

SOCI0006
Anxious Times: A Sociology of the Environmental Crisis
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This course will explore growing climate anxiety and how people are responding to it in different ways. Raging forest fires, floods, drought, and erratic climate patterns seem to be ravaging our world with some scientists claiming that 1.5C global warming threshold has already been crossed. Set amidst a global climate emergency, the course aims to introduce students to key questions facing local and global climate futures, including resource and labour futures, the liveability of cities and countrysides, the future of food, energy, and the threat of species extinction.

Taking stock of popular media, including documentaries, podcasts, and news reports, we will reflect on how people are dealing with the global environmental crisis. These responses range from collective social action, such as movements led by students, peasants, workers, and communities, to individual choices, including adopting eco-friendly lifestyles and choosing not to have children. It will also assess of climate denialist positions from a sociological standpoint, which engages with the institutional and individual rationale for fearing how adopting a fossil fuel phase out and low energy consumption may impact lifestyles. The course hopes to introduce students to a sociology of the environmental crisis, and provide a strong foundation for interrogating alarmist, denialist and optimistic positions on climate futures.

Learning Objectives:

We will discuss:

- 1) Key debates and theoretical approaches within sociology around the environment
- 2) How climate anxiety is shaping global and local politics, individual and community decision-making
- 3) How the climate question interacts with other facets of life, including food, labour, energy, and consumption
- 4) How climate movements are engaging with climate governance at local, national and global scales

Books:

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Simon and Schuster. 2014
Gould, Kenneth A., and Lewis, Tammy L. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2015

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. The University of Chicago Press. 2016.

Elizabeth Kolbert. *Fieldnotes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*. Bloomsbury. 2015.

Grading instruments:

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Student-led workshops | 20 percent |
| Thematic reflections | 20 percent |
| Public Engagement Project | 25 percent |
| Research Project | 35 percent |

Student-led workshops (20%)

The Thursday session every week will be student-led. I recommend that the presenter uses it to present a case study which explores the theme of the week. Students can sign up to lead these sessions at the start of the semester. These can be presentations, followed by open discussion, or can be developed as interactive group activities. Students should discuss and share outlines for the session with the instructor in advance.

Reflections (20%)

Students are expected to turn in six 500-word reflection essays on themes covered in the course. These should be critical engagements with the assigned materials for the week.

Public engagement project (25%)

Imagine yourself as one of the many individuals or groups facing and responding to climate change. Produce a public engagement project that reflects how that subject position engages with the climate question. These outputs could include: a podcast, letter, play, artwork, short video, social media engagement, campaign design, etc. You are required to discuss the creative brief with me by the week 4.

Research Project (35%)

The final project (25%) will be a research paper of around 2,500-3,000 words that uses a case study to reflect on the implications of the climate crisis on environmental sociology. A 500-word proposal (10%) will be due by the 9th week of class. I will schedule one-on-one meetings in the 10th week of class to discuss the final project.

Grades:

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|----|------------|
| A | 90-100 |
| B+ | 85-89 |
| B | 80-84 |
| C+ | 75-79 |
| C | 70-74 |
| D | 60-69 |
| F | 59 or less |

Topics

Week 1: Introduction

The week will introduce the course, and focus on understanding the broad contours of how climate change is shaping individual and collective feelings and action.

Week 2: Anthropocene? Climate change and the human species

Is the Earth's climate changing? Do humans share collective responsibility? What are the implications?

Week 3: The Rise of Environmental Sociology

In this week we explore how sociology is responding to climate change by tracing the theoretical development of environmental sociology.

Week 4: Governing Climate

We explore the local and global institutional arrangements developed to address climate change, including the IPCC and COPs.

Week 5: Climate Scepticism

We explore the phenomenon of climate scepticism through a sociological lens, which goes beyond simply dismissing these positions as irrational.

Week 6: School Strikes? Fridays for Futures and the Rise of a Youth Climate Movements

We explore what motivates young people to join global climate movement.

Week 7: Extinction/Rebellion

We explore the threat of human extinction, and how it is shaping individual and collective actions with a focus on birth strikes and the climate movement, Extinction Rebellion

Week 8: Green New Deal or Deindustrialisation?

This week we will discuss degrowth, deindustrialisation and 'green industrialisation'

Week 9: Climate and the Future of Food

We explore the implications of climate change for food and food producers, including the future of meat and lab-grown foods, and how rural social movements are responding

Week 10: Conscious Consumption, Trade Disruptions

We explore how climate anxiety is shaping consumption choices and the effects of climate change on globalised trade

Week 11: Energy Politics and the Question of Fossil Fuels

This week we explore how fossil fuels have shaped contemporary capitalism and the complex politics surrounding a transition away from fossil fuels

Week 12: Labour in our Climate Futures

How will climate change affect labour? This week we explore how climate considerations are reshaping global labour relations, including how labour unions are responding

Week 13: Climate Dystopias

We reflect on dystopian imaginations of a climate changed world and potential implications for sociology.

Week 14: Review

We review the implications of climate anxiety for a multi-dimensional sociology of the environmental crisis.