Topics in Environmental Values & Society — Climate Politics: When Policy meets Reality
Fall 2019

Instructor Information
- Gernot Wagner
- Email: gwagner@nyu.edu
- Office Address: Department of Environmental Studies, 285 Mercer Street, 10th floor
- Office Hours: Mondays & Tuesdays, 9:40-11:00 a.m. (Please sign up. Alternatively, join me on a ~40-minute morning run. If none of these times work, please email me.)

Course Information
- Class Meeting Times: Mondays & Wednesdays, 8:00-9:15 a.m.
- Class Location: 12 Waverly Place, Room L114

Course Description
What’s the optimal way to curb carbon emissions? Should we price fossil or subsidize low-carbon energy? What’s the role of solar geoengineering? What should it be? What will it be?

It is precisely the will that is the topic of this course. It’s one thing to develop the ideal policy, it’s quite another to place that ideal policy in a political context.

We will discuss a number of different climate policy objectives and policies throughout the semester, and then place them in a political context.

Many questions discussed don’t have a clear answer. Come prepared to argue both sides of each issue in class. Student-led debates, semi-regular 800-word essays, and the research paper will reinforce class discussions. They will also ask you to pick a side.
Think *Economist* leader: crisp, logical, and always with a point of view. By the end of the course, you will be well prepared to apply fundamental economic and political economy tools to a host of climate questions, and to do so without fear, favor, or jargon.

Note that the topics of this course overlap significantly with ENVST-UA 450.005 *Topics in Environmental Values & Society — Introduction to Policy Analysis: Environmental Case Studies*. We here use an entirely different approach. There, the focus on developing an analytical toolkit. Here it is the political implications of this thinking. In the language of economics, the two courses are complements, not substitutes.

This course fulfills the Environmental Studies major's Governance requirement.

**Readings**

There is no textbook. All readings are available online or via the course website except (ironically) my own book, *Climate Shock*. The whole book isn’t required reading, though the preface is on the reading list for week 1, the ‘fat tails’ chapter is on the list for week 6, and chapters 5 and 6 are on the syllabus for the discussion on solar geoengineering. The book is available at NYU Bookstore and on reserve at NYU libraries.

This is not a drill. It’s not a class taught in a vacuum, to give you abstract tools. It’s about real-world questions, using real-world tools. That implies that there is no one-size-fits all approach. Reading amounts vary by topic, week, and type of material. Use your judgment.

If the report is 150 pages long, skim it.

If it’s a non-technical, 5-page article, study it.

If it’s a dense, technical economics paper, focus on the main results presented in abstract, introduction, and conclusion. Don’t internalize footnote 18 from the technical appendix.

In short, come prepared to discuss the gist of the reading materials and be able to submit brief reflections prior to class. A good portion of your grade depends on it. Equally important, where appropriate, incorporate the readings into your short essays, peer reviews, and the research paper.

There are many good general surveys that aren’t just interesting but also fun to read. One is Daniel Yergin’s *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*. Another is David MacKay’s *Sustainable Energy – without the hot air*. Both will not just make you a better policy analyst, they will also make you a better writer.

All this also implies that the readings will (likely) change throughout the semester—in part driven by your interests and research papers. I will announce any changes to the syllabus via NYU Classes.
## Assessment Assignments and Evaluation

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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Participation and engagement</td>
<td>Actively engage with the readings and participate in class discussions. The 30% are made up of three parts:</td>
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<td>1. Brief (100-200 word) reflections and/or questions on the readings, posted by 10:00 p.m. the evening before each class on the course website, beginning with week 2. (Total grade: 5-15%)</td>
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<td>2. Active class engagement, debating the merits and demerits of any one particular policy or its politics. (Total grade: 5-15%)</td>
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<td>3. Three brief, anonymous peer reviews (100-200 words) of short essays, submitted on the course website (3.33% each, 10% total)</td>
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<td>The ratio between the first two parts is not fixed: to those more comfortable with written comments, emphasis (up to 15%) will be placed on the pre-class postings. To those more comfortable with engaging during class, emphasis (up to 15%) will be placed on class participation.</td>
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<td>Bonus points for anyone able to point to recent news stories relevant to the topic at hand. (Please post them, by 10:00 p.m. the night before each class, on the course website, in addition to your reflections on the readings.)</td>
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<td>The remaining 10% are for three short (100-200 word) constructive critiques of your colleagues’ essay submissions. You will be randomly assigned to review essays from your peers.</td>
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<td>Short essays</td>
<td>You might call them “policy memos.” You might call them “op-eds.” Either way, these four short essays have a point of view, they are well argued, and they come in at just around 800 words (sans bibliography). Make sure to use proper citations of materials, including those from the syllabus.</td>
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<td>Essays will be graded on a 10-point scale, and each counts for 5% of your final grade. Please add a word count and make sure it comes within 50 words of 800 to avoid point deductions.</td>
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<td>You are free to write your essays in any four of weeks 2 through 10 of the semester. Your essays will be based on the topic and class discussions of that week and are due by 11:59 p.m. (midnight) Friday via the course website.</td>
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<td>If you submit more than four 800-word essays, your overall</td>
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essay grade will be based on the best four of the first five submitted.

| Research paper | The research paper is generally between 3,500 and 4,500 words long. Please discuss and get approval for the paper topic before you begin writing, no later than Wednesday, October 16th (1 percentage point of your 40% total for the paper). Detailed outlines are due 10:00 p.m. Monday, October 28th (2%). The paper is due by 10:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 26th (remaining 37%), the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. | 40% |
| Final short essay | Your final short essay is due on Friday, December 6th. All of the same rules apply as for the short essays, with one difference: the topic is to summarize your research paper in one succinct, 800-word essay. (You will have received feedback on your research paper by Monday, December 2nd. We will discuss the papers in class that day as well.) | 5% |
| Presentation | In the last three class meetings, you will present your main thesis and lead a brief class discussion on your topic. | 5% |
| **Total** | | **100%** |

All written assessments are individual. Discuss the topic with each other; join up in reading groups; come to office hours alone or in groups to discuss details; but submit your own, individual essays.

If you need more time, you will need to optimize in light of the following time-grade tradeoff: You will lose 10% of the total grade for each assignment immediately, and another 10% for each additional 24 hours.

**Class schedule**

**WEEK 1: Intro—The Three Horsemen of the Climate Policy Apocalypse**

Class meeting: Wednesday, September 4th

Readings

2. This syllabus(!)
WEEK 2: Rebound Effect: Can CAFE standards lead to more driving?

Readings


WEEK 3: Energy Paradox: Why don’t we all use CFLs and drive hybrids?

Readings


Recommended Reading


WEEK 4: Green Paradox aka Temporal Leakage: Can environmental policy lead to more pollution?

Readings


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1 All readings found on NYU Classes; the links here go to the published articles.
2 It's clearly a paradox, though note it's not one of the “three horsemen.”
WEEK 5: How far how fast? aka What’s the ‘optimal’ carbon price?

Readings


Recommended Reading


WEEK 6: How far how fast? aka It’s not over ‘til the fat tail zings.

Readings


WEEK 7: Tax pollution or subsidize renewables?

Read


Skim (abstract, introduction, and conclusion):


**WEEK 8: Spatial leakage: What if companies just move abroad?**

**Readings**


**WEEK 9: Global problem, global solution: Kyoto, Copenhagen, Paris, etc?**

**Read**


**Skim**


**WEEK 10: Domestic policy choice: Climate after Trump**

**Readings**

WEEK 11: Solar geoengineering is ‘nuts’, but ‘nuts’ compared to what?

Readings


Recommended Reading


WEEKS 12 and 13: Research paper due Tuesday, November 26th(!)

(We will focus on your research paper topics, discuss any burning questions, etc.)

WEEKS 14 and 15: Student research paper presentations

December 2nd class readings:


Readings for week 15 (no readings for December 4th)

Your colleagues’ final short essays

NYU Classes

All announcements, resources, and assignments will be delivered through the NYU Classes site.

This is the first time I’m offering this specific class, and, as we all know, climate politics is a fast-moving target. I may modify specific class topics and readings, and other aspects of the course as we go through the term with advance notice provided as soon as possible through the course website.
Academic Integrity

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 http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity. NYU offers academic support and tutoring at the University Learning Center: http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ulc; (212) 998-8085.

Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab, or call or email CSD at (212) 998-4980 or mosecsd@nyu.edu for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

Acknowledgments

This syllabus has evolved from climate and energy policy classes I have taught at various institutions, including Columbia, NYU Stern, and Harvard. Its first incarnation was largely based on Snorre Kverndokk and Knut Einar Rosendahl’s Energy Economics class taught at Johns Hopkins in Spring 2009. This current syllabus has benefited greatly from Richard Zeckhauser’s Analytic Frameworks for Policy class at Harvard, as well as from his mentorship and guidance over the years. Prior iterations have also taken some cues from Bill Hogan’s Energy Policy Analysis class at Harvard, Paul Joskow’s former Energy Economics class at MIT, Rob Stavins’s Fundamentals of Environmental Economics and Policy class at Harvard, Erin Mansur’s former Energy Economics & the Environment class at Yale, Jim Stock’s U.S. Energy Revolution and its Implications seminar at Harvard, and valuable feedback from, among others, Joe Aldy, Rajeev Dehejia, Ken Gillingham, Matt Kahn, Katherine Rittenhouse, Steve Salant, Rob Stavins, Thomas Sterner, Martin Weitzman, Matthew Zaragoza-Watkins, participants in an OurEnergyPolicy.org discussion forum, and students at Columbia, NYU Stern, and Harvard who have taken versions of this course in the past. Thank you to all. Anything seems off? Please let me know.