

History 141: Carbon: Element at the Center of History  
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This “I-course” has always had sustainability as an important implicit theme, since it attempts to delineate the parallel histories of how humans have used carbon-based fuels in history and how they have coped with changing and intensifying environmental consequences of these uses.

As a result of participating in the 2014 meeting of the Chesapeake Project, I have made the theme of sustainability more explicit in the project requirements of the course. The primary writing assignment is now defined as follows:

**Energy Sustainability in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:** (1500-2000 wds) One of the key themes of this course is the significance of energy choices. Your primary writing assignment requires you to select one of the key energy choices in 20<sup>th</sup> century history and to research and analyze several key aspects of it:

- a. **What were the primary options available to energy users at the time this choice was made?**
- b. **What were the primary influences that governed the selection of the most important of these options?**
- c. **What were the most significant consequences of the choices, particularly for the long-term sustainability of the energy system?**
- d. **What were the environmental effects, both short term and long term? How were these effects recognized and dealt with?**

It is important that you choose a topic that is specific enough to allow you to do meaningful research and analysis. Some effort will be made during your section meetings prior to topic selection to guide you in finding and doing preliminary research in feasible topics.

You will need to get approval for your topic by submitting a proposal two weeks before the assignment due date. At this stage, you may (with approval) join with one or two other students to develop a cooperative project of appropriate length. The proposal must demonstrate knowledge of relevant sources.

As can be seen, the assignment requires students to look at the history of energy choices in the 20<sup>th</sup> century explicitly through the lens of sustainability. Their success in doing so will be judged on the basis of the extent to which they are able to identify key choices (and the key actors making them) and to describe the factors shaping these choices and their outcomes, particularly in terms of sustainable action.