



**ROYAL INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY**

AK1204 Environmental History (7.5 HP)
Course-PM HT-26

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 eight 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 1750 to the present. We will explore 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 18th to the 20th 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 discussed the first week of the course.*

Final Presentation: Each student is expected to make a short presentation about their essay topic and how it connects to course themes during one of the four presentation slots at the end of the term. *A detailed outline with specific grading rubric and expectations for the presentation will be discussed the second week of the course.*

Reflection Assignments: Before (and occasionally during or after) each class session, each student must complete a short writing assignment online, via Canvas, of about 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:

- Meets Expectations: Is well written and structured; addresses the prompt or question; shows evidence of completing and engaging with the course readings/course material (2 pts).
- Does Not Meet Expectations: Is sloppily written; minimal evidence of having completed the readings and/or engaged with course material; does not address the prompt or question (Less than 2 pts)

At the end of the course, the two lowest Reflection grades will be dropped (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.” If you need an extension beyond this time, please contact Rob Gioielli.

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 20 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.

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

Grading:	Reflection Assignments	20 percent (total)
	Personal Environmental Narrative	10 percent
	Final Essay	40 percent
	Presentation	10 percent
	Class Engagement	20 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, Claude 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.

Further information

Course responsible

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

E-mail: gioielli@kth.se

Additional teachers

Emil Flatø

Jonathan Galka

Fannie Frederikke Baden

Examiner

Sabine Höhler

Additional contacts

Help with registration: kursexp@abe.kth.se

Planned Course Schedule

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

Session 1: Course introduction and environmental history as a field of knowledge

Time: **Tuesday 27 October 13:15-15:00**

Place: E36

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

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

Readings: Primary source environmental history documents distributed in class.

Session 2: Doing Environmental History

Time: **Thursday 29 October 13:15-15:00**

Place: B26

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: [Melanie Arndt](#), Environmental History, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 23.08.2016

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>

Session 3: The Biological Old World/New World

Time: **Tuesday 3 November 13:15-15:00**

Location: M32

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Reading: Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, Introduction and Ch. 1-3

Session 4: Climate and Crisis

Time: **Thursday 5 November 13:15-15:00**

Place: V21

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

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

Session 5: Industrial Ecologies

Time: **Tuesday 10 November 13:15-15:00**

Place: E31

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Readings: Malm, Andreas (2013). The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry. *Historical Materialism* 21 (1):15-68.

Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, Ch. 4 and 5.

Session 6: Agricultural Revolutions

Time: **Thursday 12 November 13:15-15:00**

Place: D32

Teacher: Emil Flatø

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 7: Urban Infrastructures

Time: **Tuesday 17 November 13:15-15:00**

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.” Also make sure you are on time! We leave promptly at 13:15.

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

Readings: Arndt, Melanie. “The Heat Is On!” Springs: The Rachel Carson Center Review, no. 3 (May 2023). <https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc-springs-4311>.

Clay McShane and Joel Tarr, "The Decline of the Urban Horse in American Cities," *Journal of Transport History*, 2003.

Session 8: Experiencing Ruins and the Environment

Time: **Thursday 19 November 13:15-15:00**

Place: E36

Teacher: Fannie Frederikke Baden

Readings: TBD

Session 9: Conservation and Control

Time: **Tuesday 24 November 13:15-15:00**

Place: E33

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

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

Session 10: Green Revolutions

Time: **Thursday 26 November 13:15-15:00**

Place: M31

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

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

Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, Ch. 6.

Session 11: Consumerism and the Great Acceleration

Time: **Tuesday 1 December 13:15-15:00**

Place: M31

Teacher: Rob Gioielli

Reading: Steffen, W., Broadgate, W., Deutsch, L., Gaffney, O., & Ludwig, C. (2015). The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration. *The Anthropocene Review*, 2(1), 81-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019614564785>

Kristoffersson, S. (2014). *Design by IKEA: A cultural history* (W. Jewson, Trans.). Bloomsbury Academic. Ch. 1 and 3

Session 12: When did we know about climate change? Histories of environmental knowledge and denial

Time: **Thursday 3 December 13:15-15:00**

Place: E35

Teacher: Emil Flatø

Readings: Locher, Fabien, og Jean-Baptiste Fressoz. "Modernity's Frail Climate: A Climate History of Environmental Reflexivity". *Critical Inquiry* 38, nr. 3 (2012): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1086/664552>

Norgaard, Kari Marie. "'We Don't Really Want to Know': Environmental Justice and Socially Organized Denial of Global Warming in Norway". *Organization & Environment* 19, nr. 3 (2006): 347–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026606292571>

Session 13: War and the Environment

Time: **Tuesday 8 December 13:15-15:00**

Place: E31

Teacher: Nico Edwards

Readings: TBD

Session 14: Ocean Commons

Time: **Thursday 10 December 13:15-15:00**

Place: E53

Teacher: Jonathan Galka

Readings: TBD

Session 15: Final Presentations

Students will sign up for one of two presentation sessions in advance.

Time: **Monday 14 December 14:00 to 16:00**

Place: D41

Time: **Tuesday 15 December 14:00 to 16:00**

Place: K51

Final Essays are due Jan. 8 at 11:59 pm (midnight)