

Course policies

This document lays out the official policies used in teaching and assessment in Americans and their Forests (P BIO 109 Matlack). It is based on official University policy, plus the experience of several years of teaching and suggestions from many students like you. It will help you avoid confusion and make learning easier and more enjoyable. Please read this document carefully and come talk to me if any questions arise. Please hold on to it for reference until you receive your final grade.

Subject matter of the course

The course describes the history of forests and forest use in the United States. It differs from the several other Environmental History courses in that it focuses on the consequences of land use for forest ecosystems, i.e. it is essentially a Plant Biology course, although it draws in considerable human history. It is not intended as a human history course. It is not a course in forestry.

The human use of forests has only recently been recognized as a major force shaping their biology, and a historical viewpoint is on the cutting edge of current thinking about conservation and resource management. If you like this approach, I encourage you to take our courses on conservation biology, landscape ecology, and plant community ecology.

The syllabus is available on-line at the P BIO web site, and the website for this course:

<http://www.plantbio.ohiou.edu/epb/instruct/websites/109%20grm/109%20grm.htm>

Attendance

There is no attendance requirement for this course – you do not have to come to class. Ever. Because there is no attendance requirement, there is no need to get medical explanations for absences. However, it will be very much to your advantage to come to class because exam questions are taken directly from lecture notes. There will be unannounced quizzes and writing assignments from time to time which you don't want to miss.

Although some people skip class and rely on the lecture notes of classmates, this is a poor system. I recommend that you make an effort to attend every lecture. All students will be held responsible for the same material, whether they have attended class or not.

Lectures begin promptly at 12:10 PM and run until 1:00 PM. On any particular day, I may end lecture a couple of minutes early or late to allow me to finish the idea I'm presenting. If I'm still talking at 1:00 PM, don't worry – I haven't forgotten what time it is.

Attendance will be taken in every lecture. Although attendance is not a requirement for the course, these data give me insight into the degree of commitment of individual students, and will influence my judgment if any sort of special treatment is requested.

Problems

If problems arise at any point in the course, please come see me. There is a good chance that we can work out some sort of solution which will improve your performance and ease some of the pressure of being a student. My office is 405 Porter Hall. There may be problems in understanding the material, problems with the organization of the course, or personal problems affecting your performance in the class. The nature of the problem doesn't matter. What is important is that it affects your performance, and we may be able to fix it.

It is essential that you recognize a problem early, however. It is much easier to find a satisfactory solution if we have some time to work with.

Office hours

Office hours are Thursday 1– 4pm, and any other time you can reach me. I spend ca. 90% of every week in my office (Porter 405), so you have a good chance of finding me there. Students are encouraged to stop by or call/e-mail and make an appointment (tel. 593 1131; e-mail matlack@ohio.edu). Although I can not guarantee that I will be available at any particular moment, this flexible approach greatly increases the amount of time I am available to students, and is to the students' advantage. Above all, if you have a problem come and see me – do not wait for office hours!

The Texts

Because environmental history is a relatively new field, there are no standard textbooks available. I have assigned reading from a widely respected book:

Williams, M. 1989 (or later editions). *Americans and their Forests*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

This map will help you to follow the geographical progress of the course:

<http://nationalatlas.gov/natlas/Natlasstart.asp>
(click on Biology > Forest Cover Types)

I also recommend

Kimmins, H. 1999. *Balancing Act: Environmental Issues in Forestry* (Second Edition). University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver.

Whitney, G.G. 1995. From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Perlin, J. 1989. A Forest Journey. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Crosby, A.W. 1989. Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe from 900-1900. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Cronon, W. 1992. Nature's Metropolis. W.W. Norton, New York.

These texts were chosen because they cover the material thoroughly, because they are authoritative and accurate, because they present many interesting examples, and because they are readable and accessible in style.

Lectures do not follow any of these texts closely (despite the similarity in title to the Williams book), but are taken from numerous professional papers in many fields. Thus, one cannot read the books and ignore the lectures.

The texts are to be used as a second viewpoint on the material presented in lecture, i.e. to clarify the lecture material. This does not mean the texts can be ignored – the course assumes you have been exposed to both lecture and book.

You are also required to purchase aerial photos of your home neighborhood for our quarter-long land use history exercise. We will have more to say about this in the near future. Stay tuned!

Assessment

Exams. The major form of assessment in this course is written exams. There will be three exams, two during and one at the end of the course. Exams last 50 minutes, just as the lecture period does. Exams will ask for short answers and short essays.

The dates of exams are set out in the syllabus at the beginning of the quarter and do not vary. It is the student's responsibility to remember when exams are scheduled and to come prepared.

Graded exams will be handed back to students as soon as possible after the exam. Exams will not be reviewed in class. If you wish to discuss exams at length, you are invited to make an appointment and visit me in my office, or talk to one of the Teaching Assistants.

A practice exam is available at the course web site. Practicing with old exams is an excellent way to prepare yourself for the real exam.

Exams are rewritten every year. Although I may occasionally repeat a good question, most of every exam is new. Thus, rote memorization of old exams is a poor way to prepare.

Trick questions. I will never write an exam with the intention of misleading students. This is not to say that some exam questions will not be difficult or that fine discrimination will not sometimes be required between several possible answers. It is also possible for students to trick themselves on a difficult question. However, questions are written only to assess the student's command of the material and for no other purpose.

Calculation of exam grades

Exam grades are arrived at through a fairly simple, mechanical process: Each question has a value, which is clearly indicated on the exam. You will be awarded full credit, some credit, or no credit depending on our judgment as to how well you answered the question. Values of all questions add to 100. Your raw score is the number of credit points you accumulate in all questions divided by 100.

For example, if the sum of points you earn is 86, then your raw score is 86%.

I expect the mean (average) score for all students in the class to fall between 70-85%. If the mean score is less than this range, then I will apply a scale: I will subtract the mean score from 75% to give the scaling factor.

For example, if the mean score of the class was 65%, the scaling factor would be $75-65=10$.

The scaling factor will be added to all grades to give the final score.

For example if you got a raw score of 74%, your grade would be 84%.

Students may expect all exams to be graded in this way unless notified otherwise.

Exams are graded by me, or by one of the teaching assistants and reviewed by me. If you don't like the grade given to you by the TA you can appeal the grade to me, but be warned that I almost always support the grade assigned by the TA. Also, please realize that I can just as easily alter your grade downward as I can alter it upwards.

Quizzes are graded on a 10-point scale. Quizzes and in-class writing will be given sporadically as I see fit. Quizzes are not announced ahead of time and can not be "made up" if you miss one.

Grading for the aerial photo exercise will be discussed in class when we explain that exercise. The exercise must be handed in on time. Exercises arriving late will be penalized 10% per day late.

Calculating final grades

Credit is assigned in the following manner:

1-hour exams	3 @ 20% apiece (3 x 20% = 60%)
Aerial photo exercise	30%
Quizzes and in-class writing	10%

For example, if you got 78 on your first exam, 86 on your second exam, 85 on the third exam, 91 on the term paper, and the average grade of all your quizzes was 82, your grade would be calculated as

$$78 \times 0.20 + 86 \times 0.20 + 85 \times 0.20 + 91 \times 0.30 + 82 \times 0.10 = 85.3 \rightarrow \mathbf{85}$$

From the numerical grade, letter grades are assigned following University policy:

A	90-100%
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	<60%

In dividing a numerical (continuous) grading scale into a small number of letter grades, it is necessary to draw boundaries between ranges of grades. If your numerical grade falls just below such a boundary the system will seem very unfair, but that is policy at the moment.

Keeping graded materials. We make every effort to keep accurate records of student performance. However, this is a fairly large class and thousands of pieces of graded paper cross our desks every quarter. Inevitably a few get lost whether by instructors, students, or somewhere in between. To avoid this problem, every student is expected to keep a file including all graded assignments until after they have received their final grade. It is the responsibility of students to turn in assignments (we will not chase you down), to take assignments back when graded, and to see that assignments have been properly graded. Please come to us immediately if there seems to be a problem. Care in this matter will make it much easier to sort out difficulties at the end of term.

Missing exams

For numerous reasons, it is very difficult to make up missed exams. Odd exam schedules pose administrative difficulties, they cause security problems, they interrupt my schedule, and they create fairness problems for other students. Hence, I strongly discourage missing exams.

The policy: If it becomes necessary to miss an exam, you must discuss the problem with me as early as possible before the exam. If I do not hear from you before the exam, I assume you will be in the classroom at the time of the exam. If I have not heard from you and you are not in the classroom, you will receive a grade of 0 for the exam.

In the event of an emergency, it is the responsibility of the student to get word to me somehow before the exam. Call me at 593 1131 or leave a message with the departmental secretary at 593 1126. Alternatively, you may leave a note in my mailbox (in 315 Porter Hall) or send me an e-mail at matlack@ohio.edu. If I have not heard from you before the exam, and you are not present, you will receive a grade of 0.

Academic integrity

Academic honesty is expected in all graded assignments. If I detect academic dishonesty, I will give you a grade of 0 and refer you to the Office of University Judiciaries.

People tolerating or assisting in academic dishonesty will be treated as guilty even if they did not benefit from it directly. For example, allowing your work to be copied is just as wrong as doing the copying.

The essence of academic honesty is presenting your own work for grading, and giving due credit to others for their work. This extends to answers on exams, information taken from published works or the internet, and text in out-of-class assignments. For a good discussion of academic honesty see

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html>

or ask Dr. Matlack or one of the teaching assistants.

Cellular telephones

Students may not talk on cell telephones during lecture. If a student uses a cell phone in lecture, or if his cell phone rings during lecture, five points will be deducted from his final grade.