



**ROYAL INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY**

**AK1204 Environmental History (7,5 hp)  
Course-PM VT-24**

**Introduction**

This course is an introduction to environmental history, a field of inquiry that asks a straightforward question: What is the role of nature in human history? The answer to this inquiry can be straightforward, like hurricanes and agriculture, but also complex, and often vexing, like climate change. Over the course of fifteen weeks we will explore nature as an historical actor, but also how human ideas about nature have shaped history. Because natural processes often play out over great distances and long periods of time, this class will be global in scope, and cover the period from 1500 to the present. We will cover the primary intersections between environmental and global history during this period, including colonial expansion and biological exchange, industrialization and urbanization, and the environmental impact of modern technology. We will be using the broad scope and expansive time period to think about environmental history thematically, covering a new topic each class, while moving roughly chronologically from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The primary learning goals are for you to become thoroughly engaged with the concepts, core themes and questions raised by the field of environmental history; understand how they relate to some of the major world historical themes of the modern period; and begin thinking about how you could use those concepts when studying other historical periods and attempting to address contemporary environmental dilemmas, both in other classes and in your professional and personal life. The course material is designed to build upon itself, and so you need to work on applying the lessons from each week over the course of the term, and show evidence of that in your assignments.

**Learning Outcomes**

After the course the student shall:

- Demonstrate knowledge about the environment as a limiting factor in human societies from the oldest times to the present modern society
- Be able to describe and explain how and why the environment has become a political, economical and technological issue in modern society
- Be able to analyze the growing interest in risks, catastrophes and understand those phenomena in a historical context

- Identify the differences between different types of historical evidence, including primary and secondary sources, and their role in historical analysis.
- Demonstrate historical thinking skills, in particular an appreciation of the relationship between continuity and change and an ability to compare and analyze discrete historical contexts.
- Develop a historical argument based on a synthetic analysis of primary and secondary source texts.

### **Course Material**

- *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Environmental Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, by Robert Marks (Fourth Edition)
- Articles, essays, documents, images, films and other media, all posted on Canvas.

**Personal Environmental Narrative:** Historical study (like many forms of inquiry) is often times very subjective. We are interested in and have a passion for certain topics because of own experience or personal background. This is often especially true for environmental history, where our own environmental experience profoundly shapes how we understand the topics we research and even our research techniques. To understand that subjectivity, and build upon it, you are going to write a short essay that explores your own personal environmental history. *A more detailed outline with specific grading rubric and expectations for the essay will be distributed on the first day of the course.*

**Final Essay:** The major assignment for this course is an essay of about 2000 words that you will write based on an environmental history topic or theme explored in class. This can either be an original exploration, synthetic analysis of key texts, or some combination. It can also include aspects of your personal environmental narrative. The essay will be due at the end of the term, but you will also submit a short, preliminary abstract to gain feedback. Grades will be based on richness of material, quality of argument, clarity of presentation, standard of writing. *A more detailed outline with specific grading rubric and expectations for the essay will be distributed the second week of the course.*

**Reflection Assignments:** Before (and occasionally after) each class session, each student must complete a short writing assignment online, via Canvas, of 200-400 words (1 to 2 paragraphs). This will usually be a response to the reading, but will also explore course themes and seek to make connections to broader course issues and questions. These will be assessed primarily based on your engagement with course material and will be graded on the following scale:

- Exceptional: “Meets Expectations”; answer makes strong connections to other course topics and material (lectures and readings); has particularly creative answer to the prompt.
- Meets Expectations: Is well written and structured; addresses the prompt or question; shows evidence of completing and engaging with the course readings.

- Does Not Meet Expectations: Is sloppily written; minimal evidence of having completed the readings; does not address the prompt or question.

At the end of the course, I will drop at least the two lowest Reflection grades (including for non-submission).

**Submission Time:** All assignments are due on the date and time listed on Canvas, but I follow a standard 48 hour “grace period.”

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance is vital to your success in this class. You are expected to attend every class prepared to take notes and participate in discussions. I highly encourage you to take handwritten notes, but laptops and other electronic devices are allowed, and laptops are needed for discussing readings. Class engagement is 25 percent of your grade and is graded on the following scale:

- An “A” in the engagement grade is for students who miss two classes or less, arrive on time, are attentive, actively take notes, and participate actively in class and/or group discussions.
- A “B” grade is for students who miss more than two classes or have tardiness issues, but are generally committed to the course.
- A “C” grade is for students with significant attendance (miss more than four classes), tardiness, and/or participation issues that represent a lack of commitment to the course.
- A “D” or “E” is a more extreme version of a “C.”
- An “F” is for students who show no engagement with the course.

Note: Students with medical and/or significant personal issues will receive exemption or accommodations, but they must consult with Dr. Gioielli.

<b>Grading:</b>	Reflection Assignments	25 percent (total)
	Personal Environmental Narrative	10 percent
	Final Essay	40 percent
	Class Engagement	25 percent

- Grading scale: A, B, C, D, E, FX, F
- Based on recommendation from KTH’s coordinator for disabilities, the examiner will decide how to adapt an examination for students with documented disability.
- The examiner may apply another examination format when re-examining individual students.
- Results on the course are reported no later than two weeks after the final submission date for the essay. Students will have the option to revise the essay for a higher grade.

## **Plagiarism and Artificial Intelligence**

All students are expected to complete their own work in this course, and not use the scholarship, writing or work of someone or something else without proper attribution. This restriction includes the use of CHAT GPT and other generative artificial intelligence tools and large language learning models. **All writing assignments must be completed by the individual student.** Evidence of plagiarism and/or the use of AI tools will lead to a number of actions, including but limited to: Resubmitting the assignment; a “0” or null grade for the assignment; formal disciplinary action with the university.

For more information on avoiding plagiarism, please see this guide from KTH:

<https://www.kth.se/en/student/stod/studier/fusk-1.997287>

In many of your courses, AI is seen as a useful tool. However, writing, research and synthetic analysis is a core part of the learning process in history courses, which is why the use of AI tools should be kept to a minimum, and you need to produce all of your own written assignments. If you have questions or concerns about this, please see Dr. Gioielli

### **Specific prerequisites**

Completed upper secondary education including documented English corresponding to English A/ English 6.

### **Support for students with disabilities**

Notify the course responsible and contact KTH’s unit for support for students with disabilities. Contact: [funka@kth.se](mailto:funka@kth.se).

### **Further information**

#### **Course responsible**

Rob Gioielli, KTH, Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment.

E-mail: [gioielli@kth.se](mailto:gioielli@kth.se)

#### **Additional teachers**

Martin Emanuel

Per Högselius

#### **Examiner**

Per Högselius, [perho@kth.se](mailto:perho@kth.se)

#### **Additional contacts**

Help with registration: [kursexp@abe.kth.se](mailto:kursexp@abe.kth.se)

## Course Plan

All readings and other material must be completed/viewed/consumed before the class in which they are listed, and all reflection assignments must be submitted. Schedule and readings subject to change. Canvas notifications will be used for all updates, and all readings will be posted to Canvas.

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### Session 1: Course introduction: Practical introduction, attendance and environmental history as field of knowledge

Time: **Monday 18 March 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V01, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Course introduction, personal introduction, major assignments, learning objectives, expectations.

Readings: Primary source environmental history documents distributed in class.

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### Session 2: The World in 1450

Time: **Thursday 21 March 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V01, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: Robert Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, Fourth Edition (Rowman and Littlefield, 2019) Introduction, Ch. 1 and 2.

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### Session 3: Doing Environmental History

Time: **Monday 25 March 13:00-15:00**

Place: [M33, Brinellvägen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: [Melanie Arndt](#), Environmental History, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 23.08.2016  
[http://docupedia.de/zg/Arndt\\_environmental\\_history\\_v3\\_en\\_2016](http://docupedia.de/zg/Arndt_environmental_history_v3_en_2016)

German Version: [Umweltgeschichte](#)

Linda Nash. "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (2005): 67–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3985846>.

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### Session 4: Slavery, Race and New Ecologies

Time: **Thursday 28 March 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V01, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Assignment: Bring a piece (or pieces) of your favorite candy or sweet treat. If you don't have one right now, choose one from when you were younger.

Readings: McNeill, John R. "Ecology, Epidemics and Empires: Environmental Change and the Geopolitics of Tropical America, 1600–1825." *Environment and History* 5, no. 2 (June, 1999): 175–184.

Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, Ch. 3

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### **Session 5: Climate and Crisis**

**April 8, 2024**

**No class meeting: Video lecture will be posted on Canvas**

Assignment: Submit writing assignment "My Personal Environmental History"

Readings: Sherry Johnson, "El Niño, Environmental Crisis, and the Emergence of Alternative Markets in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1760s-70s," *William and Mary Quarterly*, July 2005.

Podcast: "Ben Franklin's World Ep. 189: The Little Ice Age"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2\\_k3ueCZ7Eg&t=25s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_k3ueCZ7Eg&t=25s)

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### **Session 6: Industrial Ecologies (Seminar)**

Time: **Thursday 11 April 13:00-15:00**

Place: [M33, Brinellvägen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: Brett Walker, "Meiji Modernization, Scientific Agriculture, and the Destruction of Japan's Hokkaido Wolf," *Environmental History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Apr., 2004), pp. 248-274

Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, Ch. 4

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### **Session 7: Agricultural Revolutions**

Time: **Monday 15 April 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V21, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: Simon Halberg, "Birth of the Sleepless Land: The Arrival of the Sugar Beet and Some Ethnological Observations on the Steam Plough and its Fossil Mode of Operation in Scandinavian Agriculture ca. 1880," *Ethnologia Fennica*, 2023.

Edward Melillo, "The First Green Revolution: Debt Peonage and the Making of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Trade, 1840–1930," *American Historical Review*, October 2012.

### **Session 8: Urban Mobility, Infrastructure and the Environment**

Time: **Thursday 18 April 13:00-15:00 (Seminar)**

Place: [W43, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Martin Emanuel

Readings: TBD

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### **Session 9: Reading the Landscape**

Time: **Monday 22 April 13:00-15:00**

Place: Teknikringen 43, 114 28 Stockholm (In front of KTH Climate Action Centre)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

This session will be a walking tour of the Norra Djurgårdsstaden and Norra Djurgården area near KTH where we will develop a core environmental history skill: reading the landscape as a primary source "text." This tour will be "rain or shine" so where appropriate clothes and sturdy shoes. "Det finns inget dåligt väder, bara dåliga kläder"

Readings: University of Wisconsin, Center for History, Culture and the Environment  
"Reading an Urban Landscape" <https://che.nelson.wisc.edu/reading-an-urban-landscape/>

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### **Session 10: New Energy Regimes**

Time: **Thursday 25 April 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V01, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Per Högselius

Readings: TBD

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### **Session 11: Conservation and Control**

Time: **Monday 29 April 13:00-15:00**

Place: [M33, Brinellvägen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil. "State Forestry and Social Conflict in British India." *Past & Present*, no. 123 (1989): 141–77

Jane Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995. EXCERPTS

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### **Session 12: War and the Environment**

Time: **Thursday 2 May 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V01, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: Andrew Kirk, "Rereading the Nature of Atomic Doom Towns," *Environmental History* 2012 17:3, 635-647.

Timo Vuorisalo, Simo Laakkonen, and Richard P. Tucker, *The Long Shadows: A Global Environmental History of the Second World War* (Oregon State University Press, 2017)  
EXCERPTS

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### **Session 13: Environmentalism(s) Top and Bottom**

Time: **Monday 6 May 13:00-15:00**

Place: [V01, Teknikringen](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: David Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn in Postwar Sweden: A New History of Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 2021). Ch. 1 and 8 and ONE additional chapter (c. 20-25 pages). <https://www.lunduniversitypress.lu.se/books/9650284/>

Rob Gioielli, "Is Ivory Perry and Environmentalist (and does it matter)?," in *Left in the Midwest: St. Louis Progressive Activism in the 1960s and 1970s*, Ben Looker and Amanda Izzo, eds. (University of Missouri Press, 2022).

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### **Session 14: The Age of Development/Age of Sustainability**

Time: **Monday 13 May 13:00-15:00**

Place: [Q31, Malvinas väg](#)

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford University Press, 1987) EXCERPTS

Angus Wright, *The Death of Ramon Gonzalez: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (California University Press, 1990) EXCERPTS

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### **Session 15: Student peer review and presentations**

Time: **Monday 20 May 13:00-15:00**

Place: [Q31, Malvinas väg](#)



Teacher: Rob Gioielli

This will be a structured seminar where students will discuss drafts of their final essay topics in smaller groups. In addition to gaining peer review feedback, they will develop common themes and questions to present to the larger course.

**Final Essays are due May 27 at 11:59 pm (midnight)**