

**AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY**

Class officially meets Wednesdays, 8:30 – 11:30

**NOTE:** MOST WEEKS OUR CLASSES WILL BEGIN AT 9 OR 9:30 AM, BUT ON 3 OR 4 OCCASIONS WE WILL BE MEETING REMOTELY WITH STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS IN EAST AFRICA, SO WE WILL NEED TO START AT 8:30 TO ACCOMMODATE THEIR SCHEDULES (EAST AFRICAN TIME IS 7-8 HOURS AHEAD OF EST)

Instructor: Lee Cassanelli [lcassanel@gmail.com]

Office: 300.8 St Leonard's Court, 3819 Chestnut St.

Office hours: Wed 1:30-3:30, and by appointment (including Zoom)

**Aims and Format**

This course will explore multiple dimensions of Africa's environmental history, drawing upon literature in the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. It is one component of a pilot project supported by Penn Global and directed by the instructor on 'Local Histories of Climate Change in the Horn of Africa', although our course will include topics and case studies from the entire continent. The course takes an historical perspective on environmental change in Africa, while also engaging with contemporary debates on climate change and efforts to mitigate its consequences for urban and rural communities across the continent. Students will read and discuss recent scholarship on the African environment, do their own literature reviews on selected topics, and prepare case studies of African communities which have been impacted by severe climate events over the past half century. The format combines lectures and seminar-style discussions, and we will draw upon the expertise of guest lecturers in a variety of disciplines which have contributed to the study of environmental change. We will also schedule a few Zoom sessions with students and practitioners working on environmental issues in East and Northeast Africa, to share perspectives and research findings.

**Requirements**

Students are expected to 1) attend and participate actively in class meetings and occasional talks/events which may have to be scheduled outside of regular class hours; 2) post regular responses in their Course Journals to the readings and discussion questions for the week; 3) prepare three individual or group presentations to the class on readings or topics to be assigned; 4) complete a 10-12 page Final Paper on a topic of their choice related to our class themes, to be determined in consultation with the instructor. Grade will be determined as follows:

Attendance and participation	20%
Weekly journal responses (minimum of 8)	20%
Three class presentations (written and oral)	30%
Final paper	30%

**Readings**

Most of our required readings will be posted as PDF files or links under Course Documents on Canvas, or can be accessed as e-books via the Penn Library site. One of the class presentations

will require you to read and report on one or more of the influential books in the field, which you will need to obtain from the Library or through Inter-Library loan well in advance. A full list of relevant titles will be provided in Week 2, when we will begin to schedule class presentations for the remainder of the semester.

**NOTE: THE FOLLOWING SYLLABUS TOPICS ARE BASED ON THE SPRING 2023 VERSION OF OUR COURSE. AN UPDATED SYLLABUS FOR FALL 2024 WILL BE SENT LATER THIS SPRING TO THOSE WHO REGISTER FOR THE CLASS.**

### Outline of Weekly Topics and Assignments

NOTE: Readings should be completed prior to the class in the week for which they are assigned.  
(CCD = Canvas Course Documents)

1. (Aug 28). Intro and logistics
2. (Sept 4). **Overview of key issues and debates** in Africa's environmental history  
\*CCD, Week 2
3. (Sept 11). **Methods and models** for studying environmental change over time  
\*CCD, Week 3
4. (Sept 18) **The desertification debate**  
**\*\*Joint Zoom class** with colleagues at University of Hargeisa, Somaliland  
\*CCD, Week 4
5. (Sept 25). **Adaptation to climate change:** concepts and case studies  
\*CCD, Week 5
6. (Oct 2). **Indigenous knowledge** and its uses for environmental planning  
\*CCD, Week 6  
**\*\*\*Student book reviews: class presentations\*\*\***
7. (Oct 9). **Conservation and development:** for whom?  
\*CCD, Week 7  
**\*\*\*Student book reviews: class presentations\*\*\***

8. (Oct 16). **Preserving biodiversity**
  - \*\*Zoom meeting** with experts from Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya
  - \*\*\*Student commentaries and questions\*\*\***
  - \*CCD, Week 8
  
9. (Oct 23). **Africa's urban environments; green cities**
  - \*CCD, Week 11
  - \*\*Guest speakers TBA\*\***
  - \*\*\*Student commentaries and questions\*\*\***
  
  - \*\*\*Tentative final paper topic (1 paragraph), submit by Oct 27\*\*\***
  
10. (Oct 30). **Extractive industries and the environment**
  - \*CCD, Week 10
  
11. (Nov 6). **Environmental activism, global and local**
  - \*CCD, Week 11\*
  - \*\*Guest speaker TBA\*\***
  - \*\*\*Student commentaries and questions\*\*\***
  - \*\*\*Revised Prospectus and Preliminary Bibliography for Final Paper\*\*\***
  
12. (Nov 13). Topic TBD by students at Penn and U of Hargeisa
  - \*\*Joint session** with students in East Africa\*\*
  - \*Readings TBD
  
13. (Nov 20) **COP 29: Any progress on climate change strategies?**
  - \*\*Guest speakers TBA:** Report by Penn delegates to COP 29 in Baku
  - \*\*\*Student commentaries and questions\*\*\***
  - \*Readings TBD
  
14. THANKSGIVING BREAK
  
15. (Dec 4) Wrap up
  - \*\*\*Brief progress reports on Final Papers\*\*\***

**\*\*\*FINAL PAPER DUE BY SUNDAY, DEC 15\*\*\***

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