

PHIL 1571 / ENVS 1043

Repairing the planet: tools for the climate emergency

Location TBA

T / Th 10:15-11:44 am

INSTRUCTOR: Carlos Santana
OFFICE HOURS: by appointment
EMAIL: csantana@sas.upenn.edu

Course Description

The modest aim of this course is to figure out how to save the world

The course consists of units on crises like climate change, biodiversity loss, and plastics pollution

In each unit, we'll ask three questions:

Past: How does this crisis represent a break with a historical state of the planet?

Present: How are scientists and other scholars approaching the crisis?

Future: What are the tools available to course-correct?

This is a participation-heavy, lecture-light course
Bring lots of energy and enthusiasm

Objectives

Knowledge goal: Leave the course with a good grasp of the current state of understanding of various environmental-social issues

Skills goal: Develop the ability to integrate knowledge, methods, and ways of thinking from a broad array of disciplines to make progress on complex problems

Affective goal: Find reason for optimism (or at least hope) in the face of planetary emergency

Texts

Textbooks are a scam. Accordingly, there is no required textbook for this course.

All readings will be posted to Canvas.

Evaluation:

Grade breakdown will run as follows:

Assignment 1—20%

Assignment 2—20%

Assignment 3—30%

Reading quizzes—15%

Participation—15%

Participation:

Every participant in the course is responsible for contributing to its success.

As such, you're expected to show up consistently, having done the reading and assignments, and be willing to contribute your ideas.

Please get in touch with me if you are having difficulty engaging with the course material or have reservations about active in-person participation.

Assignments:

Full details on each assignment will be given well in advance.

Reading quizzes—3 question, closed-book quizzes on the readings, conducted at the beginning of each class

Assignment 1—Editorial

Write an editorial about a planetary issue as if you were on the editorial team of a major periodical

In the editorial, translate the academic scholarship we'll be reading for a general audience

Assignment 2—Policy brief

Craft a mock brief for a policy audience (your choice) in which you make a case for a particular solution to one of the crises we cover

Assignment 3—Take-home final

Pick from a set of questions and write short essays in response

Flexibility:

I reserve the right to adjust the schedule and assignment structure according to student need and emerging conditions

Honesty:

You are encouraged to use any available resources, including your peers, to understand readings and prepare for assignments, but submitted work must be your own, and follow appropriate citation practices.

It is your responsibility to be familiar with university policy on academic honesty.

Environment:

I aim to make our classroom a safe, welcoming environment for you, and require that you do the same for your peers. While disagreement and debate is encouraged, I have zero-tolerance for hostility, aggression, or harassment.

Student life can be challenging and stressful, and for some of you that will include participating in this course. I encourage you to chat with me if you begin to feel overwhelmed by this course.

Support:

If you need academic support or disability services, please contact the Weingarten Center at 215-573-9235, located at 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300.

For accommodations not in the purview of the Weingarten Center (e.g. personal crisis, acute health event), I'm happy to work with you, and I don't need to know the details. Please get in touch as far in advance as possible so we can design a solution together that's both fair and works for your situation.

Meetings with me:

I meet by appointment rather than holding regular office hours. If you request an appointment, I'll find time for you within the week, barring extraordinary circumstances.

I'm happy to discuss course-related topics as well as other academic stuff.

Tentative list of topics

Biodiversity Loss

Water

Climate disasters

Population shifts

Plastics pollution