

# Climate Justice

Old course title: Environmental Citizenship

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We do not know how long we have, but we do know that ... to succeed, we must simultaneously work for immediate changes *and* advance a vision of the world we want to build.

Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene*

There is no more potent weapon in the battle against fossil fuels than the creation of real alternatives.

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*

This is a course on the politics of environmentalism at a time of planetary emergency. In the face of rapid climate change, what are our political prospects? How in the world might we confront the challenge? What sort of political strategy and form of citizenship could be adequate to the task? And what would 'victory' look like?

In this course we will take up these questions by studying planetary climate change, political theory, and capitalist social relations. Underlying all these challenges is a crisis of imagination, including our imagination of what it means to be a citizen. The carbon profiteers hope you fail to connect the dots, or imagine the various futures we could make, or discover your conscience and voice, or ever picture how different it must be. So, while this course starts—as it must—with a sober, scientific assessment of the current crisis of the Earth and humanity, marked by economic insecurity, a lack of faith in political parties, species loss, and climate change, ultimately, this course aims at cultivating the imagination.

## Course Requirements

Exam 1 (three questions, you answer two)	28.6 %
Exam 2 (three questions, you answer two)	28.6 %
Exam 3 (aka the final: four questions, you answer three)	42.8 %

This is a lecture-led course. This means that I will combine lectures with in-class discussion of course material. Attendance is required but will not be graded. For our discussions to be effective, you must come to class prepared. Our three in-class exams will provide essay prompts regarding the core questions addressed in our course. To participate effectively in classroom discussions, and perform well on exams, you will need to read the assigned texts.

## Course Readings

Our course has five assigned books. I encourage you to buy or otherwise acquire these books as soon as possible. (You do not need to use these links.) Please buy paper copies—not digital—so that you can bring the books to our class discussions (i.e., without using your phone or iPad).

[1] P. Robbins (2008) *Lawn People*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Lawn-People-Grasses-Weeds-Chemicals/dp/159213579X>

[2] B. Christophers (2024) *The Price is Wrong*. London: Verso.

Website: <https://www.versobooks.com/products/3069-the-price-is-wrong>

[3] Kohei Saito (2024) *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*. NY: Astra.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Slow-Down-Manifesto-KOHEI-SAITO/dp/1662602367>

[4] A. Malm & Wim Carton (2024) *Overshoot*. NY: Verso.

Website: <https://www.versobooks.com/products/3131-overshoot>

[5] J. Wainwright and G. Mann (2018) *Climate Leviathan*. NY: Verso.

Website: <https://www.versobooks.com/products/520-climate-leviathan>

All other reading materials will be made available on-line (via Carmen and/or email). Reading assignments are shown on our Course Plan (page 3). I will provide specific guidance about reading assignments in class.

## Our Course Plan

#	Day	Date	Topic	Reading assignment
1	Tuesday	7-Jan	Course introduction	course syllabus
2	Thursday	9-Jan	Climate change basics 1: physical processes	IPCC AR6 WG 1 SPM
3	Tuesday	14-Jan	Climate change basics 2: carbon mitigation	IPCC AR6 WG 3 SPM
4	Thursday	16-Jan	Climate change basics 3: adaptation to climate change	IPCC AR6 WG 2 SPM
5	Tuesday	21-Jan	Climate change basics 4: The Paris Agreement	Paris Agreement (2015) text
6	Thursday	23-Jan	Climate change basics 5: Why didn't we act earlier?	N Rich, story from <i>NYT Magazine</i>
7	Tuesday	28-Jan	Environmentalism & ideology 1: human population 1	Scranton, <i>Learning to die ...</i> , selections
8	Thursday	30-Jan	Environmentalism & ideology 2: human population 2	D Harvey, Population, resources & science
9	Tuesday	4-Feb	Environmentalism & ideology 3: the lawn 1	<i>Lawn people</i> , cover to p 71
10	Thursday	6-Feb	Environmentalism & ideology 4: the lawn 2	<i>Lawn people</i> , cover to p 72 to end
11	Tuesday	11-Feb	Exam 1 (three questions; you answer two)	
12	Thursday	13-Feb	Perhaps the market will solve the problem? 1	<i>The Price is Wrong</i> 1, pp. 1-131
13	Tuesday	18-Feb	Perhaps the market will solve the problem? 2	<i>The Price is Wrong</i> 2, pp. 133-264
14	Thursday	20-Feb	Perhaps the market will solve the problem? 3	<i>The Price is Wrong</i> 3, pp. 265-379
15	Tuesday	25-Feb	Reflecting on climate justice 1 [B Christophers, guest]	<i>Slow Down</i> 1, Intro + Ch 1-3
16	Thursday	27-Feb	Reflecting on climate justice 2	<i>Slow Down</i> 2, Ch 4-6
17	Tuesday	4-Mar	Reflecting on climate justice 3	<i>Slow Down</i> 3, Ch 7 to end
18	Thursday	6-Mar	Exam 2 (three questions; you answer two)	
			March 10 - March 14 spring break	
19	Tuesday	18-Mar	Climate & political imagination 1: USA-China	M Li, Scenarios for the US, China & the World
20	Thursday	20-Mar	Climate & political imagination 2: overshoot ideology	Malm & Carton, <i>Overshoot</i> , Preface & Part I
21	Tuesday	25-Mar	Climate & political imagination 3: asset stranding redux	Malm & Carton, <i>Overshoot</i> , Part II
22	Thursday	27-Mar	Student services workshop on student finances	catch up on readings
23	Tuesday	1-Apr	Climate & political imagination 4: the overshoot conjuncture	Malm & Carton, <i>Overshoot</i> , Part III
24	Thursday	3-Apr	Climate & political imagination 5: 'This changes everything' 1	Naomi Klein, <i>This Changes Everything</i> , selection a
25	Tuesday	8-Apr	Climate & political imagination 6: 'This changes everything' 2	Naomi Klein, <i>This Changes Everything</i> , selection b
26	Thursday	10-Apr	Climate, capitalism, & planetary sovereignty 1	<i>Climate Leviathan</i> , intro + Part I
27	Tuesday	15-Apr	Climate, capitalism, & planetary sovereignty 2: Leviathan	<i>Climate Leviathan</i> , Part II
28	Thursday	17-Apr	Climate, capitalism, & planetary sovereignty 3: Climate X?	<i>Climate Leviathan</i> , Part III
29	Monday	28-Apr	Exam 3 at 8:00-9:40 AM (four Qs, you answer three)	

## Accessibility

Ohio State strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately privately so that we can discuss your options; moreover, you are strongly encouraged to register with Student Life Disability Services (SLDS) to establish reasonable accommodations. Please communicate with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that we can arrange accommodations in a timely fashion.

Among other services, SLDS offers in-person exam proctoring. Students who are registered with SLDS and whose accommodations include adjustments to exams (e.g., additional time) will only be able to schedule an exam in the SLDS database if there is a seat available. For this reason, **early scheduling of your exams – within the first two weeks of class – is strongly encouraged.** SLDS will work with you to try to find a space, but it is your responsibility to contact them early in the semester to initiate the process. The scheduling deadline is 1 week in advance. SLDS will allow students to schedule their exams within a 3-day window (class exam day + 2 days after). **Students are expected to schedule their exams as close as possible to the day and time the exam is given in class.** In other words, you are strongly encouraged to take the exam on the same day, and overlapping in time, as the other students.

SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Ave.

## General Education Goals & Expected Learning Outcomes

Geography 3597.03 meets the GE requirement for the Sustainability theme. It does so by examining the causes and consequences of anthropogenic climate change. Our course begins from the premise of the fundamental dependence of humans on Earth and proceeds to examine three dimensions of sustainability: “environmental and earth systems,” by studying IPCC reports on climate change; “economy and governance” through analysis of the political economy of fossil fuel consumption; and “society and culture” through examining the prospects for climate justice.

GE goal 1: Successful students will analyze an important topic or idea at a more advanced and in-depth level than the foundations. In this context, “advanced” refers to courses that are e.g., synthetic, rely on research or cutting-edge findings, or deeply engage with the subject matter, among other possibilities.

GE goal 2: Successful students will integrate approaches to the theme by making connections to out-of- classroom experiences with academic knowledge or across disciplines and/or to work they have done in previous classes and that they anticipate doing in future.

GE goal 3: Students analyze and explain how social and natural systems function, interact, and evolve over time; how human wellbeing depends on these interactions; how actions have impacts on subsequent generations and societies globally; and how human values, behaviors, and institutions impact multi- faceted, potential solutions across time.

More specifically, we meet the Expected Learning Outcomes (ELOs) for GE courses in Sustainability by:

<b>ELO 1.1</b> Engage in critical and logical thinking.	<p>GEOG 3597.03 examines the planetary crisis presented by climate change through a synthetic, critical, historical political economy approach. Our guiding questions are: What processes are driving rapid climate change? In the face of rapid climate change, what are our political prospects? What sort of political strategy could be adequate to the task of building a just response to climate change?</p> <p>Students engage these three questions in several ways. They read different texts on the political economy of climate change and political philosophy of climate justice; discuss these texts in class; complete in-class writing assignments to demonstrate their ability to analyze subtopics; and take exams to assess learning and performance. Student writing (both in-class and exam-based) is evaluated for correctness as well as students’ ability to express critical and logical views in writing.</p>
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<p><b>ELO 1.2</b> Engage in an advanced, in-depth, scholarly exploration of the topic or ideas within this theme.</p>	<p>GEOG 3597.03 examines anthropogenic change of the Earth's climate through the burning of fossil fuels. The focus is not on human nor natural system evolution, but on a narrower set of questions: how does the specifically capitalist form of human society (which has only existed for a few hundred years) contributed to the planetary climate crisis? How could we generate a just response to this crisis (i.e., what are the enabling conditions for climate justice?)?</p> <p>GEOG 3597.03 examines these questions through the lens of historical political economy. Within this framework, human values, behaviors and institutions are seen as the reflections or reifications of the underlying class processes that define capitalism as a social formation. Grasping these processes, and this form, is therefore essential.</p> <p>At the outset of GEOG 3597.03, students study the most recent IPCC reports (presently AR6) of the three Working Groups; then (building upon AR6 WG3 SPM) study the political economy of fossil fuels through readings (including one full book, providing an opportunity for discussion about how to read a book), lectures, and in-class writing assignments. Later, the second half of the course is devoted to the political philosophy of climate change. Students read two books of political philosophy, complemented by several research papers specifically on the role of China in international climate change negotiations and China's political economy of fossil fuel use (crucial subtopics which are, alas, not well covered in the political philosophy of climate justice literature).</p>
<p><b>ELO 2.1</b> Identify, describe, and synthesize approaches or experiences.</p>	<p>Rather than present a single explanation for the crisis of climate change, or a single solution, GEOG 3597.03 trains students to examine the problem from multiple dimensions.</p> <p>To develop a robust analytical understanding of the climate crisis and the prospect for climate justice, the course begins by having students read texts representing multiple approaches to the politics of climate change (including several which I happen to reject, although in the classroom I present the arguments in a sincere and appreciative fashion, as it is better to engage in Socratic dialog with the students, i.e., to question them to ask whether and how what they are reading is true, and if so, what it means for their lives).</p>

	As the semester progresses, students are tasked to write responses to texts representing these different prospects—and to reflect upon their earlier thoughts. Through this process, GEOG 3597.03 stimulates critical and self-critical examination of multiple perspectives on the political economy of climate change and climate justice. The result of this procedure is to bring the students to a point where they can appreciate the virtues of social analysis of the climate crisis which is grounded in science and capable of accounting for the specific historical form of society that has generated the crisis.
<b>ELO 2.2</b> Demonstrate a developing sense of self as a learner through reflection, self-assessment, and creative work, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts.	<p>While the course starts—as it must—with a sober, scientific assessment of the global climate crisis, ultimately, this course aims at cultivating the imagination as much as rational understanding of the challenge. Cultivation of imagination (like all creative work) benefits from self-reflection. Every student comes into GEOG 3597.03 with a given conception of the world which shapes their understanding of the climate crisis and its relationship to their lives. One of the fundamental goals of the course is to help them come to understand themselves better by historicizing their own conception through critical self-reflection. Taken together, this allows them to examine the 'blind spots' of their own ideological positions and deepen their grounding in human history.</p> <p>GEOG 3597.03 is (relative to most 3000-level courses in SBS) reading-intensive. The course assigns five books in addition to three scientific reports around ten academic papers. (Apart from the books, all materials are freely available via Carmen.) Students are encouraged to acquire paper copies of the books and to bring them to class discussions. The principle means by which students engage in an advanced, in-depth, scholarly exploration of the political economy and philosophy of climate change, therefore, is through close reading and commentary upon texts.</p>

	Course activities and assignments to meet these ELOs
<b>ELO 3.1</b> Describe elements of the fundamental dependence of humans on Earth and environmental systems and on the resilience of these systems.	One of the fundamental premises of GEOG 3597.03 is that humans are a species which evolved under natural-historical conditions which are changing because of anthropogenic global warming. Seen against this long-term historical baseline, the resilience of social systems to the coming changes, while difficult to assess scientifically, is weak: students in GEOG 3597.03, at least, tend to

	<p>come into the class with such an understanding. Rather than try to convince them otherwise, my strategy is to help them deepen their critical understanding of the natural history of humanity and the implications of climate change. To say the least, doing so is challenging both analytically and psychologically.</p> <p>While these premises are initially posited as facts (drawing from scientific study of human evolution and recent climate change), through the course of the semester, they are elaborated through a Marxian natural history framework. But the matter is also taken up in a second path, i.e., through the sharing of feelings in the classroom. Students come to GEOG 3597.03 today with a profound sense of frustration with previous generations (for failing to reduce carbon emissions) and anxiety about the future. Reading, discussion, writing and reflection are oriented toward practicing a shift from an emotional to an historical understanding and political analysis.</p>
<b>ELO 3.2</b> Describe, analyze and critique the roles and impacts of human activity and technology on both human society and the natural world, in the past, currently, and in the future.	<p>For the historical political economy approach that provides the framework of GEOG 3597.03, questions of human activity and technology must be grasped within an analysis of the specific type of social formation that we live in today, viz., capitalism. This social formation (and the type of state it has engendered) must be examined critically to understand the inability to address the climate crisis justly.</p> <p>To examine this question critically, in GEOG 3597.03 students pass through the following cycle iteratively: [a] introduction to problem/subtopic in lecture --&gt; [b] reading about problem/subtopic --&gt; [c] reflection &amp; questioning in class --&gt; [d] in-class writing on problem/subtopic --&gt; [e] peer criticism and class discussion --&gt; [f] additional reading, review, or study --&gt; [g] writing (formal examination) --&gt; [h] grading and feedback.</p>
<b>ELO 3.3</b> Devise informed and meaningful responses to problems and arguments in the area of sustainability based on the interpretation of appropriate evidence and an explicit statement of values.	<p>To recapitulate: by building upon an historical political economy approach, in GEOG 3597.03 students first examine the challenges with sharply reducing fossil fuel consumption, then elaborate the conditions of possibility for a just response to the climate crisis, and then debate strategies to achieve these conditions.</p>



## **Additional Notes**

Because many of us are easily distracted by use of cell phones, computers, recording devices, and the like, such equipment should be turned off and placed out of sight during class. (I will say more about this at the start of class on day 2.)

Because our exams are essay-based and unique to each course-group, they cannot be taken late or made up. Exceptions are rare—emergencies only—and up to my discretion. Arrangements for a make-up exam should be made before the exam is distributed.

Grading options for the course are A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, E. Grading is not 'curved' and is based on the OSU standard scale.

An 'I', or Incomplete, will only be given under special circumstances and where I have made an arrangement with the student before the end of the semester. If you wish to request an 'I,' be prepared to explain (a) why an Incomplete is an appropriate grade and (b) when you will complete the incomplete.

Any academic misconduct will be reported to Ohio State's Office of Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). It is the responsibility of COAM to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. (The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed.) Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). COAM have prepared some useful suggestions to preserve academic integrity: see next page. For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct at <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

## **Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity**

Ohio State Office of Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, students are expected to complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. The following suggestions will help you preserve academic integrity [...].

**1. ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOURCES THAT YOU USE WHEN COMPLETING ASSIGNMENTS:** If you use another person's thoughts, ideas, or words in your work, you must acknowledge this fact. This applies regardless of whose thoughts, ideas, or words you use as well as the source of the information. If you do not acknowledge the work of others, you are implying that another person's work is your own, and such actions constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism is the theft of another's intellectual property [...].

**2. AVOID SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR:** Do not put yourself in a position where an instructor might suspect that you are cheating or that you have cheated. Even if you have not cheated, the mere suspicion of dishonesty might undermine an instructor's confidence in your work. Avoiding some of the most common types of suspicious behavior is simple. Before an examination, check your surroundings carefully and make sure that all of your notes are put away and your books are closed. An errant page of notes on the floor or an open book could be construed as a 'cheat sheet'. Keep your eyes on your own work. [...]

**3. DO NOT FABRICATE INFORMATION:** Never make up data, literature citations, experimental results, or any other type of information that is used in an academic or scholarly assignment.

**4. DO NOT FALSIFY ANY TYPE OF RECORD:** Do not alter, misuse, produce, or reproduce any University form or document or other type of form or document. Do not sign another person's name to any form or record (University or otherwise), and do not sign your name to any form or record that contains inaccurate or fraudulent information. Once an assignment has been graded and returned to you, do not alter it and ask that it be graded again. [...]

**5. DO NOT GIVE IN TO PEER PRESSURE:** Friends can be a tremendous help to one another when studying for exams or completing course assignments. However, don't let your friendships with others jeopardize your college career. Before lending or giving any type of information to a friend or acquaintance, consider carefully what you are lending (giving), what your friend might do with it, and what the consequences might be if your friend misuses it. [...]

**6. DO NOT SUBMIT THE SAME WORK FOR CREDIT IN TWO COURSES:** Instructors do not give grades in a course, rather students earn their grades. Thus, instructors expect that students will earn their grades by completing all course requirements (assignments) while they are actually enrolled in the course. If a student uses his/her work from one course to satisfy the requirements of a different course, that student is not only violating the spirit of the assignment, but he/she is also putting other students in the course at a disadvantage. Even though it might be your own work, you are not permitted to turn in the same work to meet the requirements of more than one course. [...]

**7. DO YOUR OWN WORK:** When you turn in an assignment with only your name on it, then the work on that assignment should be yours and yours alone. This means that you should not copy any work done by or work together with another student (or other person). [...]

**8. MANAGE YOUR TIME:** Do not put off your assignments until the last minute. If you do, you might put yourself in a position where your only options are to turn in an incomplete (or no) assignment or to cheat. [...]