

University of Toronto
Department of Geography

GGR 101 H1S Ancient Civilizations and Their Environments
Course Outline 2014-15

Time and Location: Thursday, 2-4PM , ES 1050

Instructor: A.M.Davis, 5037 Sidney Smith Hall, Tel # (416) 946-0270.

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Office Hours: Monday 12.30 -2.00PM; Thursday 10.00- Noon in my office (5037SS)

Teaching Assistants: TBA

Course Outline:

Most of our contemporary environmental problems are a consequence of deliberate and inadvertent human impact. Those impacts are largely confined to the current interglacial, the Holocene. Some are of long standing while others are relatively recent phenomena. Clearly the severity of these impacts has increased with increasing population and technological advances. Human history is replete with examples of societies that evolve, flourish and fail. Most of these involve self-destruction caused ultimately by over-exploitation of resources and failure to adjust to natural environmental changes. What happened to the 'hydraulic' civilizations of the Middle East and the Indus Valley? Why did the Incan, Mayan, Moche and Anasazi cultures fail? What happened to the Norse settlements in Greenland? What brought about the demise of Polynesian societies on Easter Island (Rapa Nui) and elsewhere across the Pacific? How were societies impacted by early globalization – the spread of plants, animals and disease?

This course considers the nature of environmental change and how those changes have impacted on society. The emphasis will be on environment not people. Although our focus will be on the Holocene, a longer, geologic scale perspective is useful. From the geologic record it is clear that huge changes have occurred over the Earth's 4.5 billion year history; all without human involvement. It's also evident that our evolution was environmentally driven. Throughout the Holocene, the last 11,500 years, relatively modest environmental shifts have had large, sometimes global human consequences.

In addition, the rise of civilization, permitted by the food surplus contingent on plant and animal domestication, has produced its own suite of environmental changes that, for some, have become sufficiently pervasive to warrant the identification of a new age, the Anthropocene.

Topics (tentative):

Week 1. Environment and Environmental Change. Introduction.

Week 2. Environmental Systems. What drives them?

(a) Plate Tectonics .

Week 3. Environmental Systems. What drives them?

(b) Solar Energy.

Week 4. Environmental Change , Evolution and the Spread of Humans.

Week 5. Holocene Environmental Changes and Human Response;

(a) Plant and animal Domestication.

Week 6. MID-TERM TEST

Week 7. (b) Agriculture, Soil Erosion and Desertification.

Week 8. (c) Early Globalization: the Diffusion of Agriculture and Disease

Week 9. (d) The Medieval Warm Epoch and The Little Ice Age.

Week 10. (e) El Nino and other Periodic Climatic Events.

Week 11. Islands and Their Vulnerability.

Week 12. The Anthropocene.

Required Reading:

The text for this course is a reader produced by Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., and will be available at the University Bookstore.

Evaluation:

Evaluation will be based on a mid-term test (30%), a term paper (30%) and a final exam (40%).

Mid-term Test: Thursday February 12, 2-4PM. Locations TBA.

Term Paper: On some aspect of human-environment interaction. A topic list with details on length, style, etc. will be provided within the first few weeks. The papers will be due on **March 26**. They will be accepted up to **one week late, but at a penalty of 10% a day**.

Final Exam: This will be held during the official exam period, **April 8-30**.

Course Policies:

You are expected to attend lectures, but this is not mandatory. You may be at a disadvantage if you don't attend. Lecture notes will be posted on the course's Blackboard site, usually after the lecture.

Remember that your paper is expected on time and that there is a stiff penalty for late submission. **Emailed assignments will not be accepted.** Plagiarism, which includes the submission of someone else's work as your own, and resubmission of work previously submitted for credit, is a serious offence. Penalties are severe. Make sure that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and know how to avoid it.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com data base, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.