AU

**Logistics:**

Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 9:30 am – 1:30 pm  
Venue: LHS-TR+38  
Email: miles.powell@ntu.edu.sg  
Office: HSS 05-24  
Office Hours: By appointment

**General Textbook (Optional)**

McNeil, John. *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World*. New York; London: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000.

**Course Aims**

To challenge students to think about how human societies have altered their environments, and how, in turn, these modified environments have shaped the course of human history. Students will recognize that environmental changes in the distant past have had long-term repercussions for both humans and the natural world. They will also gain an appreciation for the wide variety of strategies that human groups have devised to exploit their environments, and will contemplate why some populations succeeded in developing more sustainable practices than others.

**Student Assessment**

Students will be assessed by:

Participation:	15%
In-Class Presentation:	20%
Weekly Reading Response:	35%
Research Project:	30% (15% for display and 15% for write-up)

**Participation**

All students should attend every seminar prepared to discuss that week's assigned readings. Outstanding participants will demonstrate a thorough and critical understanding of the assigned material by offering perceptive comments and asking informed questions. Disruptive behaviors, such as non-course-related conversations during lectures, presentations, or class discussion, will adversely affect your participation score.

**In-Class Presentation:**

Each student will sign up to co-present the seminar readings for a selected week with a partner. You are free to present the material in any manner you like. But you should aim to engage the class, and to demonstrate a strong grasp of the assigned readings. I will provide a grading rubric for these presentations on NTULearn.

### **Weekly Reading Response:**

Every week, **by 5:00 pm the night before class**, students will submit a brief (400 word) reading response addressing the assigned material for that week. Your response should identify the author's thesis (central argument) in one to two sentences. Your response should also identify, define, and provide an example illustrating, a key concept (e.g. "shifting baselines," "hybridity," etc.) introduced in the reading. This section should constitute the bulk of your response. Finally, your response should present a question that occurred to you while you were perusing the material. This question should demonstrate intellectual engagement with the assigned reading. For a few weeks, I have assigned works by more than one author. In these cases, you do not have to identify the author's theses. However, you do have to identify a central concept that runs through BOTH readings, and come up with a question that pertains to BOTH.

### **Research Project**

You are going to apply the theories and concepts you have encountered in this course by researching a local (Singaporean) environmental history topic. I will assign you into groups of four, and you will choose your own topics. Potential subjects include the Botanical Gardens, land reclamation, deforestation, waste disposal, wildlife management, or whatever else captures your interest.

Original research on local topics can be challenging, and for this reason, the written portion of this assignment is relatively short. This will free up more time for creative research strategies, including visits to the archives or oral history interviews.

Each group will present its research in two ways: First, each group will write up a report that includes 1,800-2,200 words of text, and at least four visual elements (note that this is a small amount of text for a group project, so the report should be highly polished). Second, you will create a visual exhibit of your findings (a poster is fine, but you can be more creative, if you like), which will be displayed in the HSS Library during the last week of classes. Your group will serve as interpreters for these exhibits and answer questions from visitors to the library. Both projects should include proper citations.

Your projects must consult primary sources (oral histories are acceptable), including at least two historical photographs. If at all possible for your chosen assignment, you should contrast a historical photo of Singapore with a present-day photo that a team member has taken from the same vantage point.

### **Course Policies**

**Your Responsibilities:** You are responsible for making yourself aware of all the information in this document. Familiarize yourself with due dates, times, and so on. It is also your responsibility to come to class prepared to participate. This means having completed the reading assignments, and having something to take notes with (either pen and paper or a laptop computer or tablet).

**Medical Certificates:** Medical Certificates (MCs) are not "get out of jail free" cards. The presentation of a medical certificate does not automatically excuse an absence or late work.

Depending on the circumstances, I will usually ask for you to complete additional work in order to “make up” for missed classes.

Late Policy: I will penalize late work at the rate of 10% of the maximum grade per 24-hour period overdue. For example, work that is 2 hours late will receive a 10% penalty, work that is 26 hours late a 20% penalty, work that is 55 hours late a 30% penalty, and so on. I may grant extensions in some special cases. However, I will not grant extensions within one week of the deadline (in other words, if you think you need an extension, ask early).

Plagiarism and Cheating: Universities consider using the works of others without properly acknowledging that use (that is, copying) to be “cheating.” In this course, such behavior will result in a score of zero on the assignment in question. In accordance with school policy, I will also report especially egregious cases to the university to be placed on record in your academic file. Learn how to cite the work of others properly. Do not ever copy. If in doubt, ask.

### **Academic Integrity**

Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU’s shared values.

As a student, it is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in all the work you do at NTU. Not knowing what is involved in maintaining academic integrity does not excuse academic dishonesty. You need to actively equip yourself with strategies to avoid all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, academic fraud, collusion and cheating. If you are uncertain of the definitions of any of these terms, you should go to the academic integrity website for more information. Consult your instructor(s) if you need any clarification about the requirements of academic integrity in the course.

### **Course Outline**

*Seminar I (Aug 14): Themes in Environmental History*

Seminar reading:

Worster, David. “Doing Environmental History” in *The Ends of the Earth. Essays in Modern Environmental History*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988

*Seminar II (Aug 21): The Environment’s Impact on Early Human Societies*

Seminar reading:

Fagan, Brian. *The Great Warming: Climate Change and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008. “1: A Time of Warming,” “12: China’s Sorrow”

*Seminar III (Aug 28): Felling the Forests*

Seminar reading:

Williams, Michael. *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis. An Abridgement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. “11: Clearing in the Tropical World”

Film: Amazon: Truth and Myth (2006)

**Seminar IV (Sep 4): Agriculture – "Let us cultivate our garden"**

Seminar reading:

Mazoyer, Marcel and Laurence Roudart. *A History of World Agriculture from the Neolithic Age to the Current Crisis*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006. "3: Systems of Slash-and-Burn Agriculture in Forest Environments" (including all subchapters)

Film: Hungry for Profit (2006)

**Seminar V (Sept 11): Water Regimes**

Lecture reading:

White, Richard. *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.

Film: Up the Yangtze (2008)

**Seminar VI (Sept 18): Fire**

Seminar readings:

Pyne, Stephen J. *World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1997. "Queimada Para Limpeza (Brazil)," "Nataraja (India)"

**Seminar VII (Sept 25): Oceans**

Seminar readings:

Bolster, Jeffrey. *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. "4: Making the Case for Caution," "5: Waves in a Troubled Sea"

Film: Sharkwater (2008)

**\*\*Recess Week\*\***

**Seminar VIII (Oct 9): Extinction**

Seminar readings:

Barrow, Mark. *Nature's Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. "1: Bones of Contention"

Elvin, Mark. *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. "2: Humans v. Elephants: The Three Thousands Years War"

Film: Tigers (2010)

**Seminar IX (Oct 16): A Pox of Germs and Pathogens**

Seminar reading:

Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. "9: Ills"

**Seminar X (Oct 23): Malthusianism**

Seminar reading:

Ehrlich, Paul and Anne Ehrlich. *The Population Explosion*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. "1: Why Isn't Everyone as Scared as We Are?"

Powell, Miles. "'Pestered with Inhabitants': Aldo Leopold, William Vogt, and More

Trouble with Wilderness”

**Seminar XI (Oct 30): Energy**

Lecture reading:

Crosby, Alfred. *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006. "Part Three: Energy at the Turn of the Third Millennium" (section intro), "7: Fission"

**Seminar XII (Nov 6): Climate Change**

Lecture reading:

Wells, Spencer. *Pandora's Seed: The Unforeseen Cost of Civilization*. New York: Random House, 2010. "6: Heated Argument"

Film: "Burning Season" (2008)

**Seminar XIII (Nov 13): Humanity's Future?**

**\*\*\*FINAL PROJECTS DUE\*\*\***

Seminar reading:

No readings. Head to library to serve as interpreters for your exhibits.

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Describe in detail how select past societies have interacted with their environments, and the key lessons to be derived from these historical examples
2. Produce projects that demonstrate an awareness of the enormous complexity of human exchanges with the environment (including germs, pathogens, and animals)
3. Identify the immense number of ways that human actions directly and indirectly affect the environment, requiring us to maintain sustainable relationships with the planet we call home
4. Use analytical and critical thinking skills to write and speak about human interactions with past environments, and to formulate environmental strategies for the future.