

History 25
Introduction to Environmental History
Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 2009
T Th 7:30PM – 9:20PM
COB 288

4 Units

Instructor:

Elijah Meeks
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(209)233-5645

Office Hours: T Th 4:45-5:45PM
Location: TBD

Course website:

CROPS will be used to post a digital copy of the syllabus as well as supplemental chapters and articles for readings.

Course description:

This course studies the interaction between environment and society, focusing on climate change and environmental degradation. This course will look specifically at environmental history in China, the Roman Empire, the Middle East and Medieval Europe, focusing on the effects of famine, resource depletion and migration.

Course Goals:

After taking this class, students will be expected to have gained a general understanding of environmental processes and their effect on population growth, development of bureaucracy and social conflict. Emphasis will be placed on integrating scientific knowledge into existing historical discourse. The interaction between climate and ecology will be explored with an emphasis on ecology's effect on societal development as well as political response to environmental catastrophes.

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 (20%), two midterms (20% each), a group presentation (20%) and reader response papers (20%). The presentation will be a collaborative project to develop and explain an overview of a particular environmental region or system and its connection to historical societies. 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:

Chew, S. *World Ecological Degradation: Accumulation, Urbanization and Deforestation*

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
R: Fundamentals of Environmental History

Week 2 – Early Environmental Modification

-WED, Chapter 1, Chew - Nature and Culture (PDF), Boserup Review (PDF),

T: Population Dynamics and State Complexification
R: Deforestation and the Bronze Dark Ages

Week 3 – Agriculture and Livestock

T: The Technology of Agriculture and Pastoralism
R: Bureaucracies in Famine – Entitlement Approach

Week 4 – Ecosystems

T: Overview of World Ecosystems and Ecosystems Services
R: Reconstructing Historic Ecosystems, Case of Zhou China
Research Plan Due

Week 5 – Midterm and Review

T: Review Lecture and Questions
R: **Midterm 1, 2/19/09**

Week 6 – Slave Agriculture – Classical

T: Chattel Slavery and Environmental Degradation
R: Slavery in Imperial Rome

Week 7 – Slave Agriculture – Modern

T: Environmental Degradation in the Antebellum South
R: Environmental Destruction in the British Colonial Empire

Week 8 – Ecological Modification – Classical

T: Ecology and Society
R: Sinification through Ecological Modification
Presentation Outline Due

Week 9 - Ecological Modification – Modern

T: Urban Ecology
R: Soviet Ecological Modification

**Week 10 -
Spring Break**

Week 11 – Midterm and Review

T: Review
R: **Midterm 2, 4/2/09**

Week 12 - Land Use and Property Rights

T: The Commons
R: Changing Rights in Medieval England and the American South

Week 13 – Contrasting Methods of Agricultural Production

T: Al-Andalus and Catholic Spain
R: The Introduction of the Potato to Europe

Week 14 – Overpopulation and Collapse

T: The Rwandan Genocide
R: The Mayan Drought

Week 15 -

T: *Rapa Nui*
R: *Rapa Nui*

Week 16 – Presentation of Environmental History

T: Digital Tools for Studying and Describing Environmental History
R: Presentation Review

Week 17

Finals TBA