

History 110
Climate Change and World History
Course Syllabus

Summer Semester 2008
TWR 9:00AM – 12:00PM

4 Units

Instructor:

Elijah Meeks
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(209)233-5645

Office Hours: T Th 1-2PM
Location: Lantern Cafe

Course website:

Prerequisites:

This course meets an upper division world history elective for the major/minor and an upper division GE course for SSHA.

Course description:

This course draws upon both environmental science and history to examine how the rise and fall of civilizations; the evolution of farming, pastoralism, and trade; the course of wars, and patterns of migration have been affected by fluctuations in temperature and rainfall. It also examines how humans have contributed to climate change.

Course Goals:

After taking this class, students will be expected to have gained an understanding of the climate and its effect on population growth and social stability. Emphasis will be placed on integrating knowledge from scientific articles into existing historical discourse. The interaction between climate and ecology will be explored with an emphasis on soil formation, changes in rainfall patterns and desertification. Students will be exposed to the use of digital tools for geographic analysis.

The class will be divided between the methods and techniques of studying historic environments and examining case studies from cultures located around the world in order to understand how to examine, track and explain the role of climate in historical processes. This course will draw heavily on research from the environmental sciences, physical and biological anthropology, as well as classic historical research.

Evaluation

Grading will be based on in-class participation (15%), a midterm (30%), a group presentation (25%) and a final paper (30%). The presentation will be a collaborative project to develop and explain an overview of the climate, ecology and geography of a historical state or culture. The paper will be ten to twelve pages and explore a historic climatic event and the effect it has on a particular state or people. Students will be evaluated based on their understanding of relevant scientific techniques, the spectrum of human response to environmental change and the limits of climate change as complete explanation for historic events.

There will be no make-up exams held unless the student has a verifiable medical emergency that caused their absence during normal exam times. If the paper is turned in late, then it will receive an automatic drop of 10% per day late. All members of the group project will receive the project grade,

regardless of attendance or participation during the project.

Course Materials:

The following texts will be available in the bookstore for purchase:

Diamond, J. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*

Montgomery, *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*

IG Simmons, *Interpreting Nature: Cultural Constructions of the Environment*

Reading will be supplemented with articles and chapters handed out in class or posted on CROPS

Accommodation for Disabilities:

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me or if you have any other special arrangements, please make an appointment to see me as soon as possible.

Week 1 – Introduction

T: Introduction and Syllabus Review

W: Climate Change vs. Environmental Change

R: Fundamentals of Environmental History

Week 2 – Scientific Studies of Historic Climate Change

T: Proxies and Feedback Loops

W: Modeling and Statistical Analysis

R: Problems of Scientific Research

Research Plan Due

Week 3 – Agriculture and Livestock

T: Technological, Ecological and Climatic Necessities of Agriculture

W: Agricultural Intensification and Degradation

R: Pastoralism and Native Culture

Week 4 – Overview of Climate and Environment By Region

T: The Americas, El Nino and Drought

W: Europe and Africa, Desertification and Glaciation

R: Asia, The Monsoons and Ecotones

Week 5 – Midterm and Review

T: Review Lecture and Questions

W: ***Midterm***

R: Presentation Review

Week 6 – Case Studies

T: Using GIS to Integrate Historical and Environmental Data

Presentation Outline Due

W: The American and Soviet Dust Bowls

R: North China

Week 7 – Case Studies

- T: Literature, Imagery and Cultural Relics of Climate Change
- W: The Medieval Warm Period and the Little Ice Age in Europe
- R: The Mayas, Incas and Anasazi

Week 8 – Presentations

- T: Toward a Global Environmental History
 - W: Presentations
 - R: Presentations
- Final Paper Due***