HH4006: The Green Earth: Issues in Environmental History
Semester 1, 2016-2017

Instructor: Asst. Prof. Miles Powell
Study Year: 4
Pre-requisite: HH1001
Academic Units: 4 AU

Logistics:
Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 1:30-5:30 pm
Room: TR+114
Email: miles.powell@ntu.edu.sg
Office: HSS 05-24
Office Hours: By appointment

General Textbook (Optional)

Learning Objective
To challenge students to think about how human societies have altered their environments, and how, in turn, these modified environments have shaped the course of human history. Students will recognize that environmental changes in the distant past have had long-term repercussions for both humans and the natural world. They will also gain an appreciation for the wide variety of strategies that human groups have devised to exploit their environments, and will contemplate why some populations succeeded in developing more sustainable practices than others. This course will address many of the major themes and debates within environmental history, and will also allow students to consider the impact of human actions on the animal, botanical, and pathogenic species with which we share the earth.

Student Assessment
Students will be assessed by:
Attendance and Participation: 15%
Final project: 35%
Final exam: 50%

Attendance and Participation
Each student will sign up to co-presentation the seminar readings for a selected week with a partner. I will post a grading rubric for these presentations on NTULearn. Even if not presenting, all students should attend every seminar prepared to discuss that week's assigned readings. Outstanding participants will demonstrate a thorough and critical understanding of the assigned material by offering perceptive comments and asking informed questions. I will include material from seminar discussions in the final exam.

Final Project
In keeping with NTU's plans to become one of the world's “greenest” universities, you are going to research the environmental history of the Nantah/NTU campus. I will assign you into groups
of four, and you will choose your own topics. Potential subjects include Yunnan Garden, Nanyang Lake, campus tree planting, managing wild animals, the 1960s “Keep Campus Green” movement, the introduction of recycling, spraying for mosquitos, or whatever else captures your interest. To help you come up with ideas, in week 2 we will visit the Chinese Heritage Center, which includes a pictorial history of the university and its grounds.

Original research on local topics can be challenging, and for this reason, the written portion of this assignment is quite minimal. This will free up more time for creative research strategies, including oral history interviews. To give you a head start, I have gathered many historical photographs of the Nantah/NTU campus, which I will bring to class. I have also acquired the contact information for some Nantah alumni you may wish to interview. I also recommend that you consult the National Archive of Singapore’s online resources. If you are not familiar with this system, I will show you how to use it.

Each group will present its research in two ways: First, each group will write up a report that includes 1,800-2,200 words of text, and at least four visual elements (note that this is a small amount of text for a group project, so the report should be highly polished). Second, you will create a visual exhibit of your findings (a poster is fine, but you can be more creative, if you like), which will be displayed in the HSS Library during the last week of classes. Your group will serve as interpreters for these exhibits and answer questions from visitors to the library. Both projects should include proper citations.

Your projects must consult primary sources (oral histories are acceptable), including at least two historical photographs. If at all possible for your chosen assignment, you should contrast a historical photo of the campus with a present-day photo that a team member has taken from the same vantage point. In the case of strong projects that connect to Nantah, the Chinese Heritage Center has agreed to upload the reports to its website, and perhaps even to publish them in its journal.

Final Exam
You will need to complete four ID and significance type questions (I will explain what these are in seminar), one short essay, and one long essay. You will be able to choose from multiple prompts for all of these components. I will draw questions from lectures, student presentations, and readings.

Course Policies
Your Responsibilities: You are responsible for making yourself aware of all the information in this document. Familiarize yourself with due dates, times, and so on. It is also your responsibility to come to class prepared to participate. This means having completed the reading assignments, and having something to take notes with (either pen and paper or a laptop computer or tablet).

Medical Certificates: Medical Certificates (MCs) are not “get out of jail free” cards. The presentation of a medical certificate does not automatically excuse an absence or late work. Depending on the circumstances, I will usually ask for you to complete additional work in order to “make up” for missed classes or quizzes.
Late Policy: I will penalize late work at the rate of 10% of the maximum grade per 24-hour period overdue. For example, work that is 2 hours late will receive a 10% penalty, work that is 26 hours late a 20% penalty, work that is 55 hours late a 30% penalty, and so on. I may grant extensions in some special cases. However, I will not grant extensions within one week of the deadline (in other words, if you think you need an extension, ask early).

Plagiarism and Cheating: Universities consider using the works of others without properly acknowledging that use (that is, copying) to be “cheating.” In this course, such behavior will result in a score of zero on the assignment in question. In accordance with school policy, I will also report especially egregious cases to the university to be placed on record in your academic file. Learn how to cite the work of others properly. Do not ever copy. If in doubt, ask.

Course Outline

Seminar I (Aug 10): Themes in Environmental History
Seminar reading:

Seminar II (Aug 17): The Environment’s Impact on Early Human Societies
Seminar reading:
Fagan, Brian. The Great Warming: Climate Change and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations.
Field Trip: Chinese Heritage Centre

Seminar III (Aug 24): Felling the Forests
Seminar reading:

Seminar IV (Aug 31): Agriculture – “Let us cultivate our garden”
Seminar reading:
Film: Hungry for Profit (2006)

Seminar V (Sept 7): Water Regimes
Lecture reading:
Film: Up the Yangtze (2008)

Seminar VI (Sept 14): Fire
Seminar readings:
Seminar VII (Sept 21): Oceans
Seminar readings:
Film: Sharkwater (2008)

**Recess Week**

Seminar VIII (Oct 5): Extinction
Seminar readings:
Film: Tigers (2010)

Seminar IX (Oct 12): A Pox of Germs and Pathogens
Seminar reading:

Seminar X (Oct 19): Malthusianism
Seminar reading:
Powell, Miles. “Pestered with Inhabitants’: Aldo Leopold, William Vogt, and More Trouble with Wilderness”

Seminar XI (Oct 26): Energy
Lecture reading:

Seminar XII (Nov 2): Climate Change
Lecture reading:
Film: “Burning Season” (2008)

Seminar XIII (Nov 9): Humanity’s Future?
***FINAL PROJECTS DUE***
Seminar reading:
No readings. Head to library to serve as interpreters for your exhibits.
Learning Outcome
Students will independently form conclusions concerning the relationship between societies and environments, from the origin of fully modern humans through the present. By placing this issue in a deeper historical context, students will learn to appreciate the enormous complexity of human exchanges with the environment (including germs, pathogens, and animals). By reading up-to-date academic literature on course themes, students will improve their analytical and critical skills. They will gain an understanding of how human actions directly and indirectly affect the environment, and of the need to maintain sustainable relationships with the planet we call home. By learning how and why some past societies have achieved workable relationships with their environments, while others have failed, students will be in a much better position to formulate strategies for the future.