Australian Environmental History

Class code
ENVST-UA 9450 – 002 or HIST-UA 9750 – 001

Instructor Details
Dr Adam Gall
amg24@nyu.edu
Consultations by Appointment
Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

Class Details
Spring 2017

Australian Environmental History

Tuesday 12:30 – 3:30pm
January 31 to May 9
Room 302
NYU Sydney Academic Centre

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
What is Australian Environmental History, and how does narrative shape our understanding of the history of the Australian Environment? This course seeks answers to these questions, and to advance our understanding of the role of environment in Australian history. Questions include: How are environments incorporated into the tool kit of historians? What counts as evidence when historical research approaches non-human subject matter? Topics include the significance of nature for citizenship and nationalism, floods, fire, food crops, maritime, rural and urban environments, acclimatisation and the introduction of plant and animal species, tourism and the Great Barrier Reef, Antarctica and climate change.

Classes will be conducted in a seminar format including short talks by the lecturer and guest experts, mixed with structured, reading-focused discussion, screenings, and source-based activities facilitated by the lecturer. In these sessions students will examine not only the events and actors in Australian environmental history, but also the major debates in the historical scholarship, and historiographic, epistemological and political issues raised by the topics under consideration. During each week’s class, students will also be encouraged to share and explore the results of their own inquiry and preparation for assessments.
The course includes two field trips: one to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney and another to the former industrial sites of Sydney Olympic Park in the city’s west.

Desired Outcomes

Throughout this course, students will be expected to develop:

- a general familiarity with Australia's environmental history, and a more detailed engagement with key aspects of that history;
- awareness of the work of prominent scholars in the discipline, and of a number of the most significant debates shaping Environmental History in Australia;
- a degree of confidence using historiographic methods to inquired into environmental issues, including identifying, evaluating and working with primary sources;
- a critical perspective on claims made about environments past and present informed by a consciousness of the different human and non-human actors and forces involved; and
- some insight into the problematic relationship between past events and narrative forms.

Assessment Components

10% Participation Students will be expected to participate fully in class throughout the semester. Participation includes involvement in structured discussions, debates and other classroom activities, as well as completing quizzes and worksheets. It also means that students should be ready to offer their perspectives on reading materials, to ask constructive critical questions of each other following presentations, and to offer relevant contributions linking issues discussed in class to their own social knowledge when called upon to do so.

10% Student presentations (10 minutes) Each student will be asked to give a brief (10 mins) presentation on an Australian place whose environmental history they have investigated. They can speak about a place that is named in the course materials for the week they are assigned, or another that interests them and whose history is relevant to the themes of the course. Places could be suburbs, towns, waterways, human institutions or natural locations that can be experienced and understood on a human scale. Two students will present in class each week, beginning in week 4. Students are encouraged to provide visual materials, including photographs, slides, excerpts from media or archival documents to accompany these short talks.

20% Short essay (5-6 pages) Due in Week 6. Students will be required to refer to at least three relevant sources from the course materials. Questions to be announced Week 3.

10% (2 pages) Animal or plant source evaluation Due in Week 10. Students will be asked to choose an animal or plant species and investigate some aspect of its history in Australia by locating a primary source through which a historian might begin an investigation. Students will evaluate the source for its reliability and establish what we can learn from it about the animal or plant in question. Sources might include images, reports, media articles, research articles, books (popular or academic) or various other possibilities. More detailed instructions on locating and evaluating sources will be offered before the mid-semester break.
10% Long essay proposal (1-2 pages) Due in Week 12. Students will prepare a proposal for their final essay, including which question they intend to answer, a brief (paragraph length) statement of what they believe they will argue, and an annotated list of the resources from the course materials they plan to refer to. These proposals will then be discussed with the lecturer in individual meetings. Guidance on this task will be offered in the classes leading up to submission.

40% Long essay (12-14 pages) Due in Week 15. Students will be required to refer to at least six relevant sources from the course materials. Questions to be announced Week 9.

*Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component will result in failure of the class.*

*For this course your total numerical score, calculated from the components listed above, is converted to a letter grade without rounding.*

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.

**Grade B:** Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.

**Grade C:** Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.

**Grade D:** Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.

**Grade F:** Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

**Grade Conversions**

This course uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 to 100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90 to &lt; 94</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 to &lt; 84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 to &lt; 80</td>
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**Submission of Work**

*Should work be submitted as a hard copy, or electronically?*

Unless otherwise specified, all written work must be submitted as a hard copy. The majority of written assignments must also be submitted electronically via NYU Classes. All in-class presentations must be completed during class time.

*Who may submit a student’s work?*

Each student’s assigned work must be handed in personally by that student. The student may not nominate another person to act on his/her behalf.

*When and where should the work be submitted?*

The hard copy of any written work must be submitted to the instructor at the beginning of class on the date the work is due. If the assignment due date falls outside of class time, work must be submitted to the Staff Member on duty in Room 2.04 during prescribed Office Hours (11:30am-12:30pm and 2:30-3:30pm Mon-Thu), or by appointment with the Academic Programs Coordinator. Each submitted item of work received in Room 2.04 will be date and time stamped in the presence of the student. Work submitted in Room 2.04 will not be considered “received” unless formally stamped.

*What is the Process for Late Submission of Work?*

After the due date, work may only be submitted under the following conditions:

- Late work, even if an extension has been granted, must be submitted in person by appointment with the Academic Programs Coordinator. Each submitted item of work must be date and time stamped in order to be considered “received”.

- Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the work is late. Written work submitted beyond five weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension receives a mark of zero, and the student is not entitled to feedback for that piece of work.

- Because failure to submit or fulfil any required course component will result in failure of the course, it is crucial for students to submit every assignment even when it will receive a mark of zero. Early departure from the program therefore places the student at risk of failing the course.
Plagiarism Policy

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form) without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges.

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centres is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades. The class roster will be marked at the beginning of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalized by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

Faculty cannot excuse an absence. Requests for absences to be excused must be directed to the Academic Programs Coordinator. Students must provide appropriate documentation for their absence. In the case of illness, students must contact the Academic Programs Coordinator on the day of absence. They must provide medical documentation to Academic Programs Coordinator within three days of the absence in order to be medically excused. The note must include a medical judgement indicating that the student was unfit to attend class/work on the specific day or dates of the absence. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Academic Programs staff.

Classroom Expectations

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.

- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
• Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.
• Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
• The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
• Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

**Diversity, Inclusion and Equity**

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “…not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU Sydney we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

• fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
• promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

**Religious Observance**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Academic Programs Coordinator in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Provisions to students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.

**Required Texts**

It is a course expectation that you have done the required reading and have prepared sufficiently to discuss them in class.
There is no required text, but students will be expected to complete the required readings each week. They are advised to attempt the recommended readings also (these are particularly useful for preparing essays). All readings will be posted on NYU Classes.

**Supplemental Texts**

There is a wide range of scholarly material on various aspects of Australian environmental history. Below is a selection of works that may be useful in preparing assessment tasks or in understanding the field and the course content more generally.

• Eric Rolls. *They All Ran Wild*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1969

**Week 1  Introduction to Australian Environmental History**
*Tuesday 31 January*

This week students will consider the practice of environmental history and its relationship to narrative. They will read about the particular historiographic issues raised by its subject matter and consider how the field as a whole is seen by its practitioners. They will also be introduced to some of the significant themes in Australian environmental history and how these have been understood and narrated by historians. Students will have an opportunity to discuss the conduct of classes, forthcoming assessment and the timetable and structure of the course.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Week 2  Nature, Wilderness and Country**
*Tuesday 7 February*

This week we set out to investigate a set of keywords to aid us in our understanding of Australian environmental history. These are words whose definitions are complex because they represent areas of human experience that are subject to ongoing political and intellectual disputes. These words for the non-human environment—nature, wilderness and country—have historically shifting meanings as well as different values for different groups in Australia. We will examine where nature and wilderness fit within Australia’s European intellectual heritage as well as how the Aboriginal concept of country contrasts with these ideas.

**Required Reading:**
Week 3  Settler Environments

Tuesday 14 February

Australia emerged through a process of colonisation which can be fruitfully compared to histories of other countries such as the United States, South Africa and New Zealand. This week we will take a broader view of this history in order to bring into focus what is specific to the Australian context as well as what it shares with other settler societies. We will look at global narratives of ecological imperialism, and some ways in which those processes took particular shapes in Australia. These influential global histories—for example by Alfred Crosby and Jared Diamond—will be contrasted with those which adopt the perspectives of the changing Aboriginal landscapes of Australia to interrogate their assumptions about past, present and possible futures.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Week 4  Foundations

Tuesday 21 February

The last two decades has seen the emergence of environmental history as a distinctive sub-discipline within Australian history and an interdisciplinary field in its own right (to some extent as a response to international scholarly trends). But Australian scholars have been producing environmental histories for some time before this, either under that heading, or as part of their work in related disciplines such as historical geography. This week students will read some of these foundational accounts, which will in turn introduce them to some important Australian historical narratives of the nineteenth century in the British colonies that became Australia: those of expanding pastoralism, mineral booms and urbanisation. Apart from helping us to sketch our broadly the colonial history of the continent in its environmental dimensions, these accounts will also be examined to discover what it is that animated the interests of earlier historians, as well as to provide a point of comparison for our later discussions of more recent scholarship.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

**Required field trip/excursion:** Sydney Botanic Gardens Walking Tour

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**Week 5 Food and soil**

**Tuesday 28 February**

The qualities of Australian soil have been central to the possibility of substantial agricultural industries on the continent, and by extension to questions of appropriate levels of human population. This is against a set of globally circulating ideas about food, population and environment, as well as the insatiable demands of capital for profit. Imported agricultural ideas and practices have also been massively destructive to existing environments, and the problem of caring for soils in Australia has become interminable. This week we consider the relationship between land management (both Aboriginal and European), soil, agricultural productivity and population on the continent.

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


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**Week 6 Environments, Citizens and the Nation**

**Tuesday 7 March**

The imagined community of the nation and the governmental project of the state (themselves possessing intertwined histories) use and interact with environments in numerous ways. To link such cultural and social work to the natural world is a powerful ideological tool, but the story does not end there: natural environments do shape us and our activities, as we seek to reshape them. This week we will consider some Australian histories of nationalism, citizenship and the state in their environmental dimensions.

**Required Reading:**

Assignment: Short Essay due (20%)

SPRING BREAK: 13-17 March (Week 7)

Week 8  Pests and friendly creatures
Tuesday 21 March

With the arrival of Europeans in Australia, animals and humans encountered each other in new ways, many unanticipated. This week we will consider the paradigmatic example: when introduced species 'go feral', causing disruption for indigenous ecosystems and economically valued activities in the environment. We will look at the history of the deliberate introduction of species from beyond the seas by colonists and some of the unintended consequences of this project. But this phenomenon will also be examined as part of a broader discussion about what it means, historically, for an animal (or plant) to be identified as 'a problem', and some of the complexities of this sort of human-animal interaction in Australian history.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Week 9  Troubling native beasts
Tuesday 28 March

Discussions of the history of invasive animal species often depend implicitly on the idea that the native is a stable point of reference, but historically this has not always been the case. This week we look at problem natives: animals who occupy an intermediate or undecidable position between what positive views about the Australian environment seek to value, and what is understood to be threatening, hostile or dangerous. Apparently benign animals such as the emu (which figures on the national coat of arms), as well as ambiguously dangerous creatures such as the red-back spider, threaten to compromise not only human bodily safety or property, but also human categories such as indigenous/introduced, destructive/helpful, dangerous/harmless, and protected/proscribed. These two examples will be looked at in detail in the reading materials, alongside a bestiary of other threatened and/or troubling natives including dingoes, galahs, ibises, crocodiles, and bandicoots.
Week 10  Fire histories

Tuesday 4 April

Australia has a long history of catastrophic bushfire and thus, too, of fire-related controversy and ongoing public dispute over how best to approach this phenomenon (as well as to save lives). Yet even this assessment— that bushfire is catastrophic— is troubled by the question: are Australian environments made to burn? What role did Aboriginal land management practices have in producing a fire-prone environment (or indeed, one where regular burning was necessary to many species)? This week we will consider how new patterns of settlement, development and land use raise again these perennial questions about fire in Australia as well as generating some new ones.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:
- Susan Yell. "'Breakfast is Now Tea, Toast, and Tissues': Affect and the Media Coverage of Bushfires". Media International Australia. No. 137, November 2010, pp 109-119

Assignment: Animal or plant source evaluation due (10%)

Week 11  Water histories

Tuesday 11 April

As the driest continent on earth, water dominates environmental histories in Australia: the problem of both its lack in drought and overabundance in flood have preoccupied settler Australians. Partly as a consequence of this (and partly due to other geographical and historical factors) European and other settlers on this continent have often clung to the coast, joining and displacing Australia's Indigenous saltwater peoples. Even
today, many Australians understand water in terms imported from other continents, so that even though native birds and other animals have adapted for local conditions, cyclical economic models derived from the Northern hemisphere have not. This week we consider different ways of living in Australian fresh and saltwater environments with a focus on rivers and river systems, harbours and estuaries including Australia’s major river system—the Murray-Darling—as well as some local Sydney waterways.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Required field trip/excursion:** Sydney Olympic Park Industrial History Tour

**Week 12 Urban and suburban environments**

**Tuesday 18 April**

Much environmental thought (as well as policy and political activism) turns away from the most populous areas of the Australian continent towards the most agriculturally productive expanses, or indeed towards wilderness and ‘the outback’. This week we look more closely at places that most Australians call home: suburban and urban environments. These have continued to be biodiverse spaces with their own ecological qualities, flora and fauna (including, in Sydney, the unfairly maligned ibis). They have also been actively shaped as more-than-human environments through uncertain alliances between human and non-human actors, adding complexity to traditional concerns of urban history over social transformation of space.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**


Assignment: Proposal due (10%)

Week 13  Antarctica and the limits of Australian environmental history

Friday 28 April (Make-up class for ANZAC Day)

Given anthropogenic climate change, the fate of Antarctica is the fate of the world. Australia shares not only proximity but also political responsibility for the continent with a number of other nations. This week we consider this 'Australian' environment as a way into thinking about Australian environmental history as an unavoidably international, transnational and even global affair. In aid of this, we will also consider questions of metageography and metahistory and ask: why do we ‘think history’ within certain imagined spatial limits? What has made Australian history so insular in the past? Is the Australian continent itself the best place to look to make sense of Australian history? What does history look like from the icy continent of Antarctica?

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Week 14  Histories of Tourism and Science on the Great Barrier Reef

Tuesday 2 May

The world’s largest coral reef system, the Great Barrier Reef, has been valued by locals, and as a World Heritage Site since 1981, yet is also being destroyed by mining, agricultural run-off, ocean acidification and global warming. The contemporary understanding of the reef as focal point for science and tourism itself has a history, though, and this week we will explore some of that history and consider changing conceptions of the reef and its significance for humans in parallel to the changing environment of the reef itself.

Required Reading:

**Recommended Reading:**

**Week 15  Climate Change and Environmental History**

**Tuesday 9 May**

By way of conclusion, we will consider the way that large-scale environmental problems such as climate change trouble the terms of our inquiry during this semester. We also ask a critical question of the field: can environmental history contribute anything to the political address of such problems?

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Assignment: Long Essay due (40%)**

**Your Instructor**

Dr Adam Gall (Ph.D., University of Sydney) holds a PhD in Gender & Cultural Studies from the University of Sydney. He is an interdisciplinary Australian Studies scholar who has taught in Cultural Studies, Human Geography, Indigenous Studies and Australian History contexts. Adam’s research interests include narratives of attachment, twentieth and twenty-first century cultures of nationalism, representations of the colonial frontier and dispossession, as well as indigeneity and settler identity in Australian film, media and literature. His current research project looks at stories of human and non-human survival in southern settler-colonial cities (Sydney, Buenos Aires, Cape Town), as well as in North America. This research deals with the relationship between storytelling, ethics and politics in situations of immense social and environmental change.