

HIST / ETST 211 Critical Climate Histories

AUCC 3D: Historical Perspectives

Course Description: This course introduces the historical contexts of climate change through a humanities-centered approach, with a focus on the significance of history, context, and perspective in understanding contemporary climate challenges. It examines the intersections of climate, society, and power by exploring themes such as imperialism, capitalism, race, gender, the Anthropocene, and Indigenous knowledge. Students will analyze how historical events and structures shape contemporary climate perceptions and inequalities, using case studies from around the globe. Through textual analysis, discussions, and projects, students will develop critical tools for understanding and addressing climate change as a deeply historical and social phenomenon.

Course Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the historical development of climate challenges and their societal implications.
2. Analyze the connections between climate change, imperialism, capitalism, race, and gender.
3. Evaluate the role of history in shaping current climate perceptions and inequalities.
4. Develop a critical understanding of key climate studies concepts such as the Anthropocene and carbon imaginary.
5. Apply Indigenous and non-Western perspectives to the study of climate history.
6. Build skills in analysis, interdisciplinary thinking, effective writing.

Additional AUCC 3D Content Criteria and Core Student Learning Outcomes:

A GT Pathways History course:

- Introduces students to the method of historical inquiry, which involves asking an important historical question, investigating and analyzing historical sources, and drawing conclusions.
- Employs historical thinking and concepts, which include context, change over time, continuity, multiple causation, and human agency.
- Investigates multiple historical primary sources and secondary accounts.
- Analyzes multiple perspectives to create written narratives, interpretations, or syntheses.

Critical Thinking

- **Formulate an Argument:**
 - 1) Ask a question relevant to the discipline.
 - 2) Synthesize perspectives that answer it.
 - 3) Take a specific position.
- **Incorporate Evidence:**
 - 1) Interpret/evaluate sources to develop an analysis or synthesis.
- **Understand Implications and Make Conclusions:**
 - 1) Establish a conclusion that is tied to the range of information presented.
 - 2) Reflect on implications and consequences of stated conclusion.

Diversity & Global Learning

- **Build Self-Awareness:**

- 1) Demonstrate how their own attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs compare or relate to those of other individuals, groups, communities, or cultures.
- **Examine Perspectives:**
 - 1) Examine diverse perspectives when investigating social and behavioral topics within natural or human systems.

Information Literacy

- **Evaluate Information Critically:**
 - Utilize a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question.
 - Consider the importance of multiple criteria, such as relevance to the research question, currency, authority, audience, and bias or point of view, when evaluating information source.
- **Use Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose:**
 - Synthesize information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose.
- **Use Information Ethically and Legally:**
 - Demonstrate a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of information from a variety of sources through correct citation practices.

Written/Oral Communication

- **Develop Content and Message:**
 - a) Create and develop ideas within the context of the situation and the assigned task(s).
- **Use Sources and Evidence:**
 - a) Critically read, evaluate, apply, and synthesize evidence and/or sources in support of a claim.
- **Use language appropriate to the audience**

Readings:

1. Book excerpts, including:
 - Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.
 - Davis, Mike. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*.
 - Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.
 - Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*.
2. Scholarly articles
3. Selected primary sources: historical treaties, colonial records, reports, and Indigenous oral histories.

Assignments:

1. **Weekly Writing (30%):** Short, in-class, handwritten essays (c. 500 words each) responding to a prompt regarding analysis of key course texts and applying historical and conceptual tools learned in class.

Note: You are encouraged to use Generative AI as a reading coach outside of class to help you read critically and efficiently. For instance, you can ask ChatGPT to provide a summary, key takeaways, and discussion questions for an assigned reading for this course.

2. **Group Project (20%):** Collaborative project examining a specific historical climate event or issue and its societal impacts. Includes a presentation and a written report (2,000-2,500 words).
3. **Critical Analysis with GenAI Assignment (20%):** Individual assignment using generative AI tools to analyze historical climate data and critique a climate-related argument, accompanied by a 1,000-word reflective essay.

Purpose: This assignment equips students with skills in prompt engineering for generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) and demonstrates how to refine AI-generated outputs to explore and analyze topics in climate history effectively. Students will learn to critically assess AI-generated content and document their iterative process.

Note: The use of GenAI involves substantial energy consumption. This assignment will involve approximately 0.5-1 kWh of energy, equivalent to driving a car 0.5 miles or charging a smartphone about 50 times. If you prefer not to use GenAI for sustainability or other ethical reasons, please let me know and I will work with you to find an alternative.

Part 1: Introduction to Prompt Engineering

- **Objective:** Learn foundational skills for crafting and refining prompts to generate meaningful outputs from AI tools. Use refined prompts to generate insights or summaries about a specific historical climate topic.
- **Task:**
 - o Select a topic related to course materials (e.g., resource extraction under imperialism or Indigenous climate knowledge).
 - o Experiment with different prompts to explore your topic, asking AI to summarize your topic, provide examples, highlight prominent debates and/or arguments, recommend relevant reading and resources, and connect it to course themes.
 - o Document 5-7 iterations of your prompts and the corresponding AI outputs, noting improvements and remaining issues.

Part 2: AI-Enhanced Analysis

- **Objective:** Reflect on the role and ethics of AI tools in historical research. Use AI to enhance your understanding of climate history.
- **Task:** Write a 1,000-word essay reflecting on your experience using AI to study this topic. Include the following:
 - o Introduction: Provide an introduction framing your essay and outlining the three following parts. (3-4 sentences)
 - o Summarize the output (1-3 paragraphs)
 - ♣ Synthesize content from multiple AI outputs into an overview of the topic that best describes it based on what you have learned about it from AI as well as through class discussions, readings, and materials. Support your points with at least three citations from course materials.
 - o Reflect on your learning (1-3 paragraphs)
 - ♣ Summarize what you learned from AI: How did AI enhance your knowledge of this topic?
 - ♣ Critically evaluate the AI output: Discuss its strengths, limitations, and alignment (or lack of) with course concepts and discussion.

- ♣ Based on your experience, evaluate AI as a tool for studying critical climate histories. What do you think are appropriate applications and limitations of this tool? Consider:
 - ♣ How prompt engineering influenced the quality of AI-generated content.
 - ♣ The challenges and benefits of integrating AI into humanities research.
 - ♣ Ethical considerations in using AI for historical analysis.
 - o Reflect on the process (1-2 paragraphs)
 - ♣ Reflect on your prompt engineering process, highlighting key adjustments you made and lessons learned.
 - ♣ What was surprising or unexpected about the prompt engineering process?
 - ♣ What did you like about this experience? What was frustrating, challenging, or uncomfortable?
 - o Conclusion: Briefly summarize your experience and findings in a conclusion. (3-4 sentences)
 - **Evaluation Criteria:**
 - o Demonstrated skill in prompt engineering and iterative improvement.
 - o Critical evaluation of AI-generated content in relation to course topics.
 - o Depth and coherence in analysis and reflection.
 - o Engagement with course concepts and readings.
4. **Participation and Discussion (10%):** Active engagement in class discussions, peer reviews, and weekly online forums.
5. **Final Project (20%):** Individual project applying and synthesizing course themes and concepts in a creative format (e.g. poster, essay, short story, poem, art, music, play), and sharing your work with classmates in a lightning round or virtual presentation.

Policies and Expectations: Students are expected to complete readings before class, actively participate in discussions, and adhere to academic integrity policies. Extensions on assignments must be requested in advance. Support is available for students requiring accommodations.

Weekly Schedule
May be subject to change

Week 1: Introduction to Critical Climate Histories

- Reading: *Drawn to Change the World Graphic Novel Collection: 16 Youth Climate Activists, 16 Artists*
- Topics: Climate change and climate histories: Key issues
- Assignments: Participation in introductory discussion

Part I: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Climate Change

Week 2: Natures and Colonialisms

- Readings: Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*; Chapters 1-2; Neel Ahuja, “M is for Mosquito”
- Topics: Resource extraction, colonial famines, and ecological disruption
- Assignments: Weekly Writing

Week 3: Capitalism and the Carbon Imaginary

- Readings: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Introduction; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Chapter 3
- Topics: Industrial revolutions and the rise of fossil capitalism
- Assignments: Weekly Writing

Week 4: Historical Climate Perceptions

- Readings: Excerpts from historical climate treatises and oral histories; Andrea Duffy, “Crafting the Anthropocene: Environmental Anxieties and Climate Realities in Nineteenth-Century France”
- Topics: Changing views of nature and climate
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 1

Week 5: Neoliberalism and Climate

- Readings: Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Chapter 1-2
- Topics: Neoliberal economies and politics
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 2

Part II: Race, Gender, and Climate History

Week 6: Racisms, Sexisms, and Climate

- Readings: Majandra Rodriguez Acha, “Climate justice must be anti-patriarchal, or it will not be systemic;” Suzana Sawyer and Arun Agrawal, “Environmental Orientalisms”
- Topics: Environmental racism, sexism, and climate vulnerability
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 3

Week 7: Pollution and Colonialism

- Readings: Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*, excerpt.
- Topics: Waste management and colonial histories, pollution and its genealogies

- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 4

Week 8: Queer Environmentalism

- Readings: Heather Davis: “Toxic Progeny: The Plastisphere and other Queer Futures; ” Greta Gaard: “Out of the closets and into the climate! Queer feminist Climate Justice”
- Topics: Queer and Trans Ecologies; Feminist environmentalism
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 5

Part III: Climate Justice

Week 9: Climate Inequalities and Deterritorialized People

- Readings: Nixon, Chapter 5; case studies on climate refugees.
- Topics: Migration, displacement, and global inequalities.
- Assignments: GenAI Assignment due. Weekly Writing

Week 10: Indigenous, Postcolonial, Decolonial Cosmologies

- Readings: Kyle Powys Whyte: “Way beyond the lifeboat: An Indigenous Allegory of Climate Justice;” Karen Cardozo and Banu Subramaniam: “Assembling Asian America Nature/Cultures”
- Topics: Invasive species, Indigenous environmentalism, Postcolonial and Decolonial climate critiques
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 6

Week 11: Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Justice

4. Readings: Kyle Powys Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene;” selected Indigenous narratives.
- Topics: Decolonizing climate knowledge and practices.
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 7

Part IV: Just Futures

- **Week 12: The Anthropocene Debate**
- Readings: Crutzen and Stoermer, “The Anthropocene;” Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, Chapter 3; Donna Haraway et. al.: “Anthropologists are Talking”
- Topics: Defining the Anthropocene; critiques and alternatives.
- Assignments: Weekly Writing. Group Project 8

Week 13: Synthesis and Counter-Movements Just Futures

- Readings: Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Chapter 7; selected Global South movements; Manifesto: “The Anthropocene in Chile: Toward a New Pact of Coexistence Las Cruces”
- Topics: Activism, counter-narratives, and resistance.
- Assignments: Weekly Writing

Week 14: Course Reflections

- Activities: Reflective discussion on key takeaways. Lightning round presentations.
- Assignment: Final Project due.

Week 15: Course Reflections

- Activities: Reflective discussion on key takeaways. Lightning round presentations.