

Course Information: History of the American Environment (HY 212) – Colorado College

Type: Group Research Paper
Oral Presentation

Professor Anne Hyde

Level: 200

This course is an attempt to put the non-human world back into historical inquiry. We will survey American history from the perspective of the environment, beginning with the European invasion of the New World and ending with current environmental problems. Because this course is a history course, we will work on the skills of analyzing evidence, preparing and evaluating arguments, writing effectively, and speaking and listening about difficult issues. We will also work on cooperative thinking and problem-solving skills.

Block Plan Context:

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Because environmental issues are extremely complex, politically sensitive, and emotionally charged, they can only be discussed and worked on in cooperation with a wide variety of people and ideas, we will work intensively in permanently assigned groups. We will use groups to generate questions, to solve problems in class, to lead class discussion, and to complete a group final project.

Grading Context for this assignment:

Group Work and Participation: 25%

4-5pp analytical essay: 20%

6 1-2 pp. response essays: 30%

Group Final Project and Class Presentation: 25%

Important Features of the Assignment:

- Group assignment
- Develop varied points of view – consensus problem solving
- Library and internet research of varied sources
- Oral presentation with visual aids
- 10-15 page written report with full bibliography

Description of Assignment:

This assignment is a group project. It asks you and your group to choose a environmental problem, describe its deep history, develop a range of solutions that demonstrates the complexity of the interests involved, and devise an educational campaign or a funding request to educate people about the problem. The idea is to understand the viewpoints of those involved in the debate and the variety of concerns around it. We will work on using a consensus model of problem-solving. The point is to get a sense of how various groups and interests see the problem and why solutions are hard to find. In other years students have examined logging issues in the

Northwest, the creation of wilderness areas, toxic waste dumps, pesticide spraying, water use, cancer clusters, the politics of endangered species, the reintroduction of animal species, specific kinds of farming practices, recycling, GMO food, nuclear power plants, fossil fuels and big SUVs, environmental practices on the CC campus, fire management in Yellowstone, the management of Rocky Flats near Denver - anything that offers a variety of opinions that you can research effectively. Your group will present your research in a 20-minute oral presentation and in a 10-15 page report, with a full bibliography of your research.

You will need to be wide-ranging and imaginative in the kinds of material that you use to develop the range of points of view and arguments around the problem. You'll need both basic history texts to get the general idea of what happened when as well as policy statements, editorials, and government reports to build a strong set of positions. A lot of this material will be in the Government Documents Department of the library and in periodicals and magazines, as well as on the Internet but you have to assess the quality of the material you get from any source. The variety and quality of the sources you find is crucial in convincing people that your positions are valid. You will probably want to consult local newspapers as well as scholarly material to see how local people feel about these issues. (It would be a huge time-saver and a big addition to the quality of your project to consult one of the reference librarians at this point. Their expertise will make your work much easier.)

Next, put together a 10-15 page report that describes the problem, using the evidence you have uncovered. You'll need to describe the history of the problem, the range of interests involved, and the concerns of each interested group. Finally, the report should also include a proposal for some public education on the problem or a funding proposal. You don't have to solve the problem or agree on a solution – the point is to explore the complexity of the problem and to develop a sense of the interests involved and their arguments. A map and some visual evidence would add a lot. **Be sure** to include a bibliography detailing your sources that uses proper bibliographic formats.

The last step is a class presentation of your problem. Briefly sum up your findings about the variety of positions around the issue and describe the biggest challenges to solving this problem in 20 minutes. Imagine that you are presenting this to a funding organization or to a group of local citizens. You will need some visual aids – maps, charts, pictures – to make the issues clear to the class. Overheads, slides, powerpoint, etc. are all fine.

Timeline:

Wk	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Weekend</i>
1			Choose groups and topics			
2	Turn in topic description with basic positions			Meet in groups with instructor		
3	Research out of class	Research out of class		Meet in groups with instructor to discuss presentation	Prepare presentation outside of class	
4		Group Presentations: AM and PM	Research reports due and individual evaluations			