

Climate Change and Resilience PACI3020 (3 credits)

Samoa: Social and Environmental Change in Oceania

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

Climate change is the most pressing issue facing Oceania — and it is profoundly human in its causes, consequences, and responses. This course examines the multifaceted environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts of climate change on Pacific Island communities, placing Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural resilience at the center of analysis rather than at its margins.

Building on understandings of historical forces and cultural systems introduced in ANTH 3010, this course evaluates the relationship between climate change, environmental transformation, and social issues in small island developing states. Students explore how Pacific Islanders' deep-rooted connections to land, sea, and ancestral knowledge inform adaptive strategies, community governance, and climate advocacy. The economic and cultural impacts of tourism and development are also examined through the lens of climate vulnerability.

Lectures and discussions are conducted in cooperation with the National University of Samoa and with support from local professionals and knowledge holders. Because sessions depend on the availability of guest lecturers, specific weekly topics are flexible within each module framework.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the significance of Indigenous knowledge and cultural values in shaping Pacific responses to climate change.
2. Analyze the environmental, social, and economic impacts of climate change on diverse Pacific Island contexts, including Samoa and Fiji.
3. Critically engage with both scientific and Indigenous frameworks of resilience and adaptation in Oceania.
4. Evaluate policies and community approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation, with emphasis on Indigenous leadership and sovereignty.
5. Participate in talanoa-style discussions on selected readings and contribute evaluative comments in peer learning forums.
6. Integrate information gathered from primary resources in Samoa with insights from local scholars, professionals, and scholarly literature in written and oral assessments.

7. Design informed, culturally appropriate strategies that integrate Indigenous knowledge with contemporary practices to enhance resilience.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Required Texts

The following two texts anchor the entire course and should be read before Week 1:

- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our Sea of Islands. In E. Waddell & E. Hau'ofa (Eds.), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Nunn, P.D. (2024). Traditional knowledge for climate resilience in the Pacific Islands. *WIREs Climate Change*, 15(4), e882. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.882>

See the course schedule for a full listing.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Participation (10%)

This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.

- Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
- Displaying Respect – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

2) Week 10 PowerPoint Image Critical Essay + 10-min Oral Presentation 50%

3) End of Week 10 Final Exam (2 hours) 40%

Assessment

Participation (10%)

PowerPoint Image Critical Essay + 10-min Oral Presentation (50%)

Final Exam (40%)

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If the reason for the request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

| | |
|---------|----|
| 94-100% | A |
| 90-93% | A- |
| 87-89% | B+ |
| 84-86% | B |
| 80-83% | B- |
| 77-79% | C+ |
| 74-76% | C |
| 70-73% | C- |
| 67-69% | D+ |

| | |
|----------|---|
| 64-66% | D |
| below 64 | F |

Program Expectations

- **Show up prepared.** For an interactive course to succeed, you must be present, on time, and have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Being prepared with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone. Moreover, the content of this course is learned collaboratively, meaning that when a student isn't here, they take away from everyone's opportunity to learn. The only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. Valid reasons for absence -- such as illness -- must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program
- **Submit assignments on time:** SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.
- **Bring your curiosity:** Ask questions in class. Engage the guest lecturers, as these are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Remember, there are no foolish questions, and your inquiries might help others in class who have similar ideas/thoughts. By actively participating and showing curiosity, you demonstrate respect for our guests and contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment for everyone.
- **Maintain academic integrity:** As members of a learning community, we all want to submit work that reflects our own ideas and efforts. Even if it is unintentional, plagiarism can have serious consequences. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself these questions:
 - Did I reference ideas, quotes, phrases, or facts I read about in a book, article, or website, without citing the author and year of the source where I read about them?
 - Did I paraphrase by changing only a word or two or moving the words around?
 - Did you answer "yes" to any of the above questions? If so, you are committing plagiarism and need to give credit to appropriate sources before you submit your assignment
- **Principled Disagreement:** Learning often involves discomfort. Some discomfort can facilitate personal and collective growth. You, your peers, guest lecturers, instructors, and local constituents, have diverse experiences, values, beliefs, affiliations, and identities. Reflecting on these differences can be emotionally challenging, even when it deepens self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this course, we aim to encourage brave spaces where principled disagreement is encouraged rather than avoiding difficult conversations. *This is challenging work, and we will inevitably make*

mistakes. Our goal is to thoughtfully critique ideas rather than attacking individuals. We aim to embrace productive discomfort and minimize unproductive discomfort, striving for principled disagreement.

- **Content Considerations:** Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a brave space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Our social identities** -- Our social identities - race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, citizenship status, and more -- shape how we are perceived, represented, and treated. They also influence what knowledge and learning is deemed valuable and legitimate. To challenge hegemonic paradigms and perspectives, this course intentionally includes readings, topics, videos, and assignments from authors and perspectives of diverse backgrounds. However, there may be gaps we have overlooked. Your constructive feedback is always welcome on how to make this course more inclusive and transformative.
- **Storing Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Classroom recording policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field

study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Relationship to ANTH 3010

PACI 3020 builds on ANTH 3010 but is analytically distinct. Where ANTH 3010 focuses on social and cultural transformation — identity, fa'a Samoa, gender, economy, and the human experience of globalization — PACI 3020 foregrounds the environmental dimension: climate science, ecological knowledge, community adaptation, and policy advocacy. Shared concepts such as Indigenous knowledge, resilience, and colonialism's long shadow are treated in both courses from different angles. Students are encouraged to make connections across courses rather than treating the conceptual overlaps as redundancies — the same village homestay yields cultural insights in ANTH 3010 and adaptation insights in PACI 3020.

Modular Framework

The course is organized into four thematic modules, each spanning approximately eight weeks of lectures. Because guest lecturers are scheduled based on availability at the National University of Samoa, specific lecture topics are slotted into the module they best fit. This flexibility ensures coherence without rigidity. Field excursions supplement each module with immersive environmental and community learning.

| Module | Thematic Focus | Lecture Topics (flexible) | Excursion Links |
|--|--|--|---|
| Module 1 People, Environment & Pacific Cosmologies (Weeks 1–2) | Indigenous eco-cosmologies, climate science basics, historical environmental knowledge | Pacific geography and ecology; Indigenous eco-cosmologies (vanua, moana, fonua); climate science fundamentals; sea-level rise and ocean acidification; traditional environmental observation | Manono Island (island ecosystems); Sataoa mangroves (coastal ecology) |
| Module 2 Vulnerability, Justice & Traditional | Social vulnerability, climate justice, traditional | Who bears the burden of climate change; colonial legacies and unequal vulnerability; climate justice frameworks; traditional | Savai'i island (sustainable development and ecotourism tensions) |

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|--|---|--|--|
| Knowledge (Weeks 3–4) | ecological knowledge | agriculture, fisheries, and agroecology; Indigenous water and biodiversity management | |
| Module 3 Adaptation, Community & Lived Resilience (Weeks 5–6 incl. village stay) | Community-based adaptation, tourism, development tensions, and lived experience | Community-based adaptation strategies; traditional food systems and climate; tourism as environmental driver; SIDS development paradoxes; participatory observation of local climate governance | Amaile village 5-day homestay (community adaptation in practice) |
| Module 4 Policy, Advocacy, Migration & Pacific Futures (Weeks 7–8 + Fiji) | Governance, advocacy, migration, loss and damage, comparative Oceania | Pacific Islands Forum and Blue Pacific strategy; Indigenous sovereignty in climate negotiations; climate-induced migration and cultural survival; loss and damage frameworks; hybrid resilience (science + Indigenous knowledge); Fiji comparative context | Fiji 10–12 day field component (human identity, environment, resilience) |

Module 1 — People, Environment & Pacific Cosmologies

Conceptual Focus

This module establishes the foundational relationship between Pacific peoples and their environments — not as passive inhabitants, but as active ecological stewards guided by cosmological frameworks (vanua in Fiji, fonua in Tonga, fanua in Samoa) that integrate land, sea, and community into a unified system of being. Climate science is introduced alongside, not above, these Indigenous observation traditions.

Possible Guest Lecture Topics

- Pacific geography, ecology, and vulnerability
- Indigenous eco-cosmologies: vanua, fanua, moana frameworks
- Fundamentals of climate science for Pacific contexts
- Sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and extreme weather in Oceania
- Traditional environmental observation and seasonal calendars

Suggested Module Readings

- *Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our Sea of Islands [core reading — re-engage with Module 1 lens]*

- Nunn, P.D. (2024). *Traditional knowledge for climate resilience in the Pacific Islands [core reading — focus on observational knowledge sections]*
- IPCC. (2023). *Synthesis Report AR6 — Pacific-relevant sections on physical climate science and regional projections.*
- Kumar, L. (Ed.). (2020). *Climate Change and Impacts in the Pacific. Chapter 1 — Pacific environmental overview.*

Module 2 — Vulnerability, Justice & Traditional Knowledge

Conceptual Focus

This module asks: who bears the burden of climate change, and why? It applies climate justice frameworks to Oceania, tracing how colonial histories have created unequal vulnerability. It also explores how traditional ecological knowledge — in agriculture, fisheries, water management, and biodiversity stewardship — represents a sophisticated adaptive resource that the climate science community is only beginning to formally recognize.

Possible Guest Lecture Topics

- Social vulnerability and marginalization in Pacific climate contexts
- Colonial legacies and environmental injustice
- Traditional agriculture, agroforestry, and biodiversity stewardship
- Indigenous fisheries management and marine protected areas
- Pacific voices in global climate forums

Suggested Module Readings

- Latai-Niusulu, A., Binns, T., & Nel, E. (2020). *Climate change and community resilience in Samoa. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 41(1), 40–60.*
- Nunn, P.D. (2024) — sections on traditional ecological knowledge and adaptation.
- Kumar, L. (Ed.). (2020). *Climate Change and Impacts in the Pacific — chapter on traditional ecological practices.*
- van der Geest, K., et al. (2024). *Addressing the diversity of loss and damage in Pacific Island countries. Climate Policy, 24(6), 657–669.*

Module 3 — Adaptation, Community & Lived Resilience

Conceptual Focus

This module moves from theory to practice, examining how Pacific communities actually adapt to environmental change in their daily lives. Community-based adaptation is explored as both a practical strategy and a political act — one that centers community agency rather than external expertise. Tourism and development are examined as double-edged forces that can undermine the very resilience they claim to support. The five-day village homestay anchors this module.

Possible Guest Lecture Topics

- Community-based adaptation: models, successes, and limitations

- Traditional food systems, water management, and climate change
- Tourism as environmental driver in SIDS
- Nature-based solutions and urban climate adaptation
- Women, youth, and grassroots climate leadership

Suggested Module Readings

- *Latai-Niusulu et al. (2020) — re-read with community adaptation lens.*
- *McNamara, K.E., & Buggy, L. (2017). Community-based climate change adaptation: A review. Local Environment, 22(4), 443–460.*
- *Pedersen Zari, M., et al. (2024). Nature-based solutions for urban climate change adaptation in Te Moananui Oceania. 4th Pacific Ocean–Pacific Climate Change Conference.*
- *Brewington, L., et al. (2024). Peer-to-peer exchanges on island resilience planning. Ocean & Coastal Management, 259, 107453.*

Module 4 — Policy, Advocacy, Migration & Pacific Futures

Conceptual Focus

The final module widens the lens from community to global arena. Students examine the structures of international climate governance and how Pacific Island nations — despite contributing minimally to global emissions — have become some of the world's most forceful climate advocates. Climate-induced migration and the emerging loss and damage framework are examined. The Fiji field component provides a comparative Oceanian context, and the concept of hybrid resilience (blending Indigenous wisdom with contemporary science) provides the synthesizing frame.

Possible Guest Lecture Topics

- Pacific Islands Forum and the Blue Pacific strategy
- Indigenous sovereignty in climate negotiations and COP outcomes
- Climate-induced migration: Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Pacific responses
- Loss and damage: frameworks, funding, and justice
- Hybrid resilience: integrating Indigenous and scientific knowledge
- Comparative climate contexts: Samoa and Fiji

Suggested Module Readings

- *Harris Rimmer, S., Byrne, C., & Morgan, W. (2024). Climate Politics in Oceania. Melbourne University Press — selected chapters.*
- *Pacific Islands Forum. (2018). Boe Declaration on Regional Security. Nauru: PIF Secretariat.*
- *Overton, J., Scheyvens, R., & Storey, D. (2026). Climate change responses in the Pacific: Just transformation or transforming justice? Geo: Geography and Environment.*
- *Nunn (2024) and Hau'ofa (1994) — synthesis re-read.*

Excursions & Field Learning

Overnight excursions and site visits are organized as primary learning experiences for each module. Pre-reading and post-excursion reflection are expected components. The following table maps each excursion to its module focus and provides suggested readings.

| Site | Duration | Focus & Learning | Suggested Readings |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--|--|
| Sataoa (Mangrove Conservation) | Overnight | Mangrove ecology and community conservation; traditional resource stewardship vs. development pressures; coastal climate adaptation in practice | Nunn, P.D. (2024) – traditional knowledge sections on coastal ecosystems; Pedersen Zari et al. (2024) – nature-based solutions |
| Manono Island | Overnight | Island ecosystem observation; no-motorized-vehicle community; traditional fishing and food systems; low-impact living as climate adaptation | Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our Sea of Islands; Kumar (2020) – island ecology chapters |
| Savai'i Island | 5 days | Ecotourism, sustainable development, and environmental change; land use pressures; renewable energy in Pacific communities; balancing development and ecology | Pedersen Zari et al. (2024); supplementary readings on Pacific ecotourism and SIDS development (libguide) |
| Falefa Valley | Overnight | Watershed and river ecology; traditional agroforestry; cultural heritage of land management; connection between cultural continuity and environmental health | Nunn (2024) – traditional ecological knowledge; Latai-Niusulu et al. (2020) – community resilience |
| Amaile Village Homestay | 5 days | Community-based adaptation in daily life; traditional food production, water management, and seasonal knowledge; participant observation of local climate governance | Latai-Niusulu et al. (2020) – re-read with field lens; McNamara & Buggy (2017) – community-based climate adaptation |

Full Bibliography

- Brewington, L., et al. (2024). *Peer-to-peer exchanges on island resilience planning*. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 259, 107453.
- Harris Rimmer, S., Byrne, C., & Morgan, W. (2024). *Climate Politics in Oceania*. Melbourne University Press.
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). *Our Sea of Islands*. In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- IPCC. (2023). *Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)*. Geneva: IPCC.
- Kumar, L. (Ed.). (2020). *Climate Change and Impacts in the Pacific*. Cham: Springer.
- Latai-Niusulu, A., Binns, T., & Nel, E. (2020). *Climate change and community resilience in Samoa*. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 41(1), 40–60.
- McNamara, K.E., & Buggy, L. (2017). *Community-based climate change adaptation: A review*. *Local Environment*, 22(4), 443–460.
- Nunn, P.D. (2024). *Traditional knowledge for climate resilience in the Pacific Islands*. *WIREs Climate Change*, 15(4), e882.
- Overton, J., Scheyvens, R., & Storey, D. (2026). *Climate change responses in the Pacific: Just transformation or transforming justice?* *Geo: Geography and Environment*.