

Geography 609: *Human-Environment Interactions Across the Holocene*

5:45–8:35 Wednesday evenings, Spring 2015: Sally Horn, Instructor



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The question, “How has the earth been transformed by human action?” has long interested geographers and has been considered one of ten ‘Big Questions in Geography.’ The other side of the two-way connection between humans and the environment is also of great interest, that is, “How have changes in climate and the environment affected human society?” Recent decades have seen an explosion of research searching for links between changes in the environment recorded in natural archives such as tree rings and sediments and changes in human society. The relationship between climate and the collapse of the classic Mayan civilization is one example you may know—but there are many others!

We will examine the two-way connection between humans and the environment in *Geography 609: Human-Environment Interactions Across the Holocene*. We’ll be looking at examples from the past, but for some case studies we’ll aim to bring the story up to the present by looking at modern human-environment interactions in areas of the world in which researchers have focused attention on interrelationships of the past. For example, what is happening today at sites in Asia that recorded prehistoric population declines thought to have been triggered by drought associated with the 4.2 ka climate event?

The seminar will be designed to meet the needs of graduate students across geography and in allied fields whose research or teaching would benefit from exploration of human-environment interactions. We will use as a starting point for our reading and discussion the beautiful book by British geographer Neil Roberts: *The Holocene: An Environmental History* (3rd edition, 2014, great color illustrations yet reasonably priced). To this we will add a variety of journal articles and book chapters written by geographers, anthropologists, ecologists, geologists, and historians, among others.