

## Memorandum

**To:** General Education Council  
**From:** Lynn Fisher (SOA)  
**Subject:** SOA 372 Nature, History, and Human Action (Online)  
**Date:** September 18, 2017

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I have submitted my syllabus for SOA 372 for recertification in the ECCE Global Awareness category. Below are some notes about the ways in which the course addresses Global Awareness criteria. Please let me know if you have questions.

Global processes & themes -- This course begins from the recognition that the landscapes we live on, and the environmental issues we face today, are culturally and historically constructed, and draws on archaeology, anthropology, and historical ecology to examine global processes of change at varying spatial and temporal scales. The text (*Redman: Human Impact on Ancient Environments*, University of Arizona Press 1999) introduces students to methods of historical ecology and draws on global case studies (including Easter Island / Rapa Nui, the eastern Mediterranean, Mexico & Central America) to examine the long-term record of human-environment interactions. Reserve readings include articles by archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, and ecologists that deepen the case studies and address contemporary issues.

Interdisciplinary approach: The course combines methods and approaches of natural (ecology, soil science) and social sciences (anthropology/archaeology) to achieve an understanding of environmental problem-solving and linkages between cultural and natural systems

### **Global Awareness criteria:**

#### Cultural Awareness:

- Readings explore cultural/natural histories and issues in several world areas (Rapa Nui/Pacific Islands, Maya/Mesoamerica, Bali, Bangladesh) through multiple perspectives, comparing community and international perspectives, and exploring examples of long-term community resilience / problem-solving (e.g., Mayan *milpa*, Balinese subak, Rapa Nui persistence).
- The same emphasis underlies the 4-part Global to Local project that students complete. The project requires each student to choose a contemporary environmental issue to examine in a world location other than their own, and to explore the cultural / natural setting, processes of change, multiple perspectives, and connections with their own lives.

Global Interconnections: The course examines global effects of processes such as prehistoric migrations, spread of farming economies, intensification, population growth, urbanization, empires, and the Green Revolution; concluding readings (Modules 6-7) on global change, social vulnerability, and culture and energy consumption invite students to reflect on the linkages between their own cultural assumptions / everyday choices and global change.

Power Inequities: Inequities in environmental decision making and in distribution of environmental benefits / harm are considered throughout the course at regional and global scales, particularly in examinations of urbanization/hierarchy, indigenous perspectives on conservation, and perceptions of responsibility for environmental problems in local & international frameworks

Knowledge of understudied or undervalued regions: World prehistory is often taught from an Old World perspective (e.g., eastern Mediterranean) – this is why I bring in comparisons to multiple world regions at each stage. For example: students often think farming comes from the Near East, and don't realize that important world food crops were independently developed in many different world areas, including Mexico, S. America, sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the mid-continental U.S. The same goes for studies of world urbanization. In addition, we explore and debate Rapa Nui and the ancient Maya, both popularly represented as cases of historic "failure" or collapse, to identify cultural assumptions/biases, factual errors, and communication failures that lead to under-recognition of the resilience and potential of local communities.

**SOA 372: NATURE, HISTORY, AND HUMAN ACTION**  
**Online Course Spring 2018**

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*This syllabus is your detailed guide to the requirements and schedule of this course.  
Please read it carefully, and return to it often to remind yourself of key dates.  
Questions? Contact me right away -- I will be glad to clarify!*

**Course description:**

The accelerating pace and global pervasiveness of **human impacts on natural environments** have made us acutely aware of the vulnerability of the ecosystems we live in today. We are less aware of the long history of dynamic interactions between human groups and their environments – the **biography** of the landscape around us. This course considers the role of human activities and social/economic systems in shaping the historical, constructed landscapes of the world. We focus on the history and diversity of human-land relationships, the effects of cultural views of nature on these relationships, and articulations with political and economic systems. Human societies have profoundly shaped their environments at local and global scales over thousands of years. In light of this, we will explore causes and consequences of contemporary environmental issues. The approach is comparative, and is intended to introduce and explore aspects of ecological anthropology, archaeology, and historical ecology that can help us imagine and evaluate solutions to today's problems.

The course will combine instructor presentations with discussion of assigned readings and student research on historical environments around the world to:

- 1) **Explore** anthropological approaches to human-land relationships.
- 2) **Become familiar** with basic methods of historical ecology.
- 3) **Examine** the long-term record of relationships between people and their environments through a series of global case studies ranging from the end of the last Ice Age to the present.
- 4) **Analyze** connections between natural and social systems at local and global scales.
- 5) **Understand and respect** different cultural values as they come into play in the recognition and resolution of environmental problems today.
- 6) **Recognize** the global reach and repercussions of our own daily choices and actions.

Readings explore a diverse set of global case studies, with a special focus on debating the causes and consequences of long-term change on Rapa Nui / Easter Island (Polynesia) and the Maya forests (Guatemala, Belize, Mexico). **Historical case studies** to be covered include the hypothesis that human hunting drove some Pleistocene megafauna species to extinction, the effects of agriculture on forests, soils, grasslands, and ecosystem structure, and the impact of colonial expansion, capitalism, globalization, and modern global tourism on the ways in which communities perceive and interact with

nature. The course is designed for any students with an interest in **culture, history, and ecological problem solving**. The course draws on both social science and natural science methods and perspectives to carry out an interdisciplinary exploration of the dynamic relationships between human communities and their environments.

### **Educational goals:**

This course combines four major themes in a course accessible to students without a special background in archaeology or anthropology:

- 1) An archaeological survey of major turning points in the long-term history of interactions between human communities and natural environments,
- 2) Readings on the diversity of cultural attitudes towards nature and conservation,
- 3) Perspectives on contemporary environmental issues and problem-solving, and
- 4) A series of assignments that invite you to explore cultural dimensions of a global environmental issue.

I hope this course will make you aware of the dynamic and historical quality of landscapes in a world that has been shaped by human action for thousands of years.

### **Required Books/Media**

- Redman, Charles L. *Human Impact on Ancient Environments*. University of Arizona Press, 1999. ISBN 978-0-8165-1963-7 (paper, \$29.95 new)
- "The Anthropologist" (Ironbound Films, 2016, 78 minutes), \$3.99 online streaming, also available in UIS library.
- All other required readings will be provided online in Blackboard (see listings below).

### **Course Requirements**

Successful completion of the course requires all of the following:

1. **Regular, informed participation in Discussion Board, at least 3x per module.** Most of your work will take place in the Discussion Board, where you will post and respond to discussion questions about assigned readings. The quality of your participation overall will affect your grade. See grading rubric in "Course Information."
2. **Read, view, and listen to online lecture presentations.** I post online "lectures" consisting of short videos, text & images for each of the 15 on-line course sessions. You should read or watch/listen to each of these at least once, and be ready to put what you've learned into practice in on-line discussions.
3. **Concept Notes.** Four one- to two-page essays summarizing and reflecting on major concepts from reading and lecture.
4. **Global to Local Environmental History** project. A four-part research project (3-5 pages each) applies course concepts to a case study in environmental problem-solving in a world location other than your own (see below). You will post a short summary of each stage of your project in Discussion Board.

The major written assignment is a four part **Global to Local Environmental History** project. Part 1: Global Environmental Case Study: Choose a global location that allows you to investigate a contemporary environmental issue and begin to explore the modern natural and cultural landscape of the

area. Part 2: Digging into the History of Your Case: do some library research to identify processes of cultural or natural change that may help you understand your case study. Part 3: Local Perspectives: explore at least two different cultural / community perspectives on the environmental issue. Part 4: Putting Yourself in the Picture: concluding discussion / reflection summarizing what you learned about the environmental issue and identifying connections with your own global location.

Detailed guidelines will be provided for each assignment, and opportunities to discuss projects on-line will be provided on a regular basis.

### **Grading and policies:**

**Your grade** in this course will be based on the following components:

|  |     |      |
|--|-----|------|
| Discussion board postings<br>7 two-week modules, 20 points each<br>(6 count towards final grade; lowest score dropped) | 120 | 30%  |
| Concept notes<br>Four 1-page informal essays, 20 points each   | 80  | 20%  |
| Global to Local Environmental History project<br>Four 3-5 page essays, 50 points each                                  | 200 | 50%  |
| <b>Total points</b> for course   | 400 | 100% |

Extensions will be given only under extraordinary circumstances. Please consult me at least one day before the due date if you would like to ask for an extension. Late work will be accepted, but the grade will be lowered 2 points for each day past the due date.

**Academic Integrity.** In this course you will be held to a high standard of academic integrity. All of your writings must (1) express your own understandings in your own words and (2) acknowledge all sources using the citation guidelines provided. Your reader must never be in any doubt about which ideas, questions, and comments are yours and which come from a published source. Plagiarism means using ideas, words, or information from published sources without giving proper credit. Any plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment, and may be grounds for other penalties, including a failing grade for the course. You are expected to be familiar with the student responsibilities outlined under the UIS Academic Integrity Policy, which you can find at <http://www.uis.edu/academicintegrity/>.

**Course Accommodations.** Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the instructor during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable. All accommodations must be approved through the UIS Office of Disability Services (ODS) in the Human Resources Building, Room 80. Phone: 217-206-6666.

**Questions?** For questions about course material, please contact me by telephone, email, or by dropping by my office. For technical assistance, contact UIS Technical Support at (217) 206-6000, (217) 206-TECH, or (877) 847-0443 (toll free in the U.S.), or by email at [techsupport@uis.edu](mailto:techsupport@uis.edu). For more information see <http://www.uis.edu/informationtechnologyservices/services/techsupport/>.

## COURSE SCHEDULE: LECTURE/DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS

### Week 1: Course introduction

ACTIVITIES: On-line introduction of participants.

ISSUES: How has the landscape around us been shaped by a history of human action? Why is understanding human action important for understanding our environmental future?

READINGS:

- Diane Ackerman, "Welcome to the Anthropocene," pp. 3-49 [from *The Human Age*, 2014]

## MODULE 1: COMBINING NATURAL & SOCIAL SCIENCE CONCEPTS; DEBATING "COLLAPSE" IN THE PACIFIC

### Week 2: Nature & culture: How do humans fit?

ISSUES: Anthropological perspectives: was Rapa Nui really a case of "ecocide"? Modeling relationships between cultures and environments. Disentangling long-term trends, colonial impacts, and local / international perceptions.

READING:

- Redman, Preface & Ch. 1-2
- Guy Middleton, "The Incredible Survival of Rapa Nui," pp. 317-338 [from *Understanding Collapse*, 2017]

### Week 3: Combining natural and social science concepts in human ecology

ISSUES: What are the major concepts that organize our thoughts about human-environment interactions? Using archaeological evidence to debate "collapse" of Rapa Nui.

READINGS:

- Redman, Chapter 3
  - Terry Hunt, "Rethinking the Fall of Easter Island" [2006 *American Scientist*]
- ASSIGNMENT: Concept Note #1 due -- What is the Anthropocene?

## MODULE 2: METHODS & CONTROVERIES IN HISTORICAL ECOLOGY

### Week 4: Animal extinctions and the human role. Pleistocene extinction debates.

ISSUES: Did prehistoric hunters drive some Ice Age mammals to extinction? Humans as dominant omnivore? Understanding the long time frame of human action.

READINGS:

- Redman, Chapter 4, begin
- Shepard Krech, "Introduction & Pleistocene Extinctions," pp. 15-43 [from *The Ecological Indian: Myth & History*, 1999]

### Week 5: Animal extinctions and the human role. Biodiversity and habitat loss.

ISSUES: Exploitation of animals and long-term effects on biodiversity (40,000 years ago to today). Evidence from animal bones in archaeological sites.

READINGS:

- Redman, Chapter 4, finish chapter
  - David Steadman, "Prehistoric Extinctions of Pacific Island Birds" [*Science* 1995]
- ASSIGNMENT: Project Part 1 due: Global Environmental Case Study

## MODULE 3 -- FARMING TRANSFORMS LANDSCAPES

### Week 6: Early farming and the impact of agrarian systems

ISSUES: Prehistoric origins of horticulture & agriculture (10,000 years ago to today); effects on soil, water, ecosystems. Ecological concepts of succession, resilience, sustainability.

READINGS:

- Redman, Chapter 5
- Robert Anderson, "The Good Earth" [links for soil science]

### Week 7: Comparing agrarian systems, understanding cooperation

ISSUES: How does farming work? What would sustainability in farming look like? Examples of sustainable agriculture in world history: the Balinese subak. Complex histories: Green Revolution in Bali and value of traditional farming methods.

READINGS:

- Monique Borgerhoff Mulder & Peter Coppolillo, "Rational Fools and the Commons," pp. 129-155 [in *Conservation: Linking Ecology, Economics, and Culture*, 2005]
  - Clifford Geertz, "The Wet and the Dry: Traditional Irrigation in Bali and Morocco," pp. 23-29 [*Human Ecology* 1972]
- ASSIGNMENT: Concept Note #2 -- Cooperation and Commons

## MODULE 4 -- URBANIZATION AND HIERARCHY

### Week 8: Moving to the city

ISSUES: Growth of world urbanism (5000 years ago to today). How ancient cities organized the world around them: intensification and resource extraction by regional elites.

READINGS:

- Redman, Chapter 6
- ASSIGNMENT: Project Part 2 due: Digging into the History

### Week 9: Collapse and resilience: sustainability in Maya rural life.

ISSUES: Revisiting "collapse" debates: what changes, what doesn't? Role of indigenous *milpa* system in ancient and modern Maya society and economy

READINGS:

- Guy Middleton, "The Classic Maya Collapse," pp. 317-338 [from *Understanding Collapse*, 2017]
  - Anabel Ford & Ronald Nigh, "Maya Restoration Agriculture as Conservation for the Twenty-First Century", pp. 155-178 in *The Maya Forest Garden*, 2016
- ASSIGNMENT: Concept Note #3, Debating Collapse

## MODULE 5 -- POPULATION GROWTH, INTENSIFICATION & LANDSCAPE CHANGE

Week 10: Agricultural intensification -- impact on people and landscape

ISSUES: Long-term global patterns in population growth; how to feed all these people then and now. Political ecology and the forces behind tropical forest destruction.

READINGS:

- Redman, Chapter 7
- Monique Borgerhoff Mulder & Peter Coppolillo, "The Bigger Picture," read pp. 156-166 [in *Conservation: Linking Ecology, Economics, and Culture*, 2005]

Week 11: Perspectives on tropical forest destruction: communities and biodiversity.

ISSUES: Anthropological debates about farming the tropical forest: local and international perceptions -- return to Maya case study.

READING:

- finish reading "Bigger Picture" chapter from Week 10, pp. 166-180.
- Hugo Galletti, "What Is the Forest to a Small Farmer? Interview with Raymundo Terrón Santana," pp. 293-298 [from *Timber, Tourists, and Temples* 1998]

## MODULE 6 -- ADAPTING UNDER STRESS: GLOBAL CHANGE & COMMUNITY ACTION

Week 12: Causes and consequences of global change.

ISSUES: Farming, pipelines, forests, and floods. Who is most vulnerable to climate change? Principles of the Paris agreement.

READING:

- Katherine Browne, "Standing in the Need: Communication failures that increased suffering after Katrina" [*Anthropology Now* 2013]
  - Watch "The Anthropologist" (Ironbound Films, 2016, 78 minutes)
- ASSIGNMENT: Project Part 3 due, Local Perspectives

Week 13: Communities, climate change, and how anthropology can help

ISSUES: Cultural perceptions of climate change. Anthropological perspectives on development; infrastructure and adaptation. Floods and storm surges in the context of global change: comparing Harvey, Irma, and 2017 flooding in Bangladesh.

READING:

- Explore links in "Global flood news" folder
- H.M. Ashraf Ali, "Anthropology and the Changing World: How Can Anthropologists Serve Humanity?" pp. 16-26 [*Management Science and Engineering* 2009]

## MODULE 7 -- LOCAL AND GLOBAL

Week 14: Examining local to global connections

ISSUES: What are the consequences of our own daily choices? Models of sustainability

READING:

- Richard Wilk, "What is Culture and Why Does It Matter? Culture and Consumption" (manuscript)

→ ASSIGNMENT: Concept Note #4 due, Sustainability Buffet

Week 15, Nov. 28 - Dec. 3: Full circle

ISSUES: How does what you've read and learned affect your perceptions of your own culture of environmental views and actions? How does it affect your perceptions of the future? Final presentations on your projects.

READING:

- Redman, *Human Impact*, Chapter 8

→ ASSIGNMENT: Project Part 4 due, Putting Yourself in the Picture