

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in Alaska, showing a large stone breakwater curving around a peninsula. The town is densely packed with buildings, many with blue roofs, and several large white storage tanks. The surrounding water is a mix of grey and blue, with some waves breaking against the shore.

# Living and Dying in the Anthropocene

**| Annie Dwyer, PhD | MW 9:30–11:20 | CHID 480C | I&S, VLPA, NW, W | Spring 2018 |**

Once upon a time, “geological time” and “human history” were imagined on separate planes: the earth had a history shaped by wind and water, and human beings made a history that was social and political in nature—but by no means “natural.” In recent years, however, scientific findings about climate change, deforestation, ocean acidification, and other human-caused, yet still “natural” processes have resulted in a new conceptualization of both human and natural history: we now live in a geological age that is dramatically impacted by human existence. This epoch—the geological age defined by human influence—is the Anthropocene.

This course interrogates how the conceptualization—and stark reality—of the Anthropocene changes the way we understand and enter into its characteristic entanglements of human activities and natural processes. What does it mean to simply live and die in the Anthropocene, particularly when that living and dying is disturbed unevenly across lines of species and human difference? In the face of accelerating changes to the environment, what theoretical reimaginings, ethical postures, and political actions are required of us? Just as the Anthropocene indicates a reconceptualization of history, so too it bodes or begs alternative imaginings of futurity—so what are our possible futures? And how might the cultural imagination work ecologically?

Course reading includes theoretical texts about the Anthropocene and additional cultural texts (including novels, film, news media, and so on).