**NB: This is a provisional syllabus, subject to change. For up-to-date information, please keep checking the course site on Blackboard.**

**Hist 382 – Climate Change and Disasters in World History**

*Wed. 2:30-4:20 PM  
King 325*

*Prof. White  
Office Hours: Tues 2-4, Wed 10-12  
303 Rice  
(440)775-8337  
sam.white@oberlin.edu*

**Goals:**
This course explores past climate changes and their impact upon history. Each week will examine a different case of natural climate events and their consequences, from ancient to modern times. Throughout this course, we will look at how climate can bring about disasters, why some societies suffer collapse, why others persevere, and above all what we can learn from historic examples as we face global warming in the years ahead.

Throughout this course, students will learn about major climate systems and different tools for analyzing past climates and their effects. *No background in climatology or other environmental sciences is required. However, students must be willing to try and work with technical articles on climate, ecology, and archaeology.* Be prepared to look at some articles with a lot of funny numbers and squiggly lines: I promise they’ll make more and more sense each week.

**Structure:**
This will be a seminar class. I may give some brief lectures for historical background, but otherwise the class will be based on student discussion of the readings

**Assignments:**
1) Students will each make one 15 minute presentation on a particular topic, preferably using notes and PowerPoint. I expect these presentations to be well-prepared, engaging, and concise.

2) Students will write a substantial research paper (12-15 pages) that either (1) integrates climate and historical data to offer an original interpretation of some historical event; or (2) makes an original comparison of two or more climate-related disasters which draws substantial conclusions about how societies can or cannot adapt to climate changes. I will be glad to offer suggestions and help develop topics throughout the semester. Students must submit a prospectus for my approval by April 1.

**Grades will be:**
30% participation
20% presentation
50% essay (including preliminary outlines, drafts, etc.)

Course Policies:

Attendance:  Students are expected to participate in class and complete the assigned readings each week.

Honor Code:  All course work is governed by Oberlin's Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Honor Code applies to a particular assignment, you should ask me in advance of the due date.

Turning in Assignments:  The presentation must be in class on the date scheduled. The essay must be due on the final exam date.

E-mail:  I will answer short e-mails Mon-Fri 9-5. If you have any questions that require a long answer, please come by my office during office hours instead. I will be happy to give feedback on any draft or outline of your class work provided you send it in at least 48 hours before the deadline—the longer in advance, the better the feedback.

Grading:  A(90-100), B(80-89), C(70-79), D(60-69), F (below 60), with plus and minus grades within two points of the next letter grade.

Course Books (available at the bookstore):
-J. Diamond (2005).  *Collapse*  
-B. Fagan (2000).  *The Little Ice Age*  
-M. Davis (2001).  *Late Victorian Holoscusts*  
**Additional articles and chapters will be posted on Blackboard or ERes each week.**

Week 1: Introduction (2/4)

Week 2: Does Climate Drive History? (2/11)

Week 3: The Ancient World (2/18)

Week 4: The Maya and Anasazi (2/25)

Week 5: Greenland (3/4)

Week 6: The Little Ice Age – Social and Cultural Impacts (3/11)

Week 7: The Little Ice Age and the “General Crisis” (3/18)
Week 8: Spring Break

Week 9: Discussion – Popular and Academic Approaches to Climate and History (4/1)

Week 10: The Middle East and Africa (4/8)

Week 11: El Niños and Monsoons (4/15)

Week 12: Late Victorian Holocausts (4/22)

Week 13: The Dust Bowl (4/29)

Week 14: Memories of the Future? (5/6)