“[Electricity] is not a thing, like St. Paul’s Cathedral; it is a way in which things behave.”
- Bertrand Russell, 1923

Course Description:

How did the world come to be encircled by pipelines, strip mines, wind farms, batteries, copper wires, nuclear reactors, generators, power stations, hydroelectric dams, and refineries? In what ways have these objects and infrastructures of the modern energy system transformed politics and culture? What does it mean to think of energy as somehow sustaining contemporary ways of being, forms of social reproduction, or modes of movement and consumption? This class invites students to engage in a dialogue about the concept and materiality of “energy” – not merely as an issue of policy or governance – but as a subject at the center of humanistic inquiry. Students will develop an understanding of how energy has become critical to the way we understand practices of democracy, labor productivity, cultures of consumption, nationalism, global inequality, waste, and more. This class will challenge students to ask what ‘energy’ is and how it is related to major questions of historical method and interpretation.

Students will be introduced to the burgeoning field of the energy humanities, specifically from the perspectives of global and comparative history, environmental history, and science and technology studies. Classroom discussions will be conducted by alternating key course texts with primary sources and selections from literature and other relevant media. No prior coursework in the above sub-fields is presumed and students from all disciplinary backgrounds are encouraged to join.

Objectives

1. To complete a research seminar paper using primary and secondary materials gathered through independent research.

2. To develop an understanding of major debates within recent research on fossil fuels.

3. To improve primary source research skills by analyzing, reflecting, and critically-engaging primary sources used in class discussion; while also increasing usage of the library’s digital archives and repositories in searching for suitable archival materials.

5. To improve writing, note-taking, and analytical skills through writing workshops, group work, and extensive classroom participation.

6. To improve group and collaborative working skill-sets.

7. To extend the empathy, understanding, and critical rigor we apply to the historical record, to our everyday engagements as members of this course and the wider NYU community.

Structure of the Course

This is a reading and research intensive course. Students are expected to have read and taken notes on weekly reading assignments and to come to class prepared to discuss the readings.
Lectures for the class will orient students to the content of the following week's readings. These lectures will provide the relevant background information not included in the reading assignments and will provide a space for answering questions regarding the content of the course.

During lectures, laptops are not allowed unless otherwise noted.

The majority of the class will be conducted as a seminar discussion, either with the class all together or in small breakout groups. Students are welcome to use their laptops during seminar discussions.

No course text is required to be purchased. All course readings will be listed as PDFs on the course website. Students can choose to keep these as digital copies or to print them.

**Course Expectations**

This is an inclusive learning environment with respect for difference in identity (actual, perceived, or performed), ability, and individual learning-backgrounds. Classrooms are spaces of many different power dynamics and as such professors and students will work to treat all members of this community with respect, professionalism, understanding, and support.

Students are allowed one absence per semester. If you need to miss more than one class, you need to clear this with the professor by the first week of class; otherwise, these absences will not be subsequently excused. Religious holiday exemptions are of course permitted. Please speak with the professor during the first week of class.

Students can consult the course website for information about the relevant university facilities for providing writing, academic, and emotional support. Students who are given academic accommodation because of specific learning outcomes recognized by the university should discuss the relevant exemption with the professor during the first week of class. If you are unsure, please see the Moses Center for further information.

All written assignments are to be submitted in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced pages, with 1” margins. Footnotes and bibliography shall conform to the Chicago Manual of Style, a sample of which will be given to students on the first day of class. For written assignments, students will submit both a digital copy to the instructor as well as a hard copy handed-in during class or in my mailbox. Late papers will not be accepted.

Students are required to meet with the professor at least once during the semester.

**New York University Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement**

In New York and on its campuses and locations throughout the world, NYU is committed to:

- fostering intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences.
- promoting an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavors.
- developing and supporting programs and policies that measurably improve NYU’s record of attracting and retaining students, as well as hiring and promoting faculty, administrators, and staff from historically underrepresented communities.
• building structures that promote inclusiveness and equity for all members of the NYU community, especially our colleagues from marginalized groups.

For the full statement from Provost Andrew Hamilton, see: https://www.nyu.edu/life/diversity-nyu.html

Evaluation

Students will be evaluated in seven areas:

(1) Reading Group Presentation – 10%
(2) Reading Response – 10%
(3) Primary Source Group Work – 10%
(4) Writing Workshop – 15%
(5) Bibliographic Essay – 20%
(6) Final Research Paper – 25%
(7) In-Class Assessment – 10%

Course Assignments

Reading Group Presentation

In the first course meeting, students will be put in groups of 2 – 3 and tasked with preparing a presentation of a course reading indicated in the syllabus with *. This presentation should be no more than 10 – 15 minutes long. The presentation will introduce the class to the major arguments of the text, the types of sources used in the text, and the group will pose three discussion questions to the class that will then be used to facilitate class discussion. These discussion questions will be submitted to the professor the day before the presentation.

Primary Source Group Work

On certain weeks we will use a portion of the class to discuss primary sources. Students will be put into groups of 5 or less and will be responsible for leading a discussion using either a concept map, outline, or other form of collaborative visual media to explain the primary source and provide a key quotation from it. A full description of this assignment and how it will be assessed will be given to students during the first week of class.

Research Paper – In Three Parts

One of the major goals of this course is to develop a research paper using primary sources. There are many types of documents that might count as primary sources for explaining the global history of fossil fuels, including newspapers, government reports, diaries of coal or oil workers, maps of wind farms, or novels and poetry. During our THIRD MEETING, we will explore the types of digital databases
available to students for conducting primary source research. Attendance at this class is mandatory and the information discussed during the class period will not be available to students who do not attend.

After this in-class workshop, the production of the paper will be divided into three subsequent parts.

(1) **Collaborative Writing Workshop – Due Meeting 5**

Students will bring with them 2 primary sources they plan to use for their final paper. Students are expected to bring copies of their primary sources to class (or detailed transcriptions of them), as well as a short (250 – 500) word abstract and outline explaining the topic they have chosen and how they see this topic fitting into the theme of the course.

In class, students will share their primary sources and abstract with a workshop partner. Workshop partner’s will use a criteria of assessment provided by the professor to assess the project’s feasibility, its relevance to themes in the course, the types of sources used, and possible areas of improvement.

Students will then submit to the professor their abstracts, a bibliography of primary source materials, and evaluation worksheet from their workshop partner by the following class meeting.

Changing topics after this meeting is completely acceptable!

(2) **Bibliographic Short Essay – Due Meeting 8**

A 1500 word essay is due by our 8th meeting. This essay will use three secondary sources from the course as well as two external secondary sources, either articles or book chapters. Students may use “Recommended Readings,” marked with a * in the syllabus, from the syllabus to count towards one of their external secondary sources for this assignment.

The goal of this essay is to present a major theme from the course and, using secondary source materials, explicate the different perspectives scholars have brought to bear upon this theme. Excellent essays will have a well-defined thesis statement that demonstrates a mastery of the texts selected and an understanding of how their perspectives complicate, challenge, or overturn previous ways of thinking about a topic. A full evaluation rubric and description of the assignment will be made available on the course website by the first week of the class.

(3) **Final Research Paper – Due Last Day of Class**

**FINAL RESEARCH TOPIC MUST BE CONFIRMED BY MEETING 10**

The final research paper is the culmination of the hard work students have been engaged in during the semester. Drawing from your experiences in developing a bibliographic essay, selecting primary source materials for the writing workshop, and refining your abstract for your chosen topic, students will now be tasked with writing a 3000 - 3500 word research paper using 4 – 5 primary sources, at least three secondary sources from the class, and at least three external secondary sources. Students may use the same sources they had previously deployed in the bibliographic essay. Papers that demonstrate a sophisticated use of secondary material research skills will contribute to the crafting of an excellent essay, though this will be weighed against other factors in the overall evaluation of the work.
Excellent papers will present a clearly marked and well defined thesis statement that explains how the primary sources you have chosen for your paper change the way we can understand the particular topic you have selected. Students will then use the primary source to document the unfolding of your particular theme within the history of South Asia, using secondary sources to bolster your claims and track related historical changes. A full evaluation rubric and description of the assignment – as well as several examples of successful introductory paragraphs – will be made available on the course website by the first week of the class.

**In-Class Assessment**

Throughout the semester, students will be given in-class assessments at particular points to demonstrate an understanding of the course material. These will include short answer questions, drawing concept maps, and term identifications. Many of the questions will be taken from discussion questions posed by students in their reading responses.

Additionally, students are expected to participate in the seminar on a regular basis. This means not only engaging during full-class discussions, but being active team members during breakout group work.

**Student Self-Assessment**

Students are required to submit along with the bibliographic essay and the final research paper. These self-assessments are designed to help clarify learning goals, for the student and the professor, as well as to provide moments of self-reflection regarding how a students’ work or understanding has changed over time. These assessments will be provided to the student prior to the submission of the assignment.

**Reading Responses**

Student reading responses guide the discussions we shall have in class. Students are required to submit 200 – 300 word responses to the NYU Classes Forum page the night before the reading is due (12:00 am cutoff). In these responses students will briefly summarize the major points of the reading, ask questions they feel are unresolved, and pose discussion questions that will be used in class.

**Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism will be penalized without exception. If you are unclear what plagiarism is, please consult the relevant university information page listed on the course website. Please see the following website for further information: https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

**Course Readings**

**Week One**

**Energy as Concept and Reality I: Time and Force (Meeting 1)**


Primary Source
Andrew Ure, “Philosophy of Manufactures”
Karl Marx, “Machinery and Large-Scale Industry,” from Capital, Volume One, Selections

Energy as Concept and Reality II: Producing Work (Meeting 2)


Week Two –

Imperial Geographies (Meeting 3)


Primary Source
Stanley Jevons, The Coal Question, Selections

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHOP

Knowing Nature and Labor (Meeting 4)


Primary Source
John L. Lewis on mechanization and the UMWA, Selections from UMWA Journal

Week Three –

Infrastructures of Energy (Meeting 5)


Film
Bernardo Bertolucci, The Path of Oil [1967]

COLLABORATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

National Sovereignty and Global Technocracy (Meeting 6)


Primary Source


Week Four –

Spectacular Accumulation (Meeting 7)


**Primary Source**

Italo Calvino, “The Petrol Pump” [1974]

Pricing the Problem (Meeting 8)


**Primary Source**

Simon-Ehrlich “The Bet”, Newspaper Selections

**BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY DUE**

Week 5 –

The Entrepreneurial Spirit (Meeting 9)


Following the Flow (Meeting 10)


Primary Source
Daniel Aldana-Cohen, “Petro-Gotham, People’s Gotham” from Non-Stop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas, Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Schapiro (eds.).

Film
Peter Mettler, Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands [2010]

Week 6 –

Disaster (Meeting 11)


Futurity (Meeting 12)


FINAL PAPER DUE