

Environmental Politics and Climate Change

United Nations University (UNU-IAS)

Fall 2021

Location: Online

Time: 16:00-17:30 unless otherwise stated

Lecturer: Dr. Philip Vaughter

Contact Information: vaughter@unu.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course provides students with an introduction to international environmental governance, with a focus on how past environmental movements and policies, as well as modern historical alliances and divisions, have shaped the approach to and implementation of how nations and international coalitions are dealing with the climate change. The course will first examine the historical origin of modern trans-boundary environmental treaties on issues such as marine pollution, acid rain, ozone depletion, and biodiversity conservation. Students will then be asked to examine how past policies and historical events have set the stage for current global negotiations around climate change and the regulation and mitigation of greenhouse gases. In the second part of the course, students will be asked to make a recommendation on a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Treaty for a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), taking into account the nation's ecology, historical international alliances, available resources, concurrent sustainable development aspirations, and economic conditions. The assignments in the course are designed to instruct students with a historical overview of international environmental treaties for modern nation states, as well as to familiarize students with environmental, social, and economic conditions that need to be taken into account when developing a national climate change strategy to comply with a global treaty. Sessions will be structured in such a way that students are encouraged to share what they have learned, as well as their own insights into global environmental governance. Students will be expected to actively participate in each class session (even those that they are not presenting in) and to complete a series of presentations and assignments on their given country.

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

This course will provide students with background knowledge of modern environmental treaties and coalition building between nation states, and demonstrate how international relations and other environmental issues have influenced the current state of negotiation for a global climate treaty. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain the historical origins of modern coalition blocks, and give insight into why these positions may help or hinder a given nation from responding adequately to climate change.
- Have a thorough understanding of modern trans-boundary environmental treaties, and demonstrate how these need to be taken into account when creating a Nationally Determined Contribution.
- Develop an appreciation for the complexity and detail required in drafting effective recommendations for climate change policy at the national level, especially when local implementation of objectives must be realized.
- Move beyond media coverage of the issues discussed, and delve further into the data to provide insight into evidence for policy and not rhetoric.
- Understand the historical conditions that have led member states to their current situations, taking into account environmental, social, and economic factors into account to better understand their societies.

In this course, students will also be asked to develop their writing and presentation skills in addition to their research skills. Assignments throughout the semester will help students craft their writing and research abilities, while short presentations will be assigned to update the class on what they have discovered about their assigned topic. Each student will be assigned a given AOSIS country to research and write recommendations for during the class.

Requirements and Grading Policy

All students are expected to complete the required readings before each class. The course requirements also include active class participation, short presentations, and short assignments, which will be compiled at the end of the semester to create a final report detailing recommendations for climate change mitigation/adaptation for an AOSIS country assigned to the student, taking into account the nation's ecology, political alliances, economy, and infrastructure:

- Active class participation (10%)
- Short written assignments (40%)
- Short presentations (10%)
- Final report (30%)
- Final presentation (10%)

Class Participation

The course requires students to attend all classes, to arrive on time, to complete the readings and to participate actively in class discussions. This means speaking during each and every class. At the discretion of the instructor, frequent late arrivals or absences may result in a lower grade. Please note that the first session is of particular importance and cannot be missed. Students are also strongly encouraged to regularly follow the news to keep up with international developments, as these events will be reflected in the class discussions. Relevant news sites and reporting archives will be shared by the instructor during the class.

Short Written Assignments

In order to develop a thorough understanding of the unique contexts and constraints faced by the country they will be researching, students will be asked to author four brief written reports on the following four topics for their assigned country:

- I. Geography & ecology, including mention of other environmental issues facing the island(s) in addition to how climate change will impact the nation, such as biodiversity loss, industrial pollution, haphazard urban development, etc.
- II. Political history, including international alliances the nation is a part of and past conflicts with other states that may impact international cooperation
- III. Greenhouse gas emission profile, including recommendations on how to mitigate emissions, in addition to adaptation scenarios that may be critical for the given region
- IV. The primary economic sectors of the country, and insight into how these may be impacted by climate change, with recommendations on how to shift economic activity when applicable

Assignments should be no more than five written pages, **not** including a works cited page. Quality visualizations such as charts and graphs are strongly encouraged. Students are expected to edit the assignments based on instructor and classmates' feedback, as these will serve as chapters in the final report.

Short Presentations:

In order to encourage a critical engagement with the literature, to practice students' presentation skills and to stimulate class discussion, each student will present on each short written assignment for no more than five minutes. The presentation will be held at the beginning of the session and should summarize the main points on the assigned topic. Students are allowed to engage in discussion about any questions raised from classmates or the instructor. These presentations are not overly formal, however, are important practice for delivering your research succinctly and clearly.

Final Report:

The final report for the class should be a set of recommendations based on a synthesis of the pre-existing four assignments that are compiled to give a background for the nation in four distinct chapters, and then based on this data, the student is to make a series of recommendations for the nation state to make its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in a final chapter. Note: while it is important that the student investigate the current NDC for the nation, this in no way dictates whether or not the student recommends this course of action. Students are free to recommend supplemental or alternative approaches to NDCs for the country they are assigned to research – the important thing is that they propose a series of actions that will enable the nation to meet its goals, either working within the country, or bilaterally with international partners. Each student is expected to write a final chapter of 5-6 pages in length, which will be in the same document as the preceding four chapter. The document must be in MS format and single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font. The papers must have a title, a proper introduction and conclusion section and all material that is used to support the student's argument must be clearly cited. For the in-text citations and the bibliography, we suggest that students use APA style citations. For a reference for APA style citations see: https://www.umuc.edu/library/libhow/apa_examples.cfm.

A works cited page should come after the end of the fifth chapter and include works cited from all five chapters. Reference programs such as *Endnote*, *Citavi* or *RefWorks* are very useful for collecting, organizing and formatting citations and students are strongly encouraged to make use of the introductory lectures at the UNU writing lab.

Final Presentation:

This presentation will be formal. Students will have 10 minutes to present the relevant background and recommendations using a PowerPoint or similar style of presentation platform. Style and speaking tips will be shared with the students during the course of the class. Students should practice their final presentation before delivering it to the class.

Course Readings

Each class will have a series of required readings that have to be completed prior to the class. The average reading load per class period is 40~80 pages. Students are expected to actively contribute to class discussions based on the material provided. The lecturer reserves the right to update the reading list throughout the course and will alert students to the changes in class. The texts will also be a critical component of the arguments in the course, and the familiarity with material should be demonstrated as it pertains to each assignment. The textbooks used in the course are available at the UNU library and relevant chapters can be copied at the designated copy machines. If any required readings from academic journals or e-books are added to the course, these can be accessed through the public work stations at the UNU library, using your UNU student login and password. Additional readings from web based content will also be included.

- Caldwell, L. K., & Weiland, P. S. (1996). *International environmental policy: from the twentieth to the twenty-first century*. Duke University Press.
- Radkau, J. (2008). *Nature and power: a global history of the environment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Axelrod, R. S., & Van Deveer, S. D. (Eds.). (2014). *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy*. CQ Press.

Please note supplementary readings may be added in the lead up to and follow-up from COP 26.

Important Information

Class Conduct & Etiquette

Students are expected to arrive on time and not to engage in disruptive behavior during class. This includes, among other things, private side conversations, the use of cell-phones and other electronic devices, or the reading of newspapers. Cell-phones should be switched off and stored in the bag. We wish to create an atmosphere of open and tolerant discussion in the classroom and request students to recognize every individual's right to have an opinion. The lecturer and other students should be treated with dignity and respect, in particular in discussions on contentious political issues where a diversity of opinion is likely to arise.

However, we also recognize that there are limits to tolerance and the lecturer reserves the right to request disciplinary action against any student who violates this policy or repeatedly shows disruptive behavior in class.

Computer Use in Class

The use of computers (including tablets) in the classroom is restricted to taking notes, reading of the course material or searching for course related information in the internet. Any disruption of the class by cell phones, instant messaging programs or other communication devices will not be tolerated. The lecturer reserves the right to revoke this permission if a student is found using a computer for any non-course related activities.

Plagiarism & Academic Misconduct

Please be aware that the consequences of plagiarism are severe and students found guilty of academic misconduct will be punished in accordance with UNU's academic honesty policies. The lecturer reserves the right to run all assignments through an anti-plagiarism software provided by the UNU. If evidence of academic misconduct on the assigned presentations, the mid-term exam or the final essay should be found, the assignment will receive a failing grade. In case of repeated violations of academic conduct, the student may receive a failing grade for the entire course and will be reported to the appropriate authorities for disciplinary action.

Course Outline

Introduction

1. ***Transboundary environmental issues – air pollution, marine protection, persistent organic pollutants, and waste***

Date: Friday, October 8th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Caldwell, L. K. & Weiland, P. S. (1996). Chapter 9 – International commons: air, sea, outer space. In *International environmental policy: from the twentieth to the twenty-first century* (pp. 202-241). Duke University Press.
- Axelrod, R. S. & Van Deveer, S. D. (Eds.). (2014). Chronology. In *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy* (pp. xvii). CQ Press.

2. ***Transboundary environmental issues – biodiversity, migratory species, and climate change***

Date: Friday, October 15th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Betsill, M. M. (2014). Chapter 10 – International climate change policy: complex multilevel governance. In R. S. Axelrod & S. D. Van Deveer (Eds.), *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy* (pp. 234-258). CQ Press.

Climate Change in Context

3. ***Island ecology, sea level rise, and international aid***

Date: Friday, October 22nd, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- European Commission. (n.d.). International cooperation and development: The Caribbean. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/caribbean-0_en
- Hezel, F. X. (2017, March 1). The open ocean: The future of foreign aid in the Pacific. Retrieved from <https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/the-open-ocean-the-future-of-foreign-aid-in-the-pacific>
- Viñas, M. J. & Rasmussen, C. (2015, August 25). Warming seas and melting ice sheets. Retrieved from <https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2328/warming-seas-and-melting-ice-sheets/>

4. ***Coalitions for climate change and the Paris Treaty – Assignment 1 due***

Date: Friday, October 29th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Caldwell, L. K. & Weiland, P. S. (1996). Chapter 8 – Transnational regimes and regional agreements. In *International environmental policy: from the twentieth to the twenty-first century* (pp. 158-201). Duke University Press.

5. ***Old wounds – historical relations between the nations states***

Date: Friday, November 5th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Radkau, J. (2008). Chapter 4 – Colonialism as a watershed in environmental history. In *Nature and power: a global history of the environment* (pp. 152-194). Cambridge University Press.

6. ***Human rights and climate change in coalition building***

Date: Friday, November 12th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Najam, A. (2014). Chapter 9 - The view from the south: developing countries in global environmental politics. In R. S. Axelrod & S. D. Van Deveer (Eds.), *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy* (pp. 213-233). CQ Press.

Climate Change and Society

7. ***Greenhouse gas reporting – what gets measured gets done – Assignment 2 due***

Date: Friday, November 19th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Faure, M. G. & Lefevre, J. (2014). Chapter 5 – Compliance with global environmental policy: climate change and ozone layer cases. In R. S. Axelrod & S. D. Van Deveer (Eds.), *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy* (pp. 110-132). CQ Press.

8. ***Greenhouse gas emissions by sectors – country profiles***

Date: Friday, November 26th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Radkau, J. (2008). Chapter 3 – Water, forests, and power. In *Nature and power: a global history of the environment* (pp. 86-151). Cambridge University Press.

9. ***Infrastructure, energy, transit, and tourism – Assignment 3 due***

Date: Friday, December 3rd, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- IPCC. (2014). Summary for Policymakers. In *Climate change 2014: Mitigation of climate change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [O. Edenhofer, R. Pichs-Madruga, Y. Sokona, E. Farahani, S. Kadner, S Seyboth, A. Adler, I Baum, S. Brunner, P. Eickemeier, B. Kriemann, J. Savolainen, S. Schlömer, C. von Stechow, T. Zwickel, and J.C. Minx (Eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. Retrieved from https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg3/ipcc_wg3_ar5_summary-for-policymakers.pdf.
- USAID. (2012, November). Addressing climate change impacts on infrastructure: preparing for change. Retrieved from <http://www.adaptationlearning.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Addressing-Climate-Change-Impacts-on-Infrastructure-report.pdf>.

10. ***Agriculture and protected areas***

Date: Friday, December 10th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- The Global Canopy Programme (GCP). (2016, April 6). What is REDD+? Retrieved from <http://theredddesk.org/what-redd>.
- Russell, S. (2014, May 29). Everything you need to know about agricultural emissions. Retrieved from <http://www.wri.org/blog/2014/05/everything-you-need-know-about-agricultural-emissions>.

11. ***Society and culture – barriers and bridges for action on climate change***

Date: Friday, December 17th, 2021 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- Caldwell, L. K. & Weiland, P. S. (1996). Chapter 1 – Comprehending the environment. In *International environmental policy: from the twentieth to the twenty-first century* (pp. 11-31). Duke University Press.

Implementing Solutions

12. ***We're still in! Engagement with education sector, NGOs, and private sector in implementing climate change mitigation – Assignment 4 due***

Date: Friday, January 7th, 2022 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- O'Neill, K. (2014). Chapter 2 – Architects, agitators, and entrepreneurs: international and non-governmental organizations in global environmental politics. In R. S. Axelrod & S. D. Van Deveer (Eds.), *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy* (pp. 26-52). CQ Press.
- Wynes, S. & Nicholas, K. A. (2017). The climate mitigation gap: education and government recommendations miss the most effective individual actions. *Environmental Research Letters*, 12(7).

13. ***We're still in! The importance of sub-national and local government in implementation***

Date: Friday, January 14th, 2022 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- DeSombre, E. R. (2014). Chapter 6 – Domestic sources of U.S. unilateralism. In R. S. Axelrod & S. D. Van Deveer (Eds.), *The global environment: institutions, law, and policy* (pp. 133-156). CQ Press.

14. ***Final presentations – Final report due***

Date: Friday, January 21st, 2022 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- None

15. ***Coalition building activity***

Date: Friday, January 28th, 2022 ~ 16:00-17:30

Readings:

- None