

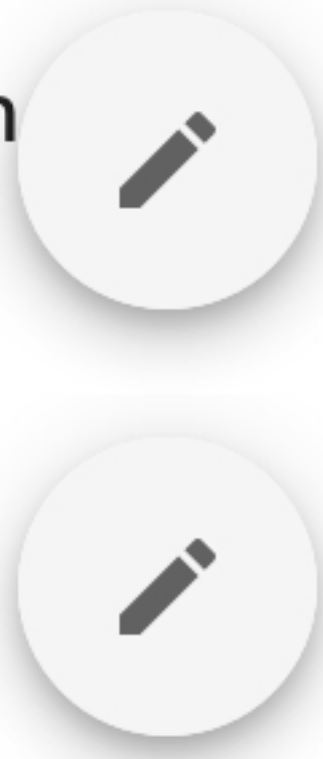
# Imperial Nature: The U.S. and the Global Environment

Macalester College Prof. Chris Wells  
TR 3-4:30 pm Theater 201



## Course Description

Although the United States accounts for just five percent of the world's population, it consumes roughly one-fifth of the world's total energy, has the world's largest economy, and is the world's largest consumer and generator of waste. Relative to its size, its policies and actions have had a significantly disproportionate impact on global economic development and environmental health. Mixing broad themes and detailed case studies, this course will focus on the complex historical relationship between American actions and changes to the global environment.



### Call me "Chris" (he/him/his)

Students are sometimes not sure what to call their professors. Like many others at Macalester, I invite you to use my first name, though if you are feeling formal, Professor Wells and Dr. Wells are both fine. Please be sure to share what you would like to be called, as well!

### Office Hours

My regular office hours this semester will be on Mondays from 1:30-2:30 and Wednesdays from 11-12 in my office (OLRI 249c). If either of those times works for you, you can claim a spot without asking me [here](#). If the scheduled times don't work, you can use the "Meet with" box in Google Calendar to see when I don't have something scheduled. Send me an email suggesting a few times that will work for you so that I can check them against my calendar.

Talking to students is one of my favorite things about being a professor. No question is too small, and no pretext to talk is too flimsy: if you want to talk, we can talk!



### Contact Information

Prof. Chris Wells

[wells@macalester.edu](mailto:wells@macalester.edu)

OLRI 249c, x6803

You can always reach me by email. I will usually get back to you quickly, and always within 24 hours on weekdays. You have my full attention.



## Challenging Times ↻

These are challenging times. As one wise colleague put it, we aren't all in the same boat, but all of us are confronting the same storm. The pandemic is rough. Public health protocols are rough. Climate change is rough. Racial inequality is rough. Our national politics are rough. Despite these challenges, let's try to be kind and patient with one another, and with ourselves. Let's learn and explore and aim as high as we're able, while acknowledging that there are limits on our time, energy, capacity, and attention that external circumstances will dictate. If things aren't working for you, whatever the reason, please let me know and I'll do what I can to help.



## This syllabus does not stand on its own!

Our Moodle site ([moodle.macalester.edu](http://moodle.macalester.edu)) is not just a crucial resource, but is also our primary point of contact for this class. In addition to hosting this syllabus, it is where you can find our complete daily schedule, as well as links to all of our readings, discussions, activities, and assignments—in short, anything and everything related to the course. Please familiarize yourself with the Moodle site before doing anything else, and let me know promptly if you have any questions or run into any problems!





# Policies

## Required Texts

All of our course texts are available in the college book store:

- John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in the Honduras and the United States*
- Gregg Mitman, *Empire of Rubber: Firestone's Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia*
- Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power*



Although all three books are available for purchase in the bookstore, please note two things:

1. Two of the three required texts are available as a free download (requires login) from Macalester's library ([Banana Cultures](#); [The Global Interior](#)). If you are comfortable reading on a device that you can bring to class and do not want to own a copy, that is fine.
2. I have ordered the third required book (*Empire of Rubber*) for the library, but it hasn't arrived yet. When it does, it will be available [on reserve at the library](#) as a 2-hour loan. (If you have trouble getting your hands on a copy of this book, please be in touch with me.)



**Policy on class recordings:** I have no current plans to record our daily class sessions. Should that change for any reason, such as to accommodate a documented disability, I will notify you in advance and any recording will be in a manner consistent with [Macalester's classroom recording policy](#). Please note that any and all recordings distributed to the class on Moodle are covered by this policy, which states that members of the class may not share, replicate, or publish any class recording, in whole or in part, or use any of the recordings for non-class purposes, without my prior written approval.

## Attendance, Engagement, and Participation

Active engagement and participation in class discussions and activities is vital to the success of this class. Our project in class meetings will be to explore connections between events, to answer questions, to clear up any confusion, to discuss the major themes of the course, and above all to engage with assigned readings. Please remember that we are all in this together, and we are all responsible for the success of the course. As eager as I am to share with you what I know, I expect that you will learn at least as much from one another as you will from me. We will discuss in class the mutual rights and responsibilities that you would like to see govern our classroom, but at minimum it is important that we all respect one another's time, space, values, and ideas by coming to class on time and prepared to engage in respectful, intellectually challenging discussions.



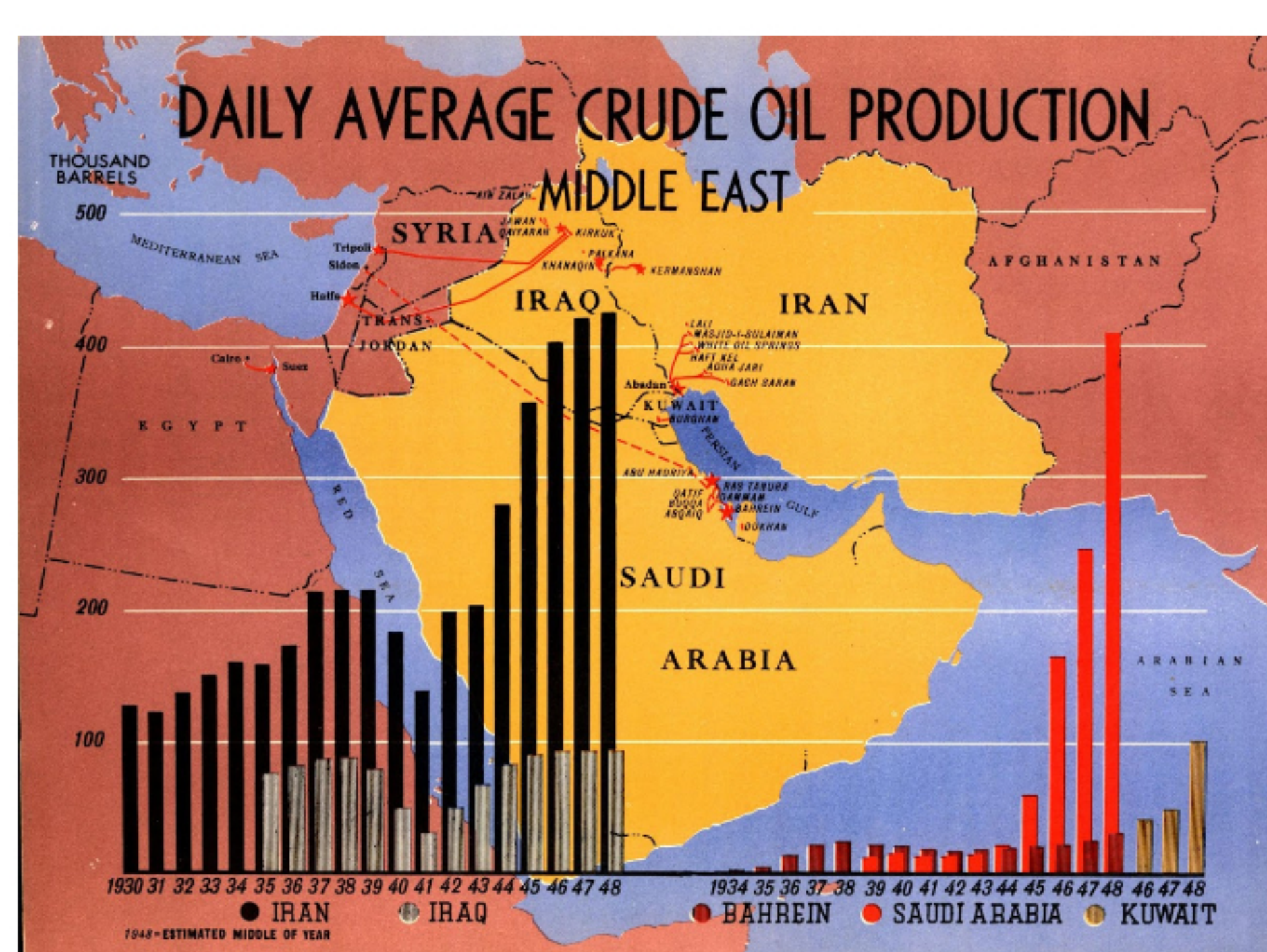
## Covid Caveats

Given the uncertain and ongoing nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, everything in this syllabus is subject to change, although I am hopeful that no significant changes will be necessary. In the meantime:

- We will follow Macalester's [well-fitted masks policy](#) in class as long as it is necessary to protect public health.
- All of my office hours will have a virtual option (via Zoom). If you want to meet in person in my office, I'm willing to do so. Weather permitting, I'm also always happy to have in-person "walking" office hours (i.e., to talk while we go for a walk around campus).
- If you are in isolation/in quarantine but are feeling well when we are scheduled to meet in person, you may join the class via Zoom. I will have a device in class that we can move around the room and add to small group discussions. If you are not feeling well, though, please rest and check in with me about how to make up the work you miss. I do not expect you to attend class remotely if you are sick and do not feel up to it.

## Helpful Resources

Many wonderful resources exist that will help you with this class. To book an online appointment with a writing counselor at the **MAX Center**, visit [WCOonline](#). You can find the center's guide to working remotely with a writing tutor [here](#). Our research and instruction librarians are also a great resource for many writing-related questions. You may book an online appointment with one of them [here](#). Another useful resource is Macalester's [Write Well video series](#). Please also spend some time perusing Prof. Zachary Schrag's [helpful advice about doing well](#) in a history course.



## Academic Dishonesty

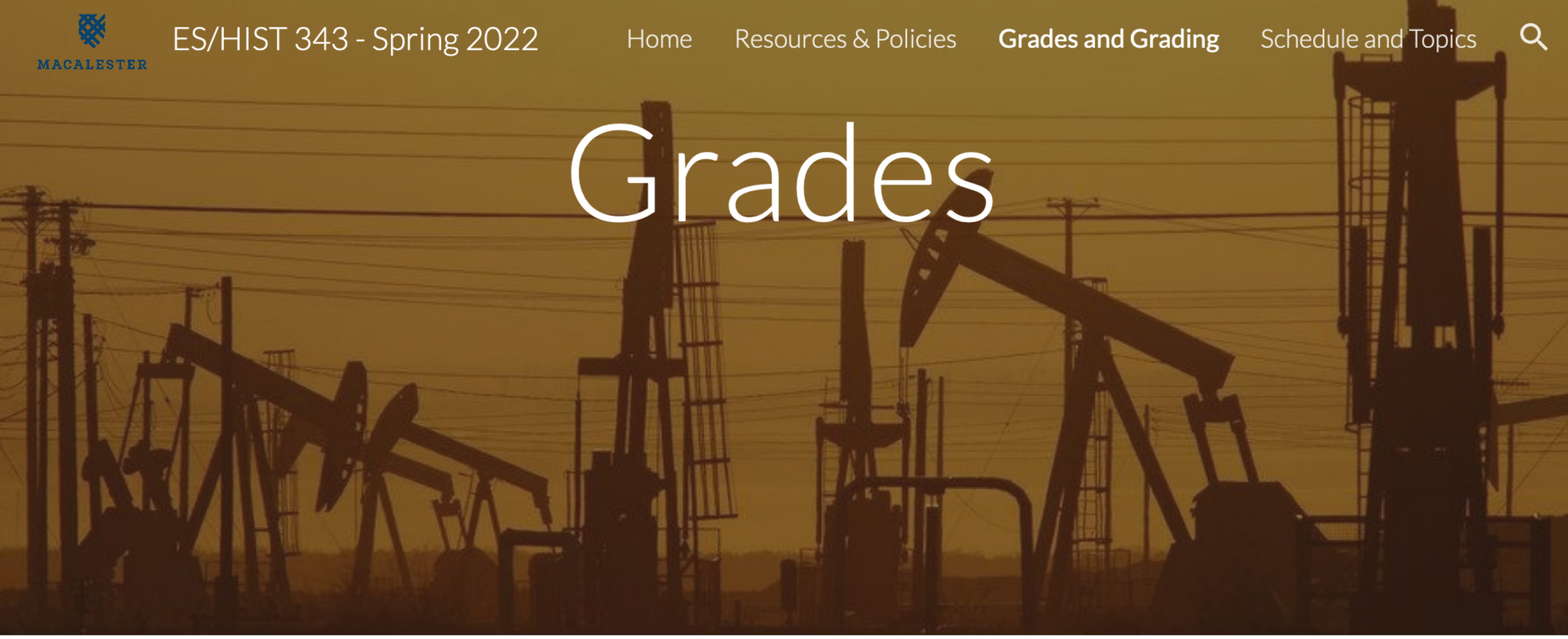
Academic dishonesty erodes the basic foundations of higher education: exchange, debate, and the thoughtful consideration of what we know, how we know it, and why it matters. It has no place at Macalester or in this course. Find Macalester's academic integrity policy [here](#). For help avoiding plagiarism, visit the Library's Academic Integrity materials [here](#). For the Quick Guide to the Chicago Manual of Style, the citation system used by historians, visit [here](#) (requires login).

## Accommodations

I am committed to supporting all students in my class. If course design ever poses barriers to your ability to access or to demonstrate mastery of course content, please let me know. I will make **reasonable academic accommodations** in such cases. If you have a known disability and think that you may need formal accommodations, email [disabilityservices@macalester.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@macalester.edu), call the office at 651-696-6275, or use their [online scheduler](#). Given the unusual circumstances this semester, you may find yourself needing things that you normally would not. In those cases, please let me know what is going on. I may be able to make reasonable accommodations that will help.







# Grades

## "Ungrading"

This course will take a different approach to grades and grading.

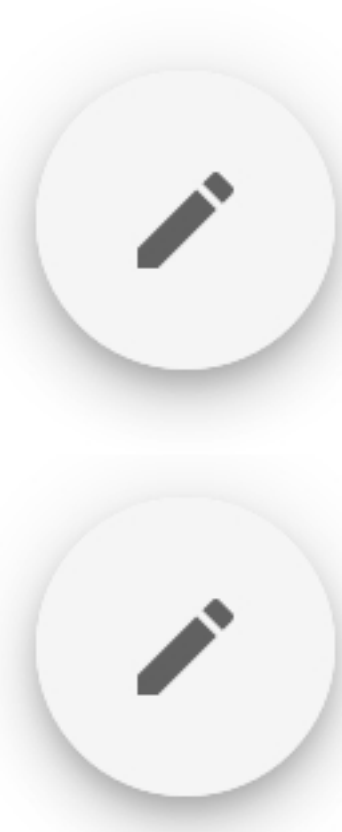
Traditional grading systems usually try to strike a productive balance between measuring your *performance* (think tests and papers) and the *effort* you put into the course (think attendance, participation, reading responses, etc). At their best, such systems usually use a combination of carrots and sticks to encourage you to learn--creating checkpoints to keep you on track, rewarding you for your effort and progress, and penalizing you for major missteps. At their worst? Let's just say they can be ... suboptimal. And whether they are working well or poorly, traditional grading systems can provoke a lot of anxiety.

My sense is that we have more than enough anxiety to deal with right now, and I don't want to produce more of it in this class if I can help it. I'd prefer that we all focus--as much as we're capable--on reading, discussing ideas, improving our writing, building community, and making this semester as positive an experience as we can.

I don't especially love grading, but I do love to help students improve their writing, critical thinking skills, and historical knowledge. What this means in practice is that I will read and comment on your work regularly during the semester, focusing on how you can improve your writing and your mastery of course content, but I will not grade anything. Then, at the end of the semester, you will have a chance to pull together your best work, revise it as much as you wish, reflect critically on what you have done over the semester, and assign yourself a grade. We will then meet and discuss everything and agree on a final grade.

The purpose of this approach is to decenter our focus from grading so that we can give our full attention to the skills, ideas, and understanding that are why we are in this class together in the first place. My hope is that it will make things more fun and rewarding as a result.

Meets Expectations	Consistently met individual goals
Below Expectations	Consistently improved through education and
Unsatisfactory	Consistently considering improvement



## Assignments

We'll talk in class about how this will work, but the short version is that 1) You will be able to pick a certain number of learning goals that seem most compelling and/or useful to you, 2) You will have a lot of flexibility to pick assignments that will best help you achieve your goals, and 3) You will put together a final portfolio of your best revised work for us to discuss in our final conference.

## Argumentative Writing (WA)

This course fulfills Macalester's **Argumentative Writing (WA) General Education requirement**, which means that we will do a significant amount of writing, that I will provide explicit instruction in writing and revising evidence-based argumentative prose, and that you will have the chance to revise some work after getting feedback from me. WA-related learning goals are to help you improve your ability to:

- Identify, analyze, and synthesize important course themes by drawing on multiple course readings;
- Identify, summarize, and engage with other scholars' historical arguments;
- Generate a compelling historical argument that follows the conventions of historical scholarship and is competently framed for an anticipated audience of other bright, engaged Macalester students who know nothing about this course's content;
- Support an argument by carefully analyzing an appropriate range of well selected evidence drawn from course materials and original research;
- Express ideas clearly using sentence and paragraph-level structures appropriate for historical scholarship.





# Schedule

## Course Schedule-at-a-Glance

This table summarizes the material in Moodle so that you can see the whole schedule at once. (Moodle remains the best place to access everything.)

343 Spring 2022 schedule : Sheet1				
		# pgs/ rdg		# pgs/ week
WK 1			INTRODUCTIONS	0
	1/20 Th	0	Introductions	
			UNIT 1: THE AGROECOLOGY OF EMPIRE	
WK 2			WK 2: RETHINKING THE BANANA REPUBLIC	127
	1/25 Tu	74	<a href="#">Soluri, Banana Cultures, Intro-ch 2</a>	
	1/27 Th	53	<a href="#">Soluri, Banana Cultures, chs 3-4</a>	
			WK 3: TROPICAL COMMODITIES IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE	119
	2/1 Tu	65	<a href="#">Soluri, Banana Cultures, chs 5-6</a>	
	2/3 Th	54	<a href="#">Soluri, Banana Cultures, chs 7-8</a>	
			WK 4: "AMERICA SHOULD PRODUCE ITS OWN RUBBER"	105
	2/8 Tu	66	<a href="#">Mitman, Empire of Rubber, Preface-ch2</a>	
	2/10 Th	39	<a href="#">Mitman, Empire of Rubber, ch3</a>	
			WK 5: AN AMERICAN PROTECTORATE?	108
	2/15 Tu	73	<a href="#">Mitman, Empire of Rubber, chs 4-5</a>	
	2/17 Th	35	<a href="#">Mitman, Empire of Rubber, ch 6</a>	
			WK 6: CONCESSIONS AND CONQUEST	89
	2/22 Tu	39	<a href="#">Mitman, Empire of Rubber, chs 7-end</a>	
	2/24 Th	50	<a href="#">Black, The Global Interior, Intro-ch 1</a>	
			UNIT 2: THE MINERALOGY OF EMPIRE	66
			WK 7: "NEW JEWELS IN THE CROWN OF AMERICAN EMPIRE"	
	3/1 Tu	66	<a href="#">Black, The Global Interior, chs 2-3</a>	
	3/3 Th	41	<a href="#">Black, The Global Interior, ch 4</a>	
			WK 8: ENERGY AND EXPLORATION	103
	3/8 Tu	66	<a href="#">Black, The Global Interior, chs 5-6</a>	
	3/10 Th	37	<a href="#">Black, The Global Interior, chs 7-end</a>	
			WK 9	
	3/15 Tu		Spring Break	
	3/17 Th		Spring Break	
			UNIT 3: AN AMERICAN EARTH	
			WK 10: DEVELOPMENT, AMERICAN STYLE	51
	3/22 Tu	24	<a href="#">Robertson, "This is the American Earth," 561-84</a>	
	3/24 Th	27	<a href="#">Robertson, "DDT and the Cold War Jungle," 904-30</a>	
			WK 11: WAR AND THE ENVIRONMENT	32
	3/29 Tu	18	<a href="#">Hamblin, "Vietnam and the Seeds of Destruction," 179-96.</a>	
		14	<a href="#">Griffiths, Agent Orange, 14 selected pages.</a>	
	3/31 Th	36	<a href="#">Merlin and Gonzales, "Environmental Impacts of Nuclear Testing in Remote Oceania," 167-202</a>	
			<a href="#">"A Time-Lapse Map of Every Nuclear Explosion from 1945-1948" (7:13), https://youtu.be/iuNCBzhFkBQ</a>	
			WK 12: EXPORTING HARM	79
	4/5 Tu	50	<a href="#">Pellow, "The Global Village Dump," 97-146.</a>	
	4/7 Th	29	<a href="#">Grossman, "Not in Our Backyard," 182-210.</a>	
		6	<a href="#">Behring, "Inside the Digital Dump," 74-79.</a>	
			WK 13: THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE	56
	4/12 Tu	52	<a href="#">Roberts and Parks, "Fueling Injustice," 133-184.</a>	
	4/14 Th	TBD	<a href="#">Klein, This Changes Everything, selection</a>	
		4	<a href="#">Agarwal &amp; Narain, "Global Warming in an Unequal World," 157-160.</a>	
			WK 14: ORGANICS, FAIR TRADE, AND ECOTOURISM	48
	4/19 Tu	24	<a href="#">Honey, "In Search of the Golden Toad," 3-26.</a>	
	4/21 Th	24	<a href="#">Belsky, "The Meaning of the Manatee," 285-308.</a>	
		24	<a href="#">Rice, "Noble Goals and Challenging Terrain," 39-62.</a>	
			WK 15: CONSERVATION REDUX	55
	4/26 Tu	4	<a href="#">Reel, "Argentine Land Fight Divides Environmentalists, Rights Advocates."</a>	
		2	<a href="#">Welsh, "Brazil Tells Foreigners Amazon Not for Sale."</a>	

