IDS 160: The Politics of Climate Change
Tuesday-Thursday 2:00-3:15
Public Affairs 1222
Fall 2019

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Office Hours: Wed 1:00-2:30

What the course is about
This course will explore how governments at the international, national, and regional levels are addressing – or not addressing – the extraordinary challenge of climate change. We will use a combination of readings, lectures, and discussions to better understand the causes, consequences, and policies to address the most important political problem of our time – not just in the US, but in other major countries as well.

To simplify our focus we will narrow our scope in two ways: by concentrating on the challenge of mitigating, rather than adapting to, climate change; and by concentrating on energy use, rather than agriculture, forestry, and land use.

Teaching objectives
This course is designed to both impart substantive knowledge about climate change and politics, and to help you become more skillful listeners, thinkers, writers, and speakers.

On completing the course, you should be significantly more knowledgeable about the causes, likely consequences, and policy implications of climate change, and hence able to speak and write intelligently about it. You should also grow more skilled in your ability to evaluate evidence, and to distinguish between scientifically-based reasoning and conjecture, popular beliefs, and magical thinking. Since almost everything we know about this issue is based on observational data, you should understand why our knowledge is limited, and how hard it is to distinguish correlation from causation.

This is also an opportunity to consolidate the learning skills you’ve accumulated over the past two or three years. We will discuss these skills and pool our knowledge about the most effective ways to learn new material, including by reading academic articles.

Format
This class will combine lectures with discussions. Attendance is mandatory and everyone is expected to participate in the discussions.

Readings
Everyone must complete all of the day’s readings before coming to class. All readings will be available on the course web site.
**Class assignment**
Everyone will either make a presentation to the class, or write a 10 page essay, on a topic selected from I list I will present.

If you are making a presentation, find a partner. All presentations will be done by teams of two students, and consist of a 15-20 minute powerpoint presentation, plus five or more minutes of answering questions. Please send a copy of the presentation and a 4 page outline/summary of your talk to me no later than 10:00 am on the day you present.

If you are writing an essay, it will be done on your own (i.e., not co-authored) and be due at the end of 10th week, on December 6.

**Grades**
Grading will be based on your performance in four areas:

- Participation in class discussions: 10%
- Class assignment: 20%
- Midterm exam: 30%
- Final exam: 40%

The midterm exam will be held in class on October 24, and the final will be on Monday December 9 at 11:30-2:30. Both will combine multiple-choice questions with IDs and short answers.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

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I do not grade on a curve. Research on higher education suggests that grading on a curve creates unproductive levels of stress and competition without fostering greater learning. Sometimes a test or an assignment will turn out to be more difficult than I anticipated, and I’ll adjust the grades accordingly. What matters is not how you do relative to your peers – I expect everyone to do well – but how well you master the material. If you ever feel like a test or assignment is unfair, please come speak with me so I can address your concerns as soon as possible. I’m committed to assessing all students in a fair, inclusive, and comprehensive way.

**No Laptops Policy**
The class will be a laptop-free zone. Studies show that using laptops (or other devices, also banned) tends to reduce the pace of learning in college courses. By taking notes with paper and pen you will get more out of the course.
Absences
Class attendance is mandatory. So is participation in class discussions and exercises. Still, there will be times when some of you cannot attend – due to illness or unavoidable conflicts – and I will accommodate any reasonable absences. You will nonetheless be responsible for making up for missed classes, and learning all the material covered in your absence.

Intellectual property notice
All of the course materials that I have prepared, including my lectures, slides and exams, are my property alone and protected by state common law and federal copyright law. Video and audio recordings are prohibited without my consent. Students shall not sell or distribute notes, or receive remuneration for taking notes, without my express written consent.
September 26: Introduction to the course

October 1: What do scientists know about climate change?


The Royal Society (2017), “Climate updates: What have we learnt since the IPCC 5th Assessment Report?”

Recommended:


October 3: How does climate change affect economies?


October 8: Why is climate change so hard to address?


October 10: Why is the fossil fuel industry so influential?


October 15: How will climate change affect conflict?


Recommended:


**October 17: How can we make a difference locally?**


**October 22: How will climate change affect migration?**


**October 24: Midterm**

**October 29: What do people believe and why?**


Recommended:


October 31: What are the costs and benefits of mitigation (I)?


Carbon Brief (2019), “Q&A: How ‘integrated assessment models’ are used to study climate change.”


November 5 & 7: What are the costs and benefits of mitigation (II)?


November 12: Does climate change pose an existential threat to civilization?


November 14: How should we approach the crisis ethically?


Michael F. Maniates (2001), "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?" *Global Environmental Politics* 1(3).

Recommended:

David Foster Wallace (2004), "Consider the Lobster," *Gourmet*.

November 19: Can carbon taxes work?


Recommended:


**November 21: Why do countries adopt such different climate change policies?**


**November 26: How much do international agreements matter?**


Recommended:


**December 3: Can geoengineering save us?**


**December 9 (11:30-2:30): Final exam**