SPRING 2023 GOVT 680 Proseminar in Comparative Climate Politics

Wednesday 5:30-8:00 p.m.
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Office Hours: Wed and Thurs 3-4:30 pm; 8-8:30 p.m. Wed (after class), or by appointment F2F or via Zoom

Zoom office hours link: https://american.zoom.us/j/5326041952

This graduate course explores social science theories and debates surrounding climate change and related environmental issues such as the transition to renewable energy sources and the implications of increasing strains on natural resources such as water. Parting from social science frames for environmental problems, such as the tragedy of the commons within scholarly literature on “the collective action problem,” the course looks concretely at the explanatory strengths and limitations of the social sciences in explaining climate change and related environmental problems. The course looks at international, national, and subnational interest groups and actors across a range of cases around the world and considers the role of individual behavior. Open to MA and PhD students, enrollment is limited to 20 students as the course will be based heavily on discussion and written assignments.

We will address debates within the gap between scientific consensus and political mobilization, seeking to understand the politics of climate change in the U.S., in other countries vital to any meaningful international climate change agreement, and at the international level. We will start by addressing ethical questions about humanity’s interaction with nature, and about a proper role for humans in addressing nature. Interdisciplinary approaches to solving problems, inquiry-based learning (meaning a “hands on” approach to solving concrete problems using teamwork and creativity), and more extensive and direct contact with faculty.

The course will frame the specific policy debates in philosophical terms by considering assumptions about relations between humanity and nature implied in climate change discussions, and in evolving policy objectives of “mitigation” versus “adaptation.” Students will gain a fundamental understanding of climate change policy (and its obstacles) across a range of nations. We will consider the difference between how authoritarian nations and democracies frame the issue, and how vital “issue framing” is to whether public support is galvanized (or not) for solutions.

After spending the first portion of the course considering broad ethical questions about the relationship between humans and the environment and how those may be changing, we consider evidence of climate change and how public policy has addressed this problem (and not addressed it). We will review the emergence and evolution of these challenges on the global stage, considering political science theories of public opinion and interest group pluralism and how these affect what people think and how these positions are aggregated and taken up for policy consideration by politicians. Then, we will take up the strategies and choices of particular nations as a few rise-up to meet the challenges, and most fail to meet such challenges. Special
attention will be given to climate change policy in the United States, which has changed dramatically over the past couple of years from Obama to Trump to Biden.

While the industrialized world has been historically responsible for causing the problem over the last 150 years, scientific evidence suggests that we cannot avoid the adverse effects of climate change without reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from both developed and rapidly growing developing countries (e.g. India and China). These considerations of national positions vis-à-vis international climate change negotiations will come to the fore in the last section of the course, where students will apply policy and governance knowledge directly through in-class United Nations simulations. Each student will research national positions, and subsequently represent one of the 10-15 national actors in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which your instructor has chosen to best embody tensions and debates between developed and developing nations in the ongoing negotiations.

Books required for purchase or use of library reserves, as we will read them in their entirety:


Dozens of readings are in Canvas and you will not need to read all of them, so do not worry. You will be expected to read about a third of the readings every week. The instructor will offer guidance in that regard.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

*Present* alternative theories to explain a particular empirical problem or question using a rigorous social science research design.  
*Apply* empirical social science methodologies to researchable questions.  
*Inventory* an array of methodological approaches and techniques available to you as a researcher, considering the strengths and weaknesses of each.  
*Analyze* the relationship between a range of methodological approaches and techniques and the concrete research problems these may be used to evaluate.  
*Critique* theories and approaches with regard to overall validity as well as with regard to their utility in “tractably” answering research questions.  
*Critically examine* other researchers’ work, grounding your own judgment in theories and approaches covered in the course.  
*Conceive and design* your own research project using the language of positivist social science research design.

**INSTRUCTOR STATEMENT ON COVID AND PRIORITIZATION OF F2F LEARNING:**

The University provided clear expectations about the wearing of masks, at least until further notice. The instructor, who has been fully vaccinated, has the option of wearing a mask or
teaching without one – but from a safe distance. He will try to project with a mask on but will reserve the right to remove it if that is necessary for everyone to hear him.

This course will make extensive use of Canvas. Nearly all meetings will be face-to-face (although one or two class meeting might be “virtual” through Zoom). Attendance at all F2F meetings is mandatory; there will be no Zoom recordings of F2F classes. If the class is held virtually, “real time” attendance will also be required (“watching the video” is no substitute). Attendance will be taken and counted as participation. Office hours will be conducted F2F (and you will be asked to sign up for office hours on the Canvas calendar), but means will be found for students to attend virtually (but only if you are not able to attend F2F).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

**Academic Integrity:** Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university’s Academic Integrity Code. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. This includes cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism.

**Defining and Reporting Discrimination and Harassment:** American University expressly prohibits any form of discrimination and discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. AU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual’s genetic information, or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

As a faculty member, I am required to report discriminatory or harassing conduct to the university if I witness it or become aware of it – regardless of the location of the incident. There are four confidential resource on campus if you wish to speak to someone who is not required to report: Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center. If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with University Police (202-885-2527), the Office of the Dean of Students (dos@american.edu or 202-885-3300), or the Title IX Office (202-885-3373 or TitleIX@american.edu). For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact OASIS (oasis@american.edu or 202-885-7070) or check out the Support Guide on the Title IX webpage.

**Emergency Preparedness:** In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the University be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or the use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency.
Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Canvas, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any emergency-related absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU website, and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean’s office for course and school/college specific information.

**Student Code of Conduct:** The central commitment of American University is the development of thoughtful, responsible human beings in the context of a challenging yet supportive academic community. The Student Code of Conduct is designed to benefit the American University community and to assist in forming the highest standards of ethics and morals among its members. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Student Code of Conduct and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code.

**Religious Observances:** Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University’s religious observances policy.

**Use of Student Work:** The professor will use academic work that you complete for educational purposes in this course during this semester. Your registration and continued enrollment constitute your consent.

**ACCOMMODATING SPECIAL NEEDS/REQUESTS**
If you have a disability and might require accommodations in this course, please notify me with a letter from Academic Support Center (ASC) or Disability Support Services (DSS) early in the semester (by the third full week of classes) so that we can address your needs and in a timely manner. I will be glad to work with you, but will not make accommodations for assignments after they are due. Note also that you will need a good (i.e. medical or “life event”) reason to have tests and assignments rescheduled, and must petition such changes in writing (with documentation) two weeks before due dates (with exception made only for unplanned and catastrophic events).

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don’t hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements.

**Academic Support Center** (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle-Tompkins 228. **Counseling Center** (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. **Disability Support Services** (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological
Grades will be determined by the following:

1. **Six** assignments will be required for submission **24 hours before class** in the form of short essays, posted on Canvas so your classmates and instructor can read them, analyzing a week’s readings with regard to methodological considerations. You should analyze and critique at least three related readings. Your instructor will give more guidance on the first day of class. Together these will count for **25 percent** of your grade overall (4 percent each and 1 percent if you do them all on time).

2. Active **participation in class every week**, meaning that you are prepared to discuss any required reading when I call on you by name, and that you are prepared to offer thoughtful contribution of critiques of the readings and colleagues’ presentations. This will account for **10 percent** of your grade. **NOTE THAT ACTIVE PARTICIPATION INCLUDES POSTING QUESTIONS ON THE READINGS 24 HOURS BEFORE CLASS MEETS ON THE CANVAS DISCUSSION THREAD FOR THE WEEK**

This is a graduate class, and hence the forms that participation takes should be intuitive. Nevertheless (and because the rubric below may be useful to you as an instructor), I offer further specification of participation. You will be expected to arrive on time to every course meeting well-read and prepared to actively contribute to discussions. If the class, as a whole, appears to arrive under-prepared on a regular basis, I reserve the right to administer pop quizzes, which may count for up to 10 percent of your grade (based on a reallocation of the participation grade weightings). I will expect no disruptions (talking while someone is presenting, cell phone ringing, etc.) or any forms of failure to respect your instructor or fellow students. Such acts will be penalized at the discretion of the instructor.

A WORD ON ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM: I do not want to police your use of laptops and other devices for class purposes. But just for the record, any student who uses their electronic devices for non-class purposes will lose points from the participation grade. My policy is based on the fact that multi-tasking during class on your laptop, texting, and any use of cell phones is disruptive to the learning environment. How you take notes is your business. Still, I would encourage you to consider the virtues of writing class notes in a notebook (“old school”), and not your computer. Transfer the important notes to your computer after class as a way of reviewing the material. Studies show that taking notes by hand, rather than laptop, increases student learning. See Scientific American for details.

Below are some good “rules of thumb” for participation, from Villanova University’s rubric.
3. There will be an in-class midterm exam consisting of three essay questions (which instructor will discuss with you in advance) worth **15 percent** of your grade.

4. For MA students: A 12-15-page term paper on an issue you choose in consultation with the instructor related to and integrating course readings. More guidance will be given in class during the early weeks of the semester. You will need to submit a one-paragraph summary of your topic and thesis to the instructor for approval BY OUR SECOND MEETING. The completed paper will count for **20 percent** of your grade and will be due on the first day of finals week (it will be your “final” grade).

For PhD students: A 15-20-page research paper or research design, on an issue you choose in consultation with the instructor related to and integrating course readings. More guidance will be given in class during the early weeks of the semester. You will need to submit a one-paragraph summary of your topic and thesis to the instructor for approval BY OUR SECOND MEETING. The completed paper will count for **20 percent** of your grade and will be due on the first day of finals week (it will be your “final” grade).

5. You will be given 20 minutes to make a presentation on a given date and will be responsible for submitting a 10-page (at least) partial draft of your paper on the Friday before your scheduled presentation. Submission of the draft and its presentation will be worth an additional **5 percent** of your grade, and your colleagues will be graded (as part of their participation grade) for feedback/critiques given during a 15-minute Q and A period after each presentation. Class presentation dates are noted in the syllabus with an asterisk (*) after that day’s subject heading.

6. You will be asked to “role play” in six case studies presented in the Eisenstadt and MacAvoy book (written by grad students last year, as well as a few by undergraduates). Your preparation, before class, of six “talking points” positions based on assignments by your instructor the week before, will count for **20 percent** of your grade (3 percent each plus 2 percent for doing all six on time). The cases are listed as assignments in the Canvas “Pages” area of each week’s module, and on the syllabus.
7. You will receive 5 percent of your grade for “attending” all six Zoom webinars by the Center for Environmental Policy on “A Sectoral Approach to Mitigation” featuring the authors of Harvey, et. al. Attendance will be taken during the webinars, but if you cannot attend you must watch the recordings. You will take a short quiz in Canvas after the last presentation just to confirm attendance at all of them.

“Amendability” clause: By taking this class, you agree to adhere to the rules and schedule presented on this syllabus, but also acknowledge the instructor’s right to alter them, as necessary, and accept that while I will seek to notify all students of any changes via Canvas, these changes will likely first be announced in class, and all students are responsible for all material covered in class, as well as for the readings.


**January 18: Week 1: Introduction to Environmental Politics in the Context of Climate Change**

**The Scope of the Problem**


Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, 1-26, 33-52. Find on Canvas.

**Subsuming the Environment under “Climate”**


**Science, Politics, and the Anthropocene**


**January 25: Week 2: Social Science Theories**
ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS


**Collective action and tragedy of the commons**


**Interest group politics**


**Individual rights and political psychology**


February 1: Week 3: Defining Parameters: Science, Politics, Economics

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

The Debate over 1.5 degrees C and its Proponents


The Economic Costs of Mitigating Climate Change

Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, Chapter 7. Find on canvas.


The Domestic Politics Critique of Economist “Market” Solutions


The Political Ambition Gap


February 8: Week 4: The International Relations Problem I: The Shortcomings of International Institutions

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS AND THE REST SHOULD POST COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

ASSIGNMENT: PREPARE CASE 8.1 (RWE VERSUS HUARAZ): Position 1 Baum-Marino Tartaglino; Position 2 Pappas-Strictland

The Paris Agreement and the UN System

Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, Chapter 3. Find on canvas.


The International Institutions We Need versus the International Institutions We Have


February 15: Week 5: The International Relations Problem II: the Fight for (Resource) Shares

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS AND THE REST SHOULD POST COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

ASSIGNMENT: PREPARE CASE 5.1 (FRACKING IN PA): Position 1 Baum-Hartnett; Position 2 Hopkins-Pappas; Position 3 Park-Strictland

The New Value of Water


Winners and Losers in the Energy Transition


**The Geo-Politics of Decarbonization**


**February 22: Week 6: Domestic Politics and the Correlates of Emissions**
ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

ASSIGNMENT: PREPARE Center for Environmental Policy Case 1: “Senator Manchin, West Virginia Fossil Fuel Interests, and the Fate of President Biden’s Climate Change Agenda (Epilogue on Inflation Reduction Act)” – Baum through Marino Tartaglino should take Position 1; Pappas-Strickland Position 2

Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, 104-126. Find on Canvas.


Regime Type and Emissions


Vulnerability and Emissions


Fossil Fuels and Emissions

Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, 155-180. Find on Canvas.

Renewables and Emissions

*Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 76(5). 2020 Special issue on transition away from fossil fuels. [https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rbul20/76/5](https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rbul20/76/5)


**March 1: Week 7: Markets Versus States**

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

**The Market Solution: Emissions Trading Systems and “Green Profitability”**


**The Regulatory Solution: Industrial Policy and Green New Deals**


**Climate Litigation as a Possibility**
March 8: Week 8: Interest Groups and Capture

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS AND THE REST SHOULD POST COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

ASSIGNMENT: PREPARE CASE 7.1 (DIVESTITURE AT AU) WITH SAME POSITION ASSIGNMENTS AS EARLIER CASES (TWO POSITIONS)

Climate Populism


“Big Oil” and Industry Subsidies


Climate Denial Moves to Climate Doubt and Obfuscation


Check out: Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, Silencing Science Tracker: https://climate.law.columbia.edu/Silencing-Science-Tracker

Parties, Elections, Time Horizons, and Climate Change


March 15 Spring Break

March 22: Week 9: Polycentrism, Norms, and Climate Policies
ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

ASSIGNMENT: PREPARE CASE 3.1 (FOREST PROTECTION AND REDD IN ECUADOR): THREE POSITIONS

The Polycentrism Disconnect between International, National, and Local


“End Runs” Around Nation-States (Subnational Climate Politics)


March 29: Week 10: Slow Harms and the Climate “Surprise”

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS AND THE REST SHOULD POST COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

STUDENTS WILL PRESENT

Calculating long-term risk

https://www-proquest-com.proxyau.wrlc.org/docview/2251242465?accountid=8285&pq-origsite=primo


The insurance industry and natural disasters

*The Economist* 2020. “Hotting up – How much can financiers do about climate change?”  
Find in Canvas.


https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14693062.2022.2036090

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14693062.2022.2070119

April 5: Week 11: In class mid-term exam

April 12: Week 12: Adaptation, Inequality, and Climate Justice

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS AND THE REST SHOULD POST COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

ASSIGNMENT: PREPARE CASE 9.1 (REBUILDING NEW ORLEANS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA): TWO POSITIONS

STUDENTS WILL PRESENT

Adaptation: the Other Wicked Problem

https://www-nature-com.proxyau.wrlc.org/articles/478477a


Climate Change as Inequality Accelerator


Climate Justice and Equity


April 19: Week 13: National Climate Change Policies

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

STUDENTS WILL PRESENT

Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, 260-290.

Read at least three of the six country/region case studies below:


Christoff, Peter. 2022. “Climate Resistant Australian Politics: Why has Australia been a weak mitigator?” Typescript on Canvas.


April 26: Week 14: The Disconnect Between Rational Individuals and Irrational Collective Choices

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

STUDENTS WILL PRESENT

The Grasping Problem


The Aggregation Problem


The Temporality Problem


May 3: No Class (reading period) but FINAL PAPERS DUE TO CANVAS by 5 pm MONDAY, MAY 8

May 10: Week 15 (final exam day): Facing the Brave New World: Reframing the Big Picture

ASSIGNMENT: SEVERAL STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ESSAYS; OTHERS SHOULD POST COMMENTS IN CANVAS

Mitigation: Geoengineering


Adaptation: Migration as a Policy Tool?


“Sowing Your Garden” versus “Doing Something”

Eisenstadt and MacAvoy, 312-332.