

Professor Wendy Petersen Boring
wpeterse@willamette.edu
Eaton 102; 370-6555

**HIST 315 - Western Civilization and Sustainability:
Beginnings to 1600 (TH MOI)**
M/W, 12:50-2:20, Eaton 207

This course is an upper division course cross-listed in History and Earth and Environmental Science designed to examine the historical roots of sustainability and the thought and practices that have marked interactions between humans and the environment in the European West prior to 1600. We will begin with a critical assessment of the term “sustainability,” and together as a class we will develop a lens of sustainability to use in our analysis of historical texts. The course will then focus on a series of key moments prior to 1600 that have contributed significantly to the current context: the transition to agriculture; the thought and practices of classical Athens; the spread of Christianity and the development of science and technology in the Middle Ages; and the era of contact between European and other civilizations in the age of global commerce and colonization in the fifteenth century.

In each unit, we will analyze environmental and traditional histories, interpret data about resource use, and analyze primary texts that speak to the human-nature relationship. In addition to examining the contours of the human-nature relationship, the course will explore the “big” questions of historical analysis: Where do the various narratives begin and end, and why? Who are the heroes and villains? Where are the moments of progress or decline? What are the assumptions about the nature of what it means to be human, or what “nature” is? We will also ask how the story of the West *ought* to be told. How, for instance, should the “first great revolution” from hunter-gatherer to agriculture be narrated: as progress, or as the beginning of ecological devastation? Finally, we will ask why these narratives matter, and what we believe is the importance of history to the issues of sustainability. Throughout, our goals will be to develop a more complex, nuanced understanding of sustainability; to understand how our current context has deep roots in the past; to analyze how values shape the structure and content of historical narratives; and to develop a deeper ability to read, think and write about texts from the past.

The course is designed as a seminar, thus your primary work will consist in preparing the reading assignments carefully. Please prepare for class by marking significant passages in the text or your notes, noting key themes, developing questions, and reflecting on the readings. Come to class ready to share what you have prepared, willing to think out loud, and prepared to listen, respond, and work together. This stance of open questioning and careful thought regarding our readings is particularly important in this class where the content is complex, challenging, and trans-disciplinary. Your participation, measured by your careful preparation of the readings and your participation in class discussions, will count for 30% of your grade. A series of writing assignments including written responses to the readings for class and longer papers that ask you to synthesize the material in a unit, will count for 50% of your grade. Finally,

you have the choice of either writing an independent research paper on a topic of your choice, or engaging in a service-learning project, related to the course (20% of your grade). More details on these options will follow, but here are the key points:

Service Learning option: 10-15 hours with an activity or organization related to sustainability; 5 pg. reflection paper on your experience; Willamette's Center for Community Outreach can help you set it up.

Research Paper option: 10-12 pg. paper which explores a topic related to course content and which engages in research beyond our class readings.

Preliminary proposal for either option due Monday, Sept. 28th. Research paper proposal due Monday, Nov. 9th.

For either option, the paper is due at the time of the final for this course.

Notes:

*I am more than happy to meet with you outside of class time. I am on campus every day until 2:20. You may come by during my office hours, T 11:30-12:30; F 1:00-2:00, or at other times we arrange. It is always a good idea, even during office hours, to check in with me first (via email or in person) to make sure I don't already have other student appointments or meetings scheduled.

* Please let me know as soon as you are able about any special accommodations you might need, or about any extenuating circumstances that affect your ability to participate in class or complete course requirements.

*I do not accept late assignments.

*I follow the University policy on plagiarism found at:

<http://www.willamette.edu/cla/catalog/Sect3/aca.html#plag>

Required texts:

Author	Title	ISBN	Publisher
Plato	Plato: Phaedrus	0486277984	Dover Thrift Editions
Thucydides, trans. Woodruff	On Justice, Power, and Human Nature	0872201686	Hackett
Diamond, Jared	Guns, Germs, and Steel		
Ponting, Clive	A New Green History of the World	014303898	Penguin

All other readings are indicated on syllabus or available on the WISE site for this course.

*In the interests of sustainability, please read materials online as much as you are able; when you need to print something out please print double-sided on recycled content paper.

Schedule:

Unit I: Assessing "sustainability"

9/2 (W) Sustainable? Western Civilization? History?

Course Introduction and Discussion.

"Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait," Chris Jordan, Seattle, WA,