Overview

Much has been made of the contemporary environmental concept of the Anthropocene: the Age of Humans. Scholars, who promote the delineation of this age, point specifically to anthropogenic climate change as an example and a fundamental driver shaping the physical world so that humans are perceived as a global force of nature. As such, environmental conditions, and the cultures that exist in them, are transitioning into something that is markedly different from what human civilization has known. In this course, we will read, discuss, and critique the emerging literature of the Anthropocene as an avenue to understand the meaning of ecological uncertainty, apocalypse, technological optimism, and human persistence. Beginning with Bill McKibben’s 1989 book *The End of Nature*, we will explore how contemporary writers, fiction and nonfiction, are articulating the tension implicit in living in a radically changing world, one in which our expectations of season, cycle, and ‘normal conditions’ have come into flux. In particular, we will focus on the tendency to write about this era and phenomenon as a time of eco-apocalypse.

Learning Outcomes – Knowledge, Skills, and Values

1) Explain the history and recent emergence of scientific and literary concepts associated with the Anthropocene;
2) Read, discuss and critique contemporary environmental literature and its scientific basis;
3) Identify elements of apocalypse, ecological uncertainty, technological optimism, and persistence in contemporary environmental writing;
4) Explain the accuracy of the physical and natural sciences as written in the contemporary environmental literature read in this course, especially as they concern anthropogenic climate change and species extinction;
6) Contribute to the literature and culture of Anthropocene studies.

Learning Outcomes – Professional and Personal Development

1) Develop a community of readers and learners;
2) Engage in peer review of writing assignments;
3) Advance writing, speaking and information literacy skills in environmental scholarship;
4) Define one’s role in environmental stewardship given global change phenomena;
5) Prepare for further learning at personal and transpersonal scales after course ends.

Evaluation and Assessment

Evaluation will be based on the following: weekly blog posts; film reviews; writing assignments and their revisions; peer review of classmates’ work; final writing project; final reading; and focused feedback, class participation, and attendance.
Assignments:

1) **Blog postings (13).** Throughout the semester, students will take the lead on making an initial, well-researched post based on assigned readings. Posts (600-800 words) will then be followed by classmates’ responses. Each student will be assigned a minimum number of main postings. All students will respond to readings and lead posts each week. Lead posts will be posted by Sunday at 8 pm and response posts will be posted by Tuesday at 11:30 pm. This will allow enough time for everyone to be heard. In addition, they will provide a basis for discussion on Thursday.

2) **Film reviews (3).** To augment our exploration of the Anthropocene, students will watch and review films that incorporate Anthropocene themes in their storylines. Subsequently, students will write and share assignments based on the films. Reviews will be approximately 800 words.

3) **Writing assignments (3).** There will be three 2500-3000 word (8-10 pg) writing assignments due during the semester. Each assignment will be developed around classroom discussions and created with student input. The intent of the assignments is to develop and assess the student’s creative and critical response to course material, to develop research expertise in Anthropocene studies, and to prepare for the larger project due at the end of the semester. Assignments will be refined through a drafting and revision process, one that includes peer and instructor review. Assignments will be graded on research depth, creativity, analysis, thoughtfulness, and clear writing. Rubrics will be provided.

4) **Project (1).** There will be one large creative writing project of approximately 5000 words in length (15-20 pg). In this piece, students will incorporate coverage of climate change and/or species extinction as a dominant theme. This piece may be fiction or non-fiction but it must be based on well researched evidence and explore the meaning of the Anthropocene as a human-dominated, geological epoch where humans play a principal role in ecological and planetary systems. This project will include first and second drafts, peer and instructor reviews, followed by final paper submission.

5) **Reading and writing.** This course is reading and writing intensive. We will read 6 books over 15 weeks as well as numerous articles from peer-reviewed and lay sources on the Anthropocene, climate change, species extinction, and the human-dominated nature of Earth’s ecosystems. Students are expected to respond to classmates’ work and to read aloud from their own work in class. In addition, there will be a final group reading at the end of the semester.

Primary readings:
Kingsolver, Barbara. *Flight Behavior* (fiction)
Kolbert, Elizabeth. *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* (non-fiction)
Kolbert, Elizabeth. *Sixth Extinction* (non-fiction)
Kunstler, James Howard. *A World Made By Hand* (fiction)
McKibben, Bill. *The End of Nature* (non-fiction)
Paull, Laline. *The Bees* (fiction)

6) **Methods of evaluation (1000 pts)**
1) Blog postings (13) (~25%; 260 pts) 2) Film reviews (5%; 50 pts)
3) Writing assignments (~33%; 330 pts) 4) Final project (~20%; 210 pts)
5) Final reading and critique (5%; 50 pts) 6) Attendance and participation (10%; 100 pts)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 21 (Th)</td>
<td>definitions</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v415/n6867/pdf/415023a.pdf">http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v415/n6867/pdf/415023a.pdf</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Anthropocene: History &amp; definitions</td>
<td>McKibben, B. <em>The End of Nature. Part I.</em></td>
<td>DUE: Blog post (600 words)*</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Climate change: Marker of Anthropocene</td>
<td>McKibben, B. <em>The End of Nature. Part II.</em></td>
<td>DUE: Draft first writing assignment</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Climate change: Marker of Anthropocene</td>
<td>Kolbert, Elizabeth. <em>Field Notes from a Catastrophe.</em></td>
<td>DUE: Peer review of first assignment</td>
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<td>February 11 (Th)</td>
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<td>Chapters 1-7.</td>
<td>DUE: Blog post (600 words)*</td>
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<td>Lord George Byron. 1816. <em>Darkness.</em></td>
<td>DUE: Film review #1</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Climate change: Marker of Anthropocene</td>
<td>Kolbert, Elizabeth. <em>Field Notes from a Catastrophe.</em></td>
<td>DUE: Final version first assignment</td>
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<td>February 18 (Th)</td>
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<td>Chapters 8-14.</td>
<td>DUE: Blog post (600 words)*</td>
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<td>Purdy, J. 2015. <em>Should we be suspicious of the Anthropocene?</em></td>
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<td><a href="https://aeon.co/essays/should-we-be-suspicious-of-the-anthropocene-idea">https://aeon.co/essays/should-we-be-suspicious-of-the-anthropocene-idea</a></td>
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<td>February 25 (Th)</td>
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<td>Scranton, R. 2013. <em>Learning how to die in the Anthropocene</em></td>
<td>DUE: Blog post (600 words)*</td>
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<td><a href="http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/learning-how-to-die-in-the-">http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/learning-how-to-die-in-the-</a></td>
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<td>anthropocene/?src=me&amp;ref=general&amp;r=1</td>
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<td>March 3 (Th)</td>
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<td>DUE: Blog post (600 words)*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DUE: Film review #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK!</td>
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| Week 9 | March 17 (Th) | Extinction: Marker of Anthropocene | Kolbert, E. *Sixth Extinction*. Chapters 1-7.  
from After Preservation: Saving American Nature in the Age of Humans. | DUE: Final version second assignment  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Week 10 | March 24 (Th) | Extinction: Marker of Anthropocene | Kolbert, E. *Sixth Extinction*. Chapters 7-10.  
Minteer, Ben. 2015. *When extinction is a virtue*.  
from After Preservation: Saving American Nature in the Age of Humans.  
https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-consolations-of-extinction/ | DUE: First draft third assignment  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)* |
Field trip to UVM Horticulture Farm and Orchard. | DUE: Peer review of third assignment  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)*  
DUE: Film review #3 |
| Week 12 | April 7 (Th) | Extinction: A fictional context | Paull, Laline. *The Bees*.  
Guest lecture: Leif Richardson, Gund Institute for Ecological Economics, on wild bee decline. | DUE: Final version third assignment  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)* |
| Week 13 | April 14 (Th) | Anthropocene literature: An example of dystopia | Kunstler, James Howard. *A World Made By Hand*.  
Field trip to Metta Earth Institute, Lincoln, VT. (12-5 pm)  
Additional readings TBD. | DUE: First draft of final project  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)* |
| Week 14 | April 21 (Th) | Anthropocene literature: An example of dystopia | Kunstler, James Howard. *A World Made By Hand*.  
*Dark Mountain Project*  
http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/ | DUE: Peer review of final project  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)* |
| Week 15 | April 28 (Th) | Writer’s workshop | Writer’s Workshop and Readings  
Closing remarks and course evaluation | DUE: Final version final project  
DUE: Blog post (600 words)* |
| May 10 (T) | Writer’s workshop | Writer’s Workshop and Readings (as needed)  
(10:30-1:15 L/L CM 314) | |
Course Guidelines

1) **Readings** – All readings must be done before the start of class. The reading serves as background for class discussion, activities, and any lectures given. Taking notes and reflecting on key points while you read is helpful.

2) **Late assignments** – Late assignments will receive point reduction along the following: film reviews, writing assignments, and peer reviews – 2 pts. per day, not accepted after 5 business days; final project draft and final version 5 pts. per day, not accepted after 5 business days; blog postings not accepted after 11:30 pm on Tuesdays.

3) **Class times** -- You are expected to attend all class periods and arrive on time and leave at the end of the class. Class will begin promptly at 1:15 or earlier with the two field trips. Please make every effort to arrive on time to be respectful to your classmates and the professor. If you arrive late, please minimize disturbance to others. With each unexcused absence, student final grade will be deducted by 25 pts. Consistently late (>2) arrivals or early departures will count as an absence as well.

4) **Absences** -- Attendance will be taken each week and unexcused absences will factor into your final grade (50 pts reduction per unexcused absence). Absences are not “excused” unless they are personally cleared with the professor. I expect you to make a commitment to attend every class, both for your own personal learning, and to contribute to the community of learners in this small class.

5) **Participation** -- There will be numerous opportunities for participation in class including break-out discussions, learning engagement activities, and in-class writing prompts that inform class discussion. Each person in the class is expected to speak up and contribute to the discussions. Participation counts for 5% of your grade.

6) **Cell phones** – UVM does not permit cell phone use in class. This means cell phones should be turned off during class. Texting is not allowed either. When you are in class you are expected to pay attention to the course material that is being discussed. Much of a college education is aimed at developing your attention and concentration so your mind is capable of more complex thinking challenges. Learning how to minimize distraction is an important skill for developing your mind.

7) **Laptops in class** – Some people have specific needs for the use of a laptop computer to take notes in class. This is the only permissible use of laptops in class. Checking email, Facebook, or playing e-games constitutes the end of laptop privilege. If you require the use of a laptop for lecture class, please see the professor for permission.

8) **Academic Honesty** -- All students are expected to follow the academic guidelines issued by the University of Vermont. Dishonesty can become a bad habit if you let it be part of your academic schooling. Don't rationalize unethical behavior. In your writing assignments, your written words should be your own. If you draw on other sources, they should be cited properly to give adequate credit. If you are having trouble in school or in the class, come and talk with me. Let me or your advisor help you before it is too late and you are tempted to turn to self-degrading compromises. Work that appears to be plagiarized will be given no credit and students will be asked to meet with the instructor to explain the situation. Plagiarism at UVM is grounds for academic suspension; don't do it. (UVM's Code of Academic Integrity is available on line at www.uvm.edu/cses/.)

9) **ACCESS** -- In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact ACCESS, the office of Disability Services on campus. ACCESS works with students to create reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to their professors as early as possible each semester. They are located at A170 Living/Learning Center, and can be reached by phone at 802-656-7753, or by emailing access@uvm.edu. Visit their website at http://www.uvm.edu/access.

10) **Course Grading** -- All written work and exams will be graded on a point basis often with rubrics. In general, I will follow these standards for grading:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Lower Boundary</th>
<th>Upper Boundary</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Lower Boundary</th>
<th>Upper Boundary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98-100%</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-87%</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-79%</td>
<td>73-77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
<td>68-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69%</td>
<td>63-67%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>below 60%</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63-67%</td>
<td>60-62%</td>
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</table>

*Warning letters:* If a student is doing poorly in class, s/he will receive a warning letter suggesting they either improve their work or consider withdrawing from class. If you receive one of these letters, please contact me, or our graduate TA, for assistance in improving your work.

11) Religious Holidays -- Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. If you need to miss class to observe a religious holiday, please submit the dates of your absence to me in writing by the end of the second full week of classes. You will be permitted to make up work within a mutually agreed-upon time.

12) Misc. policies --

**Academic Integrity:** The policy addresses plagiarism, fabrication, collusion, and cheating.  

**Grade Appeals:** If you would like to contest a grade, please follow the procedures outlined in this policy:  

**Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities:** [www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/studentcode.pdf](http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/studentcode.pdf)

**FERPA Rights Disclosure:** The purpose of this policy is to communicate the rights of students regarding access to, and privacy of their student educational records as provided for in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974.  

**Promoting Health & Safety:**  
The University of Vermont’s number one priority is to support a healthy and safe community:

- **Center for Health and Wellbeing** [http://www.uvm.edu/~chwb/](http://www.uvm.edu/~chwb/)
- **Counseling & Psychiatry Services (CAPS)** Phone: (802) 656-3340  
  **C.A.R.E.** If you are concerned about a UVM community member or are concerned about a specific event, we encourage you to contact the Dean of Students Office (802-656-3380). If you would like to remain anonymous, you can report your concerns online by visiting the Dean of Students website at [http://www.uvm.edu/~dos/](http://www.uvm.edu/~dos/)