Course Description: This course will cover how and why climate change has impacted human societies over the past 20,000 years until the present day. We will examine why climate changes, the methods for recording climate change, and discuss case studies of the varied responses of past human societies to climate change in different geographic regions and time periods with varying socio-political and economic systems. We will discuss aspects of resilience and rigidity of societies, and issues of environmental sustainability. Finally we will compare and contrast modern responses to climate change on a global scale with those of past societies.

Format: Seminar. Three to four journal articles will be assigned weekly. Students are expected to do all the assigned readings. Each week (beginning in the second class meeting) one student will be responsible for giving a 15 min summary of the articles and getting discussions started by providing a few questions or comments to the group. I will provide general background information and additional comments if necessary.

Goals: To familiarize students with the evidence for climate change and methods of climate change research; to increase their understanding of the social, economic and technological issues human societies faced in the past when dealing with climate change. To understand what were adaptive and maladaptive human strategies. To help students understand the modern politics and social responses to climate change. On successful completion of this course a student should understand how climate change is recorded, and the basic climatic record for the period of human occupation of the earth. To be familiar with current debates about how human societies adapt to climate change. To be able to think critically about issues and arguments proposed in the literature, and to write a coherent essay arguing a point of view.

Grading: will be based on the following requirements:

1) Weekly reading of articles and chapters. Before the class meeting, students are required to email me a comment, critique, or question about each of the assigned readings for that week. These will be presented to the class anonymously for discussion (25%).
2) Lead discussion(s) once or twice, depending on class size (15%).
3) Attendance and participation (20%).
4) Book Review: Choose a book relevant to issues of climate change and society (subject to the instructor’s approval). Write a review beginning with an analytical synopsis of the book’s contents and arguments. Then give your own critical evaluation including what may be unique about the book and its significance (or lack of significance) to the field. (ca. 1500 words double-spaced) (15%). (Due Oct. 22, 2012).

5) Research Paper of approximately 3000 – 4,000 words (25%), double-spaced due on December 10, 2012. In this paper you should select a case study relevant to the impact of climate change on an ancient society. Provide a discussion of the basic data and interpretations as seen in the literature, as well as your own ideas, critiques, and commentary. Please come to my office to discuss your topic as soon as you are ready.

TENTATIVE Weekly Readings (subject to change):

Theme 1: Tools for Understanding the Human Face of Climate Change

1) Historical and Theoretical Background: Historical background to the discovery that climates change; Theoretical Perspectives: Climatic Determinism (the ‘zip-code lottery’ of climate and culture), Cultural Ecology, Political Ecology; Nature/Culture Debates:

Recommended Reading:

2) Why does the climate change? How do we learn about climate change in the past? Earth’s Climates in the Past, Present, and Future. Discussion Topic: The impact of global climate change on localities today, how climate change is represented in the media, and control of information about climate change in politics and education.

Required Reading:

3) **Climate Change, Biodiversity and Human Ecodynamics in the past.** Human Responses to Climate Change; Perception of Climate Change; Scales of Change; Adaptation; Resilience; Sustainability.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Theme 2: Climate Change, Human Origins and Later Foraging Societies**

4) **Climate Change and our Early Ancestors;** Discussion Topic: Early Hominids, Climate and Environmental Change.

**Required Reading:**
5) Climatic influences on coastal human environments from the Late Pleistocene to the mid-Holocene.

Required Reading:


Theme 3: The Role of Climate Change in the Origins and Spread of Agriculture

6) Did climate change force the origins of agriculture? Discussion Topic: Is climate change a ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factor towards agriculture?

Required Reading:


7) Spread of Rice Farming to Marginal Areas in the Chinese Neolithic;

Required Reading:

8) Climate and culture change: From farmers to nomads in the Steppes of Central Asia.

Required Reading:

Theme 4: Climate Change and the Collapse of Civilizations (Nature pleads “not guilty”)

9) Maya Collapse: Did Environmental Change Play a Role?

Required Reading:

10): Collapse of Early Bronze Age cities of the Near East (Climate or Culture, Who is to blame?).

Required Reading:

**Required Reading:**


12) **The Little Ice Age and its impact on the Greenland Norse populations.**

**Required Reading:**


13) **Adapting to climate change in our modern age.**

**Required Reading:**