Description:
"Climate and Society" is an intermediate Environmental Studies elective about how societies understand and respond to climate change. We will analyze the values, assumptions, and perceptions that contribute to our understanding of climate change. The main topics are: ethics, justice and responsibility; definitions of nature; cost-benefit analysis and the precautionary principle; geoengineering; contrarianism; framing and communication; social engagement; and education. Central questions include: Is climate change a technical or social problem? What makes climate change uniquely challenging to understand and respond to? Which ethical and perceptual frameworks are best suited for both understanding and responding to climate change? Who is responsible, and what moral implications does this have? What assumptions about values, behavior, economics, and nature do we make when discussing climate change? How are causes and solutions to climate change framed? How does climate change challenge our conceptions of nature, morality, society, and economics? Does climate change pose a special challenge to society, or does it simply amplify existing challenges? What is at stake? Throughout the course, we will analyze the values, assumptions, and perceptions that contribute to our understanding of climate change. The main topics are: ethics, justice and responsibility; definitions of nature; cost-benefit analysis and the precautionary principle; geoengineering; contrarianism; framing and communication; social engagement; and education.

Texts (available at the NYU Bookstore): McKibben, End of Nature; Oreskes and Conway, Merchants of Doubt; Gardiner, Shue, Jamieson & Caney, eds., Climate Ethics. Readings on Google Drive. I might add optional readings and guest speakers, but will not otherwise change the readings below.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:
9/9: Introduction, Context, and Central Questions
  - Note that this is a Wednesday, as per the University Calendar
  - Syllabus review

9/14: Does Climate Change result in the 'end of nature'?
  - McKibben, End of Nature 1-2
  - Reading notes assigned

9/21: Understanding Climate Change
  - McKibben, End of Nature 3-5; Hansen, Storms of my Grandchildren, 7, 8, 9, 11; Orr, Down to the Wire 2, 3; Jamieson, “Energy, Ethics, and the Transformation of Nature”
  - Stop, start, keep
  - Projects assigned

9/28: Misunderstanding Climate Change
  - Oreskes and Conway, Merchants of Doubt, 1, 2, 6; lomborg.com; Kahan et al, “The polarizing impact of science literacy and numeracy on perceived climate change risks,” Roberts, “The scariest thing about global warming (and Covid-19)”
  - Assignment: bring in one example of contrarianism or misunderstanding
  - Quiz 1 in class

10/5: Why We Fail to Respond to Climate Change; Whose Responsibility is it?

10/12: What Kind of Problem is Climate Change?: Justice and Future Generations
  - Exam 1 assigned. Due Friday at 10am

10/19: Cost-Benefit Analysis and the Precautionary Principle
  - Sunstein, Laws of Fear, 1, 7; Revesz, Retaking Rationality, 1.1, 1.3, 2.6, 2.9; Sunstein, “Of Terrorism and Climate Change”; Ackerman and Heinzerling, Priceless, 1, 4, 5; Gardiner, “Cost-Benefit Paralysis”; Shrader-Frechette, NDPR review of Risk and Reason

10/26: Responsibility, Wealth, and Pollution Markets
  - “Subsidies Emissions and Luxury Emissions”; “Selling Environmental Indulgences”; “Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds”; “It’s not my fault” (from Climate Ethics); cheatneutral.com; Scranton, “A Wicked Problem”

11/2: Solutions: Social Engagement and Change
  - WWF, Weathercocks and Signposts; Moser and Dilling Creating a Climate for Change, 14, 17, 28, 32; Hardin, “Tragedy of the Commons”; Maniates, “Individualization”; 350.org; thebreakthrough.org
  - Assignment: bring in examples of engagement with GCC
  - Quiz 2 in class
11/9: Solutions: Divestment; Anthropocene
- “Influence of climate science on financial decisions;” “Scientists must speak up on fossil-fuel divestment;” “Fossil Fuel Divestment: Making the Case;” “Shame;” “Justice is the goal: divestment as climate change resistance;” Salmon, “Keep it in the ground”; culturesofenergy.com/ep-26-dale-jamieson/
- Exam 2 assigned. Due Friday at 10am

11/16: Solutions: Geoengineering, Adaptation
- “Is Arming the Future” with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?; “Deadly Delays”; “Adaptation, Mitigation and Justice” (from Climate Ethics); excerpt from Superfreakonomics; Kolbert New Yorker review

11/23: Solutions: Stories and Moral Imagination
- Assignment: bring in an example of a story about GCC

11/30: Final Presentations
- Final projects due

12/7: Solutions
- Shrader-Frechette, “Solutions”; McKibben, Eaarth, 4; Curren IMPACT, 2, 5, conclusion

Assignments and Grading:
This course, including the list of central questions above and below, is designed to foster close reading and conceptual analysis of complex, interdisciplinary subjects. Active class conversation is required in order to develop and unpack the assumptions, arguments and implications of the topics we discuss. In the interest of fairness to other students, extensions and incompletes are only given in exceptional circumstances. Details and grade percentages are as follows.

Participation. Your active participation is required (10%). This includes class discussion, weekly questions about readings, and occasional assignments linking class readings to contemporary case studies. Since the success of the course depends heavily upon class participation, you are expected to attend all sessions and participate actively. Missing more than one class without permission will negatively impact your grade. If you cannot make a class, please email me in advance and get notes from your peers. I will not be able to re-teach you the material. In addition, you will closely analyze one week’s readings and write shared notes (a 2-page outline and 3 analytical or content questions; 5%) by Monday at 1pm of the day that we discuss that reading.

Exams and quizzes. Exams 1 and 2 are sets of five 1-page essay responses to prompts. You will not have an exam during finals period. Each exam constitutes 25% of your grade. The grading criteria are: comprehension, clarity of presentation, coherence, and engaging the question critically and productively. The in-class quizzes (5% each) will cover class content. The content you will be asked to analyze is from the entire course up until the exam date.

Project Presentations and Papers. Your collaborative research projects will be selected early in the semester. We will discuss the requirements and presentations in class that day, as well as in subsequent classes. The written part of the project is due 11/30 at 5pm by email, and presentations will take place on the same date. The project presentation and written component (~15 pages plus references) constitute 25% of your grade.

Methods:
In this course, we will analyze applied, interdisciplinary subject matter through an ethical lens. All content is to be approached critically. Many claims that are empirical in nature arise in these texts. If you find discrepancies, please research them independently in order to understand the nature of the claim. The central analytical questions for each class are:
- What unique ethical and social challenges does climate change raise?
- How should we balance multiple (ethical, cultural, social and aesthetic) values?
- What is the relationship between individual action (e.g., energy use) and solving environmental problems?
- What assumptions about values, behavior, economics, and nature do we make when discussing climate change?
- How are causes and solutions to climate change framed?
- Does climate change pose a special challenge to society, or does it simply amplify existing challenges?

Plagiarism and Academic Support:
Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to your academic dean. It includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes and references; not citing a source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or inadvertently copying verbatim from any source. More detail can be found at https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html. NYU offers academic support and tutoring at the University Learning Center (www.nyu.edu/cas/ulc). Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (www.nyu.edu/csd).