

Big questions in the Anthropocene

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Embedding the Anthropocene as a concept in university curricula is essential for preparing students for their future. Different disciplines have vastly different perspectives on the Anthropocene, while the term pops up in different guises across curricula, leaving students with vague notions of what it constitutes. We aim for a course integrating and contrasting these different disciplinary perspectives in order to arrive at a richer understanding of its complexity, at the same time making the Anthropocene tangible and concrete. In our Liberal Arts and Science programme, we offer for the 3rd consecutive year a 6 credits mandatory course that specifically invites students from all disciplines to explore the Anthropocene. We identify three essential concepts that we discuss in-depth from different disciplinary angles. These concepts include Nature, Human and Anthropocene interactions. For each, the teaching team provides foundational disciplinary lectures and an interdisciplinary interaction that synthesizes the different approaches. Guest lectures and field visits complement the interdisciplinary interaction. In particular, we include perspectives from the Social Sciences (e.g. international relations, economics, cognitive psychology, sociology, anthropology), Humanities (e.g. ethics, visual arts, film, history, communication, journalism, critical theory) and Sciences (e.g. earth system science, environmental science, ecology, engineering). The final project for this course challenges teams of students to develop and lead an excursion to a local manifestation of the Anthropocene, incorporating different disciplinary perspectives. This leads to a lasting experience of tangible manifestations of the Anthropocene in their local surroundings, linking global processes to local phenomena, often rooted in historical developments, and connected to deep time processes. Team teaching, involving multiple teachers with different disciplinary backgrounds in one class, leads to debunking of common misconceptions, to a better understanding of different methods and conceptualisations, and to the development of shared vocabulary and collaborative problem solving. Students much appreciate the hands-on project, applying their understanding of the Anthropocene and interdisciplinary cooperation to their local environment.