

## Paleoclimatology and Climate Change (C002473)

**Course size** *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

**Credits 6.0**

**Study time 180 h**

### Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2025-2026

A (semester 1)

English

Gent

seminar

group work

lecture

### Lecturers in academic year 2025-2026

De Batist, Marc

WE13

lecturer-in-charge

Verschuren, Dirk

WE11

co-lecturer

### Offered in the following programmes in 2025-2026

[Master of Science in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management](#)

**crdts**

6

**offering**

A

### Teaching languages

English

### Keywords

paleoclimate, paleoceanography, climate change, global change, Quaternary, Holocene, El Niño, tectonics, thermohaline circulation, climate mechanisms

### Position of the course

The aim of this course is to provide the students with a basic understanding of the global climate system, as starting point for the teaching of advanced knowledge in late-Cenozoic climate history and the full range of natural climate variations on both short (years to centuries) and long (thousands to millions of years) time scales; and of how the long-term perspective gained from paleoclimate data can be exploited for better prediction of future climate change resulting from the interaction of natural and anthropogenic climate drivers.

### Contents

Overview of the structure and functioning of the world climate system with emphasis on components subject to variation at time scales of years and longer. History and mechanisms of natural climate variation at all time scales (tectonics, Milankovitch factors, thermohaline circulation, bipolar see-saw, monsoons, solar activity, volcanoes, ENSO, NAO) with emphasis on the processes, their temporal and spatial scale of operation, periodicities in external forcing, feedback mechanisms and interactions between atmosphere, geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere and cryosphere. Overview of the principal archives and proxy indicators of climate change, their (potential) applications and characteristic limitations. Historical perspective and scientific basis for anthropogenic climate change, with in-depth discussion of recent findings and the associated uncertainties.

### Initial competences

"Geology: system Earth" (1Ba) or equivalent.

### Final competences

- 1 The student has acquired general scientific and intellectual competences, competences in collaboration and communication, and social competences.
- 2 The student demonstrates basic knowledge of the functioning of the large-scale physical elements of the global climate system, and of potential and limitations of all important natural archives and techniques in paleoclimate reconstruction.

- 3 The student demonstrates advanced knowledge of the complete range of patterns, frequencies and natural mechanisms of climate change during the late-Cenozoicum, with emphasis on Quaternary ice ages and the Holocene.
- 4 The student demonstrates insight in the scales (both in space and in time) of operation of the various climate mechanisms, and their modulation through variable influences from and interactions between the atmosphere, geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere and cryosphere.
- 5 The student displays an objective critical attitude towards new data, interpretations, theories and models of anthropogenic climate change in the context of the long-term perspective obtained from paleoclimate research.
- 6 The student demonstrates the ability to process, combine, evaluate, and synthesize in a structured manner complex information from the primary scientific literature of multiple relevant sub-disciplines.

#### **Conditions for credit contract**

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

#### **Conditions for exam contract**

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

#### **Teaching methods**

Group work, Seminar, Lecture

#### **Extra information on the teaching methods**

Lecture: slides with text and figures, shown during lectures, made available on beforehand via Electronic Learning Environment (<http://ufora.UGent.be>).

Teamwork: group assignments involving literature review, synthesis and report, on topics of debate in the fields of paleoclimatology and global change

Seminar: class presentation and discussion of group assignments, using ppt-presentations

#### **Study material**

Type: Handbook

Name: EARTH'S CLIMATE: PAST AND FUTURE (3rd Edition, 2014)

Indicative price: € 75

Optional: no

Language : English

Author : William F. Ruddiman

ISBN : 978-1-31915-400-4

Number of Pages : 390

Alternative : a number of copies of the text book are made available on loan

Oldest Usable Edition : EARTH'S CLIMATE: PAST AND FUTURE (2nd Edition, 2008)

Online Available : No

Available in the Library : Yes

Available through Student Association : No

Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : intensive

Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : regularly

Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : occasionally

Type: Slides

Name: Slides Paleoclimatology and Climate Change

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Oldest Usable Edition : 2024

Available on Ufora : Yes

Online Available : No

Available in the Library : No

Available through Student Association : No

Additional information: The slides are made available online on Ufora in pdf format

#### **References**

Ruddiman, W.F., 2014. Earth's Climate: Past and Future. McMillan Learning, ISBN: 978-1-429-25525-7

Burroughs, W.J., 2001. Climate Change: a Multidisciplinary Approach. Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 0-521-56125-6

Alverson, K.D. et al. (eds.), 2003. Paleoclimate, Global Change, and the Future. Springer Verlag, New York, ISBN: 3-540-42402-4  
Oldfield, F., 2005. Environmental Change: Key Issues and Alternative Perspectives. Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 0-521-53633-2  
Bradley, R.S., 1999. Paleoclimatology: reconstructing climates of the Quaternary. Academic Press, London, ISBN: 0-12-124010-X  
Cronin, T.M., 2010. Paleoclimates - Understanding Climate Change Past and Present. Columbia University Press, New York, ISBN: 978-0-231-14494-0

#### **Course content-related study coaching**

Moderation/supervision of group assignments, pre-evaluation feedback on written reports.  
Contact with instructors via Electronic Learning Environment (<http://ufora.UGent.be>).  
Personal contact with instructors on appointment.

#### **Assessment moments**

end-of-term and continuous assessment

#### **Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period**

Written assessment with open-ended questions

#### **Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period**

Written assessment with open-ended questions

#### **Examination methods in case of permanent assessment**

Oral assessment, Assignment

#### **Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment**

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

#### **Extra information on the examination methods**

PE: Questions testing both knowledge and insight in material presented in lectures and personal work or group assignments of fellow students. Examination in the second examination period is possible.

NPE: Evaluation of the written report, the ppt presentation and the discussion abilities of the student regarding the group assignment. Students who eschew the non-periodical evaluation cannot pass for the course.

A second examination chance is offered in modified form between the first and second examination period.

#### **Calculation of the examination mark**

25% NPE

75% PE

#### **Facilities for Working Students**

Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance.  
Possible rescheduling of the exam to a different time in the same academic year