This course is a thematic survey of global history from its origins to the present. Its aim is to provide a wide contextualized understanding of human existence in a new format that is called “Big History,” a concept that integrates knowledge from the natural and social sciences with the humanities. The result is a more realistic understanding of how humans fit into the vast expanse of the universe. As a part of this survey, we will consider some of the challenges of modern globalization, with an important theme being the quest to develop sustainable and ethical lifestyles. The overall focus of this course will be about what such knowledge might mean in our everyday lives and how we should—as responsible individuals and a responsible species—conduct ourselves in this world.

This course is offered in a hyperflexible format—“hyperflex.” One section is in-person (class # 8114), which will meet as shown in the schedule, below. The other section (class # 8118) is online for those who cannot attend in-person because of distance from campus, job schedule, disability, family needs or other significant reason. Please make sure that you are in the right section. Our official in-class meeting time will be on Thursdays, 13h00 to 15h30, in room #105, at USM’s Lewiston-Auburn College. Online students are welcome to join our classes or field trips whenever it might work for them to do so.

You might find this website helpful: Online and Distance Education at USM (usm.maine.edu/online/). For assistance with online access, please feel free to contact the helpdesk at (207)-780-4029 or at (helpdesk@usm.maine.edu). And, of course, feel free to contact the professor. My telephone numbers and other contact information are in the General Course Advisories on Blackboard’s getting started page. Please submit documents in an RTF format, as an attachment.

Since this course requires the integration of a lot of material, it is absolutely necessary for students to keep up with assignments. A failing grade will be given for late assignments, so be careful to follow our course schedule. If problems come up, contact the professor right away so that he can help you in a timely manner. Also, read ahead in the syllabus, as some assignments require advance work. Students will communicate through our Blackboard site at (www.courses.maine.edu). Things to pay attention to include:

• Each student must join with three or four other students to make a team. In order to facilitate this process, an open Blackboard exercise will be assigned for Class #2. Each team must create a name and post their membership on our Blackboard discussion board pages by the third class. If anyone has difficulty joining a team, please let the professor know and he will help. Teams must submit a report of their members’ work after each team project (see the General Course Advisories).
• The films may be viewed online by going to our media-link coordinates, which will be posted on our Blackboard assignment pages for the week that the films are due to be watched. These online films are time-sensitive: They will be posted a couple of weeks before the day that the assignment is due and will then be removed from the site after that class. Quicktime is required for playback and is available for both Windows and Macintosh from (www.apple.com/quicktime).

• Students will submit two-page quiz-essays, as scheduled below, integrating their thoughts about the materials in that day’s assignment. These quiz-essays must be submitted by their respective class-day and all the materials must be discussed in order for them to count.

• Please read the General Course Advisories, which are posted on Blackboard’s getting started page. These Advisories will provide details about course expectations, including writing assignments, team work, presentations, etc. These guidelines are important components for successful completion of the course.

The following materials are required and may be obtained in the USM-LAC bookstore:


Manu Chao, La Radiolina, Manu Chao, 2007. (Music C.D.)

You also should refer to the following presentations about cosmology, evolution and life:


Universcale, Nikon: (www.nikon.com/about/feelnikon/universcale/index.htm)

Ideas, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, on the Maine Public Broadcasting Network, Friday at 19h00, consult their schedule at: (www.mpbn.net/).

An important component of this course will be two service-learning projects: One for Earth Day and the other on human rights issues for peoples of the Caucasus Mountains. These are discussed below in the syllabus.
Class Schedule

I. Introduction. 22 January 2009

View this film at our online site: The Elegant Universe, Part 1, “Einstein’s Dream,” NOVA and others, Joseph McMaster (director), 2003; running time—50 minutes.


**Section One: The Universe & Earth**

II. Origins of the Universe—fourteen to five billion years B.P. 29 January 2009

The assignment due for today is:


Read Fred Spier’s “The Small History of the Big History Course at the University of Amsterdam” (worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/2.2/spier.html).

Begin reading the novel, Einstein’s Dreams.

View these two films at our online site:

The Elegant Universe, Part 2, “String’s the Thing,” NOVA and others, Joseph McMaster (director), 2003; running time—50 minutes.


Forum Discussion # 1: Write a three-page essay about yourself, your family and your community, as well as about how you see yourself fitting into the universe. Incorporate the course materials in your essay. Post your essay in the first forum of our Blackboard discussion board pages for others to read. Students are then encouraged to dialogue with each other about their essays. This will serve as a basis for students to choose their teams by next week. This essay will also count as a paper in your course grade.

III. Solar System & Planet Earth—five to one billion years B.P. 5 February 2009

Our in-class section will be at USM-Portland, where we will watch astronomical shows at the Southworth Planetarium (www.usm.maine.edu/~planet/). We will meet at the
cafeteria in the Woodbury Center at 12h45, if anyone from our online section would like to join us.

The assignment due for today is:

Submit Quiz-Essay #1; send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.


Continue reading Einstein’s Dreams.


View this film at our online site: Origins: Earth is Born, NOVA and others, Alice Harper (director), 2004; running time—60 minutes.


Each student must join with three to four other students to make a team. Give it a name and post its membership on today’s Blackboard discussion board pages!

IV. Life on Earth—one billion to ten million years B.P. 12 February 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Submit Quiz-Essay #2; send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.


Complete reading Einstein’s Dreams.

Read Edward Wilson’s “Protect biodiversity hot spots and the rest will follow,” Science News, 20 December 2008, p. 32; this essay may be read online at (www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/39071/title/Protect_biodiversity_hot_spots_and_the_rest_will_follow).

View this film at our online site: Origins: How Life Began, NOVA and others, Alice Harper (director), 2004; running time—60 minutes.

**Winter Break, Sunday, February 15, to Sunday, February 22**

**World Chechnya Day, Monday, February 23**
(ISOLA sponsored, activities to be announced)

V. Discussion & Activities, Section One 26 February 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Team Presentation #1: Each team must choose a movie listed below (or a different one selected with the professor), research its scientific background, relate it to our course materials and make a presentation—in a format of their choosing—on today’s Blackboard discussion board pages. This presentation must be substantial and be specifically related to our course materials. These films may be obtained from interlibrary loan or a movie store. The team work-report is also due today. Each student must also respond in a meaningful way to one of these presentations through Blackboard’s discussion board pages. This response to other presentations must be at least a full page in length, is due by next week’s class, and must be completed for the student’s part of their own team presentation to count.

*The Day After Tomorrow*, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Roland Emmerich (director), 2004; running time—124 minutes.

*The Core*, David Foster Productions, Jon Amiel (director), 2003; running time—135 minutes.

*Deep Impact*, Dreamworks SKG, Mimi Leder (director), 1998; running time—120 minutes.

*Contact*, South Side Amusement Company and Warner Brothers, Robert Zemeckis (director), 1997; running time—153 minutes.

*Armageddon*, Touchstone Pictures, Michael Bay (director), 1998; running time—150 minutes.

*Aliens*, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation and others, James Cameron (director), 1986; running time—137 minutes.

*The Abyss*, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation and others, James Cameron (director), 1989; running time—138 minutes.

Read Eric Chaisson’s “Follow the Energy: Relevance of Cosmic Evolution for Human History,” *Historically Speaking* 6 (5), 2005; this essay may be read online at [www.tufts.edu/as/wright_center/eric/reprints/big_history.pdf](http://www.tufts.edu/as/wright_center/eric/reprints/big_history.pdf).

Read Betsy Mason’s “Muons Meet the Maya,” Science News 172 (23), 8 December 2007, pp. 360–361. This journal is subscribed to online through the USM library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.

View this film excerpt at our online site on ethics and the scientific process: The case of physicist Lise Meitner, from Einstein’s Big Idea, NOVA and others, Gary Johnstone (director), 2005; running time—15 minutes.

Read George Ellis’ “Physics, Complexity and Causality,” Nature 435, 9 June 2005, p. 743. This journal is subscribed to online and through the USM library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.

**Section Two: Early Humans & the Earth**

VI. Early Humans—ten million to ten thousand years B.P. 5 March 2009

The assignment due for today is:


Read Bruce Bower’s “Evolution’s Ear,” Science News 174 (5), 30 August 2008, pp. 22–25. This journal is subscribed to online through the USM library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.

Paper #1: Using the materials that we have considered so far in this course, write a formal five-page essay linking cosmic origins to human development and discuss what this means in your own life. At least ten different sources from our course materials must be used in a meaningful discussion with full citations and bibliography. Send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.

VII. Origins of Agriculture—ten to five thousand years B.P. 12 March 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Team Presentation #2: Each team will present a botanical description and historical account of an ancient crop, as well as material about modern varieties, in a format of their choosing, and post it on today’s Blackboard discussion board pages. The team work-report is due today.

Begin reading *Macedonia: What does it take to stop a war?*

VIII. Power, Cities & States—five to one thousand years B.P.  
19 March 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Submit Quiz-Essay #3; send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.


Read the New Internationalist Cooperative’s “Cotton: The Peril and the Promise,” *New Internationalist* 399, April 2007, pp. 2–21. This journal is subscribed to online and in hard-copy through the USM-LAC library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.

View this film at our online site: *The Future of Food*, Lily Films, Deborah Koons (director), 2004; running time—88 minutes.

Continue reading *Macedonia: What does it take to stop a war?*

**Spring Break: Sunday, March 22 to Sunday, March 29**

IX. Discussion & Activities, Section Two  
2 April 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Submit Quiz-Essay #4; send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.


View this film at our online site: *Flow: For Love of Water*, Seven Starr Productions and others, Irena Salina (director), 2008; running time—93 minutes.

Read Jaman Matthews’ “Coming Full Circle: Integrated Farming in Vietnam,” *World Ark*, July/August 2007, pp. 6–19. This article may also be read online at [www.heifer.org/site/c.edJRQNiFiG/b.2877337/#](http://www.heifer.org/site/c.edJRQNiFiG/b.2877337/#).

Read the New Internationalist Cooperative’s “Edible Earth: In Search of Permaculture,” *New Internationalist* 402, July 2007, pp. 4–20. This journal is
subscribed to online and in hard-copy through the USM-LAC library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.


Complete reading *Macedonia: What does it take to stop a war?*

**Section Three, Modern Era**

X. Early Modernity—one thousand years B.P. to the present 9 April 2009

The assignment due for today is:


Begin reading *The Oath*.

View this film at our online site: *A Crude Awakening*, Lava Productions, Basil Gelpke and Ray McCormack (directors), 2006; running time—85 minutes.

Paper #2: Write a formal five-page essay that considers the rise of agriculture and its centralization of power in fewer hands, how issues of food affect your life and how that might change in the future. At least seven different sources from our course materials must be used in a meaningful discussion with full citations/bibliography. Send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.

XI. Globalization—ten to three hundred years B.P. 16 April 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Team Presentation #3: Each team should listen to Manu Chao’s *Radiolina*. Choose a song from the C.D., do some online research about Manu Chao, and explain the song’s relationship to issues of globalization and our course materials. Post your presentation in today’s Blackboard discussion board pages for others to read. The team work-report is due today. Each student must also respond in a meaningful way to one of these presentations through Blackboard’s discussion board pages. This response to other presentations must be at least a full page in length, is due by next week’s class, and must be completed for the student’s part of their own team presentation to count.

View this film at our online site: *The 11th Hour*, Appian Way and others, Nadia Conners and Leila Petersen (directors), 2007; running time—95 minutes.

Read Barry Rodrigue and others’ *Chechnya, the Caucasus & World Justice*, Lewiston: International Student Organization of Lewiston-Auburn and others, 2008 ([usm.maine.edu/lac/isola/Chechnya_Caucasus_Booklet.pdf](usm.maine.edu/lac/isola/Chechnya_Caucasus_Booklet.pdf)).

*Плачущее солнце* (Crying Sun: The Impact of War in the Mountains of Chechnya). Memorial (Russia) and Witness (New York), Zarema Mukusheva (director), 2007; running time—26 minutes.


Continue reading *The Oath*.

**Earth Day Celebration! 22 April 2009**
(ISOLA sponsored, activities to be announced)
Each student will do a simple Earth Day service-learning activity in their community and report about it on our Blackboard discussion board pages.

XII. The Modern World–three hundred years B.P. to the present   
23 April 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Team Presentation #4: Symbols, thoughts and representations of reality. Each team will choose one of the following “art films” (or a different one selected with the professor). The teams will analyze the film’s symbolic meaning, relate it to our course materials and make a presentation—in a format of their choosing—on today’s Blackboard discussion board pages. This presentation must be substantial and be specifically related to our course materials. These films may be obtained from interlibrary loan or a movie store. The team work-report is due today. Each student must also respond in a meaningful way to one of these presentations through Blackboard’s discussion board pages. This response to other presentations must be at least a full page in length, is due by next week’s class, and must be completed for the student’s part of their own team presentation to count.

*La Face cachée de la lune* (The Far Side of the Moon), FCL Films and others, Robert Lepage (writer/director), 2003; running time—105 minutes (Québec).

*Ikiru*, Toho Company, Akira Kurosawa (director), 1952; running time—143 minutes (Japan).

*Orfeu Negro* (Black Orpheus), Dispat Films and others, Marcel Camus (director), 1959; running time—107 minutes (Brazil).
Солярис (Solaris), Mosfilm, Andrei Tarkovsky (director), 1972; running time—165 minutes (Soviet Union).

Cléo de 5 à 7 (Cleo from 5 to 7), Ciné-tamaris, Agnès Varda (director), 1982; running time—90 minutes (France).

Det Sjunde inseglet (The Seventh Seal), Svensk Filministrye, Ingmar Bergman (director), 1957; running time—96 minutes (Sweden).

Le sang d’un poete (The Blood of a Poet), Vicomte de Noailles, Jean Cocteau (director), 1933; running time—55 minutes (France).


Look through the “Mixed Media” section at the back of old editions of New Internationalist magazine, comparing and contrasting them to your presentation. This journal is subscribed to online and in hard-copy through the USM-LAC library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.

Continue reading The Oath.

XIII. Section Three Discussion 30 April 2009

The assignment due for today is:

Submit Quiz-Essay #5; send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.


Complete reading The Oath.

View this film at our online site: Hubert Reeves, Star Teller, Canadian National Film Board, Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol (director), 2002; running time—52 minutes.

Read the New Internationalist Cooperative’s “State of the World’s Oceans,” New Internationalist 397, January/February 2007, pp. 2–27. This journal is subscribed to online and in hard-copy through the USM-LAC library.


XIV. Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine 7 May 2009
Our in-class section will make a field trip to the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine for a discussion with its Director Robert Bernheim and to see the film: *Were the House Still Standing: Maine Survivors and Liberators Remember the Holocaust*, Robert Katz (director), running time—80 minutes. If anyone online would like to join us, they are welcome, otherwise, please review the pages about the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine at their website ([www.hhrc.org/hhrchome.html](http://www.hhrc.org/hhrchome.html)).

The assignment due for today is:

Read the New Internationalist Cooperative’s “Justice after Genocide,” *New Internationalist* 378, May 2005, pp. 2–21; and “Daring to Dream: Inspiration from the Majority World,” *New Internationalist* 400, May 2007, pp. 4–20. This journal is subscribed to online and in hard-copy through the USM-LAC library; please contact the library with questions about how to access it.


Each student is required to talk with someone in their own community, in-person, about the human rights situation in Chechnya and the Caucasus, including what can be done to help, and then report about it on today’s Blackboard discussion board pages. Each student must also respond in a meaningful way to one of these other presentations through Blackboard’s discussion board pages. This response must be at least a full page in length, is due by next week’s class, and must be completed for the student’s part of their own team presentation to count.

XV. Final Exam

14 May 2009

This course challenges many traditional views of the universe and the human place in it. Moreover, it challenges individuals to reassess their own lives. Your assignment is to write a five to ten page paper describing your vision of your role in the universe. Please also address the question: “What does human life provide to the universe?” You must incorporate at least fifteen different sources from this course in a meaningful fashion, along with proper citations and a complete bibliography. Strict attention must be paid to the conventions of a formal essay. Please send it as an e-mail attachment to the professor.