

SCN graduate summer course (10 ECTS)

Environmental Memory and Change in Medieval Iceland

An interdisciplinary course in the Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences with a special focus on Risk and Vulnerability in Iron-Age and Medieval Iceland

Dates: August 2-16, 2014.

Supervisors: Viðar Hreinsson, Árni Daníel Júlíusson, Astrid Ogilvie, Steven Hartman, Thomas McGovern, Ragnhildur Sigurdardottir.

Special guest lecturer: Dr. Lawrence Buell.

Other distinguished lecturers: Michael Twomey, Megan Hicks, Adolf Friðriksson, Emily Lethbridge, Reinhard Hennig, Þorvarður Árnason.

This intensive graduate summer course (10 ECTS) is co-organized by the **Reykjavik Academy**, and Mid Sweden University, in close cooperation with [NABO](#) (The North Atlantic Biocultural Organisation), [NIES](#) (The Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies) and [GHEA](#) (The Global Human Ecodynamics Alliance). The course draws upon the Intersections of Ecocriticism, Environmental History, Environmental Anthropology and Archaeology in the integrated research fields of Historical Ecology and the Environmental Humanities.

The course builds upon the models of three courses / field schools that have run successfully in recent years.

- The first (2009) took place at Bardardalur/Svartarkot farm and focused on Icelandic culture and nature, under the auspices of the Reykjavik Academy and SCN.
- The second (2011) took place in Sweden and was organized by the Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (the Researcher Training Course in Advancing Theory and Method in the Environmental Humanities, Sigtunastiftelsen, Sigtuna, Sweden).
- The third is the annual NABO/ FSI (Fornleifastofnun Íslands/ Institute of Archaeology, Iceland) field school in archaeology and paleoecology that began in 1996.

The NABO field school builds upon an international consortium that connects Icelandic, Scandinavian, US, Canadian and UK institutions and scholars. Graduate students from 27 nations, (including Greenland as well as Canadian and US First Nations participants) have been trained in the field school. Ongoing NABO/FSI field projects in Northern Iceland will provide active cooperation with the SCN summer course, offering almost daily field excursions to the course participants, as well as the potential for extended internships in the field at archeological excavation sites in northern Iceland as part of a supplementary course package. The NIES-NABO research initiative *Inscribing Environmental Memory in the Icelandic Sagas* (IEM) will also provide a great deal of the grounding, focus and inspiration for the lectures and participants.

Merging the strongest elements from each of these successful initiatives to create a new model for cooperative interdisciplinary humanities and social sciences graduate training for younger scholars in the increasingly important Global Environmental Change (GEC) research field, the

course will address questions on long-term societal resilience in the face of risks from climate change, internal conflict, rapid landscape change, pandemic disease, and the impact of early globalization. Iceland represents a key area for international, interdisciplinary investigations of social responses to multiple simultaneous threats over the millennial scale. Many of the senior scholars lecturing in the course have been active in applying cultural lessons of the *longue durée* to current efforts promoting long term sustainability in the modern world. Collaborating teams are part of the [IHOPE](#) (Integrated History and Future of People on Earth) Circumpolar Networks initiative, organized under the International Human Dimensions Programme ([IHDP](#)) and the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme ([IGBP](#))

Principles of Course Organization

The course will have a thoroughly interdisciplinary orientation and will address timely research questions that lend themselves to intersecting disciplinary perspectives and inputs from complementary scholarly fields in the humanities and social sciences that share a common interest in the human dimensions of environmental change and the effects of such processes on environments and societies. Distinguished guest lecturer Dr. Lawrence Buell will discuss the significance of literary texts and genres as carriers of environmental memory during the first week of the course and these framing lectures will inform the more specific geographical and temporal cases of Iron Age and Medieval Iceland. The concept of Environmental Memory as addressed through ecocritical approaches to sagas and saga studies will thus provide important frames of reference for the course which otherwise involves coordinated workshops and lectures in four anchoring disciplines:

- 1) literary ecocriticism
- 2) environmental history
- 3) environmental archaeology
- 4) environmental anthropology

Following the NIES model¹, the course will be organized in tandem with an international research symposium. At the first combined Researcher Training Course and research symposium organized by NIES in 2011, the graduate lectures and seminars that formed the mainstay of the course were augmented by an international research symposium, as an extension of the two-week course of study.

Based on this same model the SCN graduate course will include a series of seminars, lectures and field-study visits (including almost daily lectures in the field) on closely related research topics and themes within the environmental humanities for the benefit of the approximately 30 doctoral and masters students admitted to the course from a field of international applicants. Senior researchers from each of the key disciplines anchoring the course will teach/lecture and hold mentoring sessions during the two week program.

Course Plan (outline)

The weekend prior to the course start will include:

Friday August 1st a short introductory lectures on Iceland and Icelandic culture at the Reykjavik Academy, for those who already have arrived in Iceland.

Saturday August 2nd bus ride from Reykjavík to [Kiðagil hostel/ Bardardalur](#), if there is sufficient interest. It would take most of the day with planned stops at spectacular points of

1 In October 2011 NIES, together with partner institutions based in the Uppsala–Stockholm region, organized an intensive researcher training course on Advancing Theory and Method in Environmental Humanities research in tandem with NIES's fifth research symposium, exploring the disciplinary intersections and emerging landscape of the Environmental Humanities, at Sigtunastiftelsen in Sigtuna, Sweden.

interest and for meals. Other transportation alternatives are domestic airline or car rental.

Sunday August 3rd is designated for settling in, socializing and relaxed exploration of nearby surroundings.

The first week of the course will run from Monday to Friday. Excursions during week one will provide a general introduction to landscapes/environments relevant to a number of themes and case studies addressed in the course. The second week of the course will resume Tuesday-Saturday (Monday a free day).

On the weekend August 9th – 10th students will attend a two-day research symposium which will present the full program of papers and presentations that serve as an important component of academic content during the course.

Every weekday (both weeks) two classroom sessions of roughly two hours each will be followed by a half-day field excursion (typically involving a lecture in the field). Each of these three daily sessions will involve the following disciplinary components: Literary ecocriticism and/or environmental history, and environmental archaeology and/or environmental anthropology, as well as assorted research topics involving study disciplines such as saga studies, environmental sciences, and landscape studies. The joint coordination of the two events, the symposium and the graduate course, will enable the organizers to recruit leading researchers participating in the international research symposia to lead seminars and lectures for the benefit of the grad students.

Accreditation/Student work

The course is set at 10 ECTS credits, with the overall student workload estimated at 260 – 300 hours. The anticipated workload breaks down as follows:

- Readings and assignments before arrival in Iceland: 80-100 hours
- Sessions on location: c. 100 hours (lectures and discussions 48 hours)
- Field trips 20 hours, student work outside sessions 20 hours, symposium 12 hours)
- Preparation of term paper after finishing the sessions on location 80-100 hours--due
- within 3 weeks of the end of the course

Prices

Cost: \$2,950 per person includes room and board, excursions, lectures, and on-site materials. Please note that airfare and other transportation costs are NOT included.

Learning outcomes

Upon completing the course, the student is expected to be able to

- identify key aspects of ecocritical approaches to medieval literature
- identify the significance of literary texts and genres as carriers of environmental memory and change.
- analyze environmental memory in the context of cultural changes in sagas and other medieval

literatures/textual sources

- relate the concept of environmental memory to environmental change as evidenced in archaeological and paleoenvironmental research fields
- apply a multidisciplinary framework to literary, historical and/or archeological study of past cultures, through which dynamic relations among cultural development, societal adaptation and environmental change can be better understood
- understand long-term relations between societal, cultural and environmental changes in the Icelandic cases and apply this knowledge to other cases in a global context
- Identify cultural and literary evidence of anthropogenic change to landscape and environment and understand long-term sustainability in a cultural context
- become familiar with a new model for integrative interdisciplinary study of social-ecological systems, drawing upon the humanities as well as the social and natural sciences, that can offer multiple advantages in further preparatory research/doctoral studies;