

**UPDATED 3/26**

**GESM 130G Seminar in Social Analysis  
Course ID #35433 Spring 2018**

**ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY:  
Approaches to Nature, Culture, and Technology in the Anthropocene**

**INSTRUCTOR**

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**CLASS TIMES**

Mon & Wed 3:30-4:50pm  
Leavey Library 3V

**OFFICE HOURS**

Mon 10:00-11:30am  
KAP348G

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Anthropocene is a new term that describes our present epoch: an age in which globalization, industrial activity, and human disturbance have forged a distinctively new and life-threatening crust throughout the planet. The engines of progress have bulldozed and outpaced earth systems and evolutionary cycles to the edge of collapse and extinction. Effects of human activity are everywhere, challenging how we study nature, culture, and technology. This seminar introduces students to key texts and approaches to living in a more-than-human world that is undergoing rapid climate change and greater connectivity.

The seminar is organized around four subjects: I. Anthropocene; II. Plants, Fungi, and Food; III. Animals, Insects, and War; IV. Infrastructure and Waste. Readings and discussions will immerse students in methods of social analysis that thread through the fields of cultural anthropology, environmental studies, biology, science and technology studies, geography, food studies, literature, film and media studies. Methods range from ethnography, interviews, observation, data collection, field notes and strategies, library research, and documentation. Students will learn to think critically about the kinds of figures, descriptions, and analyses they encounter in the texts; compare different methods used; and experiment with various applications in everyday life.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This general education seminar will cultivate students' abilities to:

- (1) Understand interdisciplinary approaches to nature, culture, and technology in emerging Anthropocene discourse through a combination of readings and field observations.

(2) Apply methods of social analysis to the study of more-than-human socialities, or entanglements of humans, nonhumans, and machines that shape local/global politics, economics, and ecosystems.

(3) Analyze uses of and tensions between observation or empirical evidence; description or documentation; and analysis or theory.

(4) Engage questions of ethical responsibility, sociopolitical action, environmental justice, and collective survival or livabilities shared across difference.

### REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

This is a reading- and writing-intensive seminar. Students are expected to read all assigned materials and participate actively in class discussions. Students will submit written responses around a key concept each week; write a mid-term essay; and develop a research question for a final paper that demonstrates an understanding of topics, experience in field observation and library research, and a capacity for critical thinking.

Grades will reflect how students meet class learning objectives:

Requirements	Learning Objectives Assessed	% of Grade
Attendance and participation in class discussions	1, 2, 3, 4	15%
12 weekly written responses: one paragraph (250 words) defining a key concept from the week's readings; <u>due every Wednesday at class</u>	1, 3	30%
Mid-term essay: 6-page paper; <u>due on Wednesday, March 7 at class</u>	1, 2, 3	25%
Final essay: 12-page paper around a research question developed through collaborative fieldwork; <u>due on Friday, May 4 by 5pm</u>	1, 2, 3, 4	30%
Total		100%

### STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and

contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

### ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### COURSE READINGS

Three books are REQUIRED and available for purchase at USC Bookstore. Students are required to bring the book to class on dates specified on the weekly schedule.

Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2014. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

McNeill J.R. and Peter Engelke. 2016. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard.

Mintz, Sidney. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York and London: Penguin.

The following book has been ordered for the class but is OPTIONAL.

Gosh, Amitav. 2016. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago.

Other assigned readings are available at USC Libraries (e-books via online access) or as pdfs on the class website. Students are required to bring the pdf, print or digital version, to class on dates specified.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

### Part I. Anthropocene: Extinction and Acceleration

- 1/8 Mon Introductions and Course Overview
- 1/10 Wed Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2014. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. New York: Henry Holt & Co. Prologue and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-22).
- 1/15 Mon *holiday, no class*
- 1/18 Wed Kolbert. Chapters 2-5 (pp. 23-110).  
**submit: weekly response #1**
- 1/22 Mon Kolbert. Chapters 6-8, 10, 13 (pp. 111-172; 193-216; 259-269).
- 1/24 Wed McNeill J.R. and Peter Engelke. 2016. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard. Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-62)  
**submit: weekly response #2**
- 1/29 Mon McNeill and Engelke. Chapter 3 and Conclusion (pp. 103-154; 207-11).
- 1/31 Wed LeGuin, Ursula K. 1986. "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. New York: Grove Press. (pp. 165-170).  
explore: Lin, Maya. 2012. *What is Missing?* web project  
<https://whatismissing.net/>  
**submit: weekly response #3**

### Part II. Plants, Fungi, and Food

- 2/5 Mon Mintz, Sidney. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York and London: Penguin. Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. xv-18). Start Chapter 2!
- 2/7 Wed Mintz. Chapter 2 (pp. 19-73).  
**submit: weekly response #4**
- 2/12 Mon Mintz. Chapter 3 (pp. 74-150).
- 2/14 Wed Tsing, Anna. 2012. "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species." *Environmental Humanities* 1(2012): 141-154.  
**submit: weekly response #5**
- 2/19 Mon *holiday, no class*

2/21 Wed NO CLASS MEETING

Read to prepare for field visit:

Deverell, Bill and Tom Sitton. 2016. *Water and Los Angeles: A Tale of Three Rivers, 1900-1941*. Oakland: University of California Press.

<https://www.luminosa.org/site/books/10.1525/luminos.21/>

Friends of LA River: <https://folar.org/river-experiences/frog-spot/>

**submit: weekly response #6**

**2/25 Sun MEET at FROG SPOT, LA River**

Friends of LA River Visitor Center

2825 Benedict Street, Los Angeles 90039

2/26 Mon Carney, Judith. 2001. *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard.

Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-30).

USC Library e-book

2/28 Wed Carney. Chapter 2 (pp. 31-68).

**submit: weekly response #7**

**submit: group description of field site, 1 page**

### **Part III. Animals, Insects, and War**

3/5 Mon Patel, Raj and Jason Moore. 2017. *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. Oakland: University of California. Chapters 5-6. (pp. 138-179).

**3/7 Wed** Bird Rose, Deborah. "Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time."

**DUE MARCH 7 at class: MID-TERM ESSAY, 6 pages**

### **SPRING BREAK**

3/19 Mon Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-42).

USC Library e-book

3/21 Wed Haraway. Chapter 10 (pp. 265-274).

USC Library e-book

**submit: weekly response #8**

3/26 Mon Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. "Can The Mosquito Speak?" *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Technopolitics, Modernity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. pp. 19-53.

USC Library e-book

3/28 Wed Lakoff, Andy. "The Indicator Species: Tracking Ecosystem Collapse in Arid California." *Public Culture Journal*. 28 (2(79)). pp. 237-259  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-3427439>

**submit: weekly response #9**

**submit: notes from field site, 2 pages**

#### **Part IV. Infrastructure and Waste**

SCHEDULE INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS to discuss your final research paper.

4/2 Mon Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Please use the pdf that I uploaded to the "Content" folder for this class. Read/skim the entire book.

4/4 Wed Gabrys, Jennifer. "Plastic and the Work of the Biodegradable." *Accumulation: Material Politics of Plastic*. edited by Jennifer Gabrys, Gay Hawkins, and Mike Michael. Chapter 12 (pp. 208-224)

**submit: weekly response #10**

4/9 Mon Edwards, Paul. 2002. "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems." *Modernity and Technology*. pp. 185-225.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256684632\\_Infrastructure\\_and\\_Modernity\\_Scales\\_of\\_Force\\_Time\\_and\\_Social\\_Organization\\_in\\_the\\_History\\_of\\_Sociotechnical\\_Systems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256684632_Infrastructure_and_Modernity_Scales_of_Force_Time_and_Social_Organization_in_the_History_of_Sociotechnical_Systems)

4/11 Wed WATCH documentary: *Cadillac Desert* 1 hour 24 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpaC4R6cU1o>

**submit: weekly response #11**

4/16 Mon Masco, Joe. 2006. *Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post Cold War New Mexico*. NJ and Oxford: Princeton. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-39)  
USC Library e-book

4/18 Wed Carse, Ashley. 2014. *Beyond the Big Ditch: Politics, Ecology, and Infrastructure at the Panama Canal*.

USC Library e-book

**submit: weekly response #12**

4/23 Mon NO CLASS MEETING: work on final research papers.

4/25 Wed Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 7.

**5/4 FRI DUE MAY 4 by 5PM: FINAL PAPER, 12 pages**