

Students in Public exemplar details [full course outline in email]

Faculty, School and Subject Area: University College for Interdisciplinary Learning

Course Unit/activity: UCIL20592 Crisis of Nature: Critical Issues in Environmental History

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What is the assignment/knowledge product? [self-arranged research project]

Set Essay Question 1500 words

Manchester's environmental crisis dates back to the early nineteenth century. During the course of history, its role and image as an industrial city has changed, but some environmental problems continue to this day. Answer the following:

What, in your opinion, is the key environmental problem facing the city of Manchester (or the Northwest)? How is this problem currently addressed (or not addressed)? How would you try to address it?

In your analysis, you may focus on the Northwest, Greater Manchester, or you can choose a part of town, a neighbourhood, or the University of Manchester Campus as your focus. You are free to use available online resources, newspapers, blogs for opinions, but your evidence and arguments should be based on **reliable sources and academic literature** (if such exists for the topic you've chosen).

Past projects: In the past, students' have discussed urban air pollution, allergens, recycling, campus electricity waste, campus wildlife, plastics, noise, flyposting, extension of the Airport, speed rail, environmental apathy, education etc. You are welcome to explore the chosen issue firsthand: either by visiting relevant sites or by speaking with those who deal with it professionally.

IMPORTANT: Please use the opportunity to see me during office hours to discuss this assignment. I will give further details in the class and will run a brief session on effective writing. This essay is expected to be an original, creative but *informed* answer to the above questions. To achieve this, you will need to spend some time researching scholarly resources.

Background Readings: Your essay should be structured so that the reader is aware of the general area of interest. For example, it may be air quality, bio-diversity, human health, urbanisation, waste, industrial brownfields, economic or social impact of urban environment. The literature listed below will give you the opportunity to contextualise your

analysis. It should also provide you with the issues currently discussed in relation to urban environment and the relevant historical development and social background.

For example, you can start by looking at the themes of urban environmental history in Schott's essay (first on the list) and then explore the specifics in the cited literature. For a useful bibliography of urban waste and pollution history, see the Environmental History Resources at <https://www.eh-resources.org/waste-pollution-bibliography/> Virtually all of the listed sources are available online or through JRUL.

Schott, Dieter (2004) 'Urban Environmental History: what Lessons are there to be Learnt?' *Boreal Environment Research* 9: 519-528.

Ian Douglas, Rob Hodgson and Nigel Lawson (2002). 'Industry, environment and health though 200 years in manchester.' *Ecological Economics* 41: 235-255.

Luckin, Bill (2000). 'Pollution in the City,' in Daunt M. (ed), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain vol III*, Cambridge University Press, 207-228.

Melosi, Martin (1993). 'The Place of the City in Environmental History,' *Environmental History Review* 17: 1-23.

Melosi, Martin (2000). *Sanitary City*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cronon, William (1991), *Nature's Metropolis. Chicago and the Great West*, WW Norton, New York; also Adriaanse, Albert (1997).

Tarr, Joel A., *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron, Oh.: University of Akron Press, 1996)

Gandy, Matthew., *Recycling and the Politics of Urban Waste* (London: Earthscan Publications, 1994).

Bairoch, Paul (1988), *Cities and Economic Development: From the Dawn of History to the Present* (translated by Christopher Braider), University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Mosley, Stephen, *The chimney of the world: a history of smoke pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001)

Platt, Harold (1999). 'The Emergence of Urban Environmental History,' *Urban History* 26: 89-95.

Davis, Mike (2004), "Planet of slums. Urban involution and the informal proletariat", *New Left Review* 26:5-34,

Satterthwaite, David (2005), "The scale of urban change worldwide 1950-2000 and its underpinnings", Human Settlements Discussion Paper Series, Theme: Urban Change I, International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

Kai N. Lee (2006) 'Urban sustainability and the limits of classical environmentalism,' *Environment and Urbanisation* 18: 9-22.

Why was it introduced?

Contemporary environmental studies/sciences are a vast universe of scholarship that not easily amenable to a focused study for a student taking a second- or final-year module such as the Crisis of Nature. Spatially narrowing the focus to urban/regional problematic makes their assessment achievable for two reasons: (1) it allows them to use a focused and more limited number of sources on a specific, current issue with policy implications (eg: 'how the introduction of cycle-paths on Oxford road increase car traffic and air pollution in other,

poorer areas of Manchester?') (2) it allows them to use 'autopsic' approach to problem identification (eg: 'why does the University of Manchester allow for unnecessary lighting and heating of its premises outside their use'). This makes students constantly *alert* to potential topics for their essay and thus – in the longer run – trains them to develop the 'autopsic' skills in identifying invisible or crypto-environmental problems before it becomes 'too late.'

Where is/could it be published?

The second-year essays and projects are usually not of the nature that would allow immediate academic publication. But the possibilities for non-academic publications are (1) blogs and similar online outlets (2) provide information and focal points of interest for local news and community engagement (citizens association, environmental NGOs); (3) potentially of use to City Council as most students get in touch with MCC or use their resources (master plans, regeneration records) (4) ideally, a collection of digest essays can be published online to showcase the collective result of environmental 'scoping' of local eco-crises (EcoMind: A Student Guide to Environmentality at the University of Manchester's – this would be an annual benchmark publication available during induction week, open days and featured on the Sustainability site of the University).

What are the challenges (e.g. copyright)?

None of the above present any copyright challenges. For the potential EcoMind publication I'd imagine it would be required to have a dedicated member of staff (eg lecturer), the necessary faculty support (IT services and any financial support) and a student 'liaison' person in the processes of communication, coordination of scoping exercises and selection criteria).

What are the student perceptions/responses/attainment?

For over the last 6 years, the response to this (and other assignments) was enthusiastic. Students like its 'engaging,' 'exploratory' quality and are keen to customize the topic to their individual perceptions and interests. Yesterday, I received the following query from a German exchange student, which can illustrate the level of interest and originality:

'Hello [...] I thought about claiming that the rise in options for ethical consumption (bike rentals, plastic alternatives, vegan/organic restaurants and groceries...) in bigger cities like Manchester is probably not only caused by economic factors (more people --> more potential customers for less popular ideas) but also by the perception of the environment (many people, concrete, Pollution, litter...) that encourages people to act and actually change their lives to a certain extent. However, their environment also reminds them every day of how the change is definitely NOT immediate and may take too long, which, finally, would take me to the issue of ethical depression again. Maybe I could also embed some

quotes of young people from Manchester on this topic. So not an actual survey, but rather "random sampling" to keep the common theme?

If published, how do you monitor use of the resource/s?

So far I have not published any of these essays.

Any other comments

Crisis of Nature: Critical Issues in Environmental History

Unit code UCIL20592

Credit rating 20

Unit level Level 2

Offered by School of Biological Sciences

Overview

Pandemics, overfishing, mass extinctions, plastics, disasters, disappearing forests - both the popular media and scientists today speak in terms of a major environmental crisis. In this course you will explore the following questions: How new are these concerns? What are the origins of environmental thinking? Indeed, what is meant by "nature"? What is thought to be the ideal relationship of the human species to the rest of the world? And do we have anything to learn from other cultures or from our own past?

Aims

The aims of this unit is to explore and provide a critical analysis of key environmental issues in the contemporary global society. The objective is to understand the fundamental assumptions driving science, policy and advocacy such as: pollution, conservation, waste, risk, sustainability, ecology, etc. Students will read a selection of multidisciplinary articles, engage in discussions, and participate in weekly debates on polarizing topics such as plastics, climate, urban sprawl, disasters. The essay aims to qualify students to identify and critically analyse a local environmental issue; the project is dedicated to developing intellectual and practical skills for doing original research.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit, a student taking this unit will be able to:

- analyse environmental movements and environmental legislation in the light of key scientific and ethical issues
- see the global connections that link environmental changes and pay particular attention to how modern technology has changed our relationship with nature on a worldwide scale
- analyse the many cultural and historical constructions of nature and to explore ideas about relations between nature and culture
- be familiar with a wide range of perspectives on the environment - social, cultural, scientific and political
- work in groups in presenting a case
- evaluate a judgment or an argument and to work in real-time to present her/his criticisms
- take active role in oral communication and dialogue during debates
- find and research an environmental topic
- find and critically assess primary and secondary sources
- write, with full scholarly apparatus, a report on their individual research project.

Syllabus

Lectures and seminars will be based around the following themes:

- Origins and meaning of "nature"

- Ecologies
- Pollution
- Climate
- Food
- Oceans
- Disasters
- Plastics
- Sprawl
- Species

One lecture and one seminar per week.

Employability skills

Analytical skills

Critical reading, essays - all based on analytical readings of sources

Group/team working

Seminars would involve non-assessed debates between teams.

Innovation/creativity

Students develop different interpretations to problem questions - on occasion work on highly localized problems even on campus (light saving proposals on basis of observations).

In sessions, developing argument for maximum impact on jury. Jury creatively interprets defense and prosecution groups.

Leadership

During seminars, group leaders are in charge of leading the group in the debate

Oral communication

Seminars discussions, debates

Problem solving

Essays may require finding a solution to a problem: e.g. what is the key environmental issue on the campus of University of Manchester?

Research

Primary and Secondary

Written communication

Essay and exam; short summaries when required

Assessment methods

- 1000 word essay (25%)
- Exam (25%)
- Project (40%)
- Presentation (10%)