Usually when we think of “history,” we have in mind the story of humanity — what has happened to people over the last few thousand years — the history that is written down in books and documents.

But there is another, much broader view — that “history” is everything that has ever happened — not just to human beings, but to all living organisms, and to the Earth, and to the entire cosmos.

Here at Berkeley, many different departments are involved in reconstructing the past. The Astronomy and Physics Departments are figuring out Cosmic history. The Department of Earth and Planetary Science studies the history of the Earth and the Planets. IB and MCB focus on the history of Life. And the history of Humanity is spread across many different departments in Humanities and Social Sciences. Any yet, up to now, no one has tried to tie all these kinds of history together.

EPS 51, Big History, is a class that takes this very broad viewpoint, and investigates all of history.

Why you might want to take EPS 51:

• Whatever kind of history you find interesting — from the solar system, to rocks and fossils, to classical civilizations or 20th century politics — EPS 51 will give you a very broad perspective, helping you to see the deep significance and relevance of your own particular interests. Or it may introduce you to fascinating topics that you have not yet even thought about majoring in.

• In EPS 51, we will study some of the most exciting things that have happened in the past — the Big Bang that started our universe, the formation of the Earth, and ice ages, volcanoes, giant impacts, strange animals from the past, and the great revolutions through which humanity has achieved its present dominance.

The Instructor: Walter Alvarez is the geologist on the Berkeley research team that discovered the first evidence that impact caused the extinction of the dinosaurs, and was involved later in the proof that the Chicxulub Crater in Mexico was the site of that impact.

EPS 51 meets in Spring semester, Tuesday and Thursday, 2:10-3:30, in Room 265, McCone Hall. There is also a 2-hour discussion section.