Climate Change

Philosophy 4250

Prof. Adam Briggle | University of North Texas | Fall 2020

Instructor: Adam Briggle | adam.briggle@unt.edu | 940-536-8710 (cell) | ENV 225 | Office hours (by phone or zoom) Tues and Thurs 10-12 or we can arrange alternative times

Teaching Assistant: David Mackh | dmackh1@gmail.com

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this course is scheduled for remote delivery via Canvas.

Course Description: Climate change is a defining challenge for the 21st century: how we think about and act on climate change now will profoundly shape the future of civilization. This course takes an interdisciplinary and problem-oriented approach to climate change. It surveys existing knowledge and uncertainties, asks fundamental questions, seeks conceptual clarity, pays attention to media and rhetoric, and engages in normative assessments. The goal is to provide orientation: a view of the decisive features and crucial dimensions of climate change so that students have a map and guiding tools to use as they think about and act on climate change throughout their lives.

The course is organized into six modules. It begins (1) by developing some tools to map and navigate the landscape. Next (2) we shore up our knowledge with some basic climate science and important terminology. We then (3) engage in some ‘meta’ climate studies to examine media, political interests, and worldviews and their interpretive and rhetorical devices. Next (4), we look at climate policy options and their history before turning specifically to (5) climate change in the 2020 US Presidential election. We conclude (6) with a look at climate solutions, ethics, and justice as we ask: what should we think and what should we do about climate change?

Evaluation

Your grade will be based on three kinds of assignments:

Quizzes: 33.3%
Mid-term exam: 33.3%
Final exam: 33.3%
Total: 100%

Grades will be based on the traditional A-F scale, where an A is 90-100%, B is 80-89%, C is 70-79%, D is 60-69%, and F is 59% and below.
Assignments

Each assignment has clearly marked due dates in Canvas. No late assignments will be accepted unless they are accompanied with documentation establishing a UNT-approved reason for delayed work.

1. Quizzes: Taken directly from the instructional materials (readings, videos, and lectures). No surprises, nothing tricky. They are designed to keep you on track and help you to absorb the main ideas. You are welcome to consult the instructional materials and your notes as you take the quiz. Quizzes will be due weekly on Sundays at 11:59 pm and they will be posted at least four days prior to the due date.

2. Mid-term exam: A mix of multiple choice and short answer questions based on reading and lecture material. You are welcome to consult the instructional materials and your notes while taking the exam. The mid-term exam will be posted by October 4. The mid-term exam will be due at 11:59 pm on October 12.

3. Final exam: Similar in form to the mid-term. It will focus mostly on the second half of class but will include some comprehensive material. You are welcome to consult the instructional materials and your notes while taking the exam. The final exam will be posted by December 4. The final exam will be due at 11:59 p.m. on December 9.

All due dates will be posted on Canvas. Send questions to adam.briggle@unt.edu.

Mission Statement

I offer this course in service to the broader mission of the UNT College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, which is “to kindle the thirst for truth, justice, and beauty; to foster cultural literacy and scientific investigation; and to cultivate thinking, speaking, and writing abilities characterized by clear expression and logically coherent, evidence-based arguments. We see these as the values, forms of knowledge, and skills most needed by citizens of a democracy and by productive members of the global workforce.”

Instructional Materials

There are no books to purchase for this class. All readings, videos, and instructional materials (or links to those materials) can be found in the appropriate spots on the course Canvas site.

Attendance and Study Tips

This is an online course and there are no requirements to attend any lecture or other activity at a specific time. That is, there is no required synchronous events. I will be recording and posting lectures via zoom throughout the semester and posting the quizzes and exams in a timely manner. I will consider you in good attendance if you watch those lectures the week that they are posted (and take good notes!) and stay on schedule with the assigned readings and quizzes. You
won’t be able to march ahead of me in this class (other than maybe doing some reading in advance), because I am going to be posting fresh material fairly regularly. If you stay engaged on a weekly basis you won’t fall behind.

I recommend carving out some time two or three days per week to devote to this class. In other words, treat this like a regularly scheduled class… but you get to choose your own schedule. Work in the morning, the afternoon, weekends, the middle of the night… – whatever fits your needs; just strive to keep this class part of your weekly routine. I will strive to post lecture videos with slides and lecture notes (word doc) in a timely fashion. I recommend downloading the notes and using that document to help organize your own notes. If you find that you are falling behind or need any help, please reach out to me at adam.briggle@unt.edu.
Course Schedule

Start Here and Introduction

The first step is to head to the “start here” material found in “modules” on Canvas where you can find helpful information about Canvas and remote/online learning at UNT. Then head to the “introduction” module to learn more about the course and about me, my teaching philosophy, and my credentials. In the “introduction” module:

*Watch: Lecture “Introduction to the Course.”

Module 1: Tools for Thinking through Climate Change

Week 1: Aug. 24 – Aug. 30

Learning Objectives:

- Assess our baseline knowledge about climate change
- Explore tools for thinking through climate change
- Recognize climate change as a philosophical topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Instructional materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | • Read: Adam Briggle *Thinking through Climate Change* “Preface,” “Chap. 1 Introduction,” and “Chap. 2 The Unnatural Growth of the Natural”  
• Watch: Lecture The Anthropocene  
• Watch: Lecture Problem-oriented Thinking: Our Method  
• Watch: Lecture Mapping the Climate Change Landscape | Climate trivia – baseline knowledge assessment. All students receive 100% just for trying it. (Due Aug. 30, 11:59 pm) |

Here are some questions we’ll ponder in Module 1

- What do you know about climate change? Where do you get your information from?
- How much are you worried about climate change? How much should we be worried? When you imagine the future, does it look bright or grim? Why?
- What does philosophy have to do with climate change?

Module 2 Climate Science and Basic Terms

Weeks 2 and 3: Aug. 31 – Sept. 13
Learning Objectives:

- Understand basic climate science
- Examine climate science as knowledge, institutions, and methods/tools
- Explore trustworthy sources of interpretation and analysis of climate science
- Know key terms and concepts central to discussions about climate change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Instructional materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2    | Watch: PBS “Climate science: what you need to know” 2014  
Read: Brad Plumer et al. “9 questions about climate change you were too embarrassed to ask” 2018  
Watch: Lecture Introduction: What is (Climate) Science?  
Watch: Lecture Climate Science as a Body of Knowledge  
Watch: Lecture Climate Science as Institutions  
Watch: Lecture Climate Science as Methods and Tools | Quiz 2a  
Due Sept. 6 |
| 3    | Read: IPCC “Global Warming of 1.5°C: Summary for Policymakers” 2018  
Watch: Lecture From Data to Meaning: Trustworthy Science Sense-makers  
Watch: Lecture Building our Climate Change Vocabulary  
Watch: Lecture What Does it Mean and What Must be Done? | Quiz 2b  
Due Sept. 13 |

Here are some questions we’ll ponder in Module 2

- What is the climate? What is climate change?
- What is causing climate change? What are the impacts of climate change?
- What key terms are involved in basic climate change literacy?
- How do we know what we know about climate change? What is largely settled and what is still uncertain? How should we act under conditions of uncertainty?

*Extra Resources: Check out the “Climate Change 101” document on Canvas.

Module 3 Climate Science in Context I: Theories of Climate Politics

Weeks 4, 5, and 6: Sept. 14 – Oct. 4

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how problems are defined and contested in democratic policymaking and the role of science and media in these processes
- Examine the social contexts of science and critique the linear model for science policy
- Compare different explanations for disagreement about climate change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Instructional materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Here are some questions we’ll ponder in Module 3

- What is a problem? How are problems framed and adjudicated in democratic policy-making processes? What is the difference between policy and politics?
- What are the social and political dimensions of climate science? What roles does science play in climate policy and politics? What roles do the media play?
- What do people believe about climate change? Why do people have different beliefs? How do different worldviews see climate change?
- What is the difference between a legitimate and an illegitimate controversy about climate change? What is a climate denier? What is a climate contrarian – and is that good or bad?
- What are the connections between climate change and capitalism? Can there be such a thing as sustainable and equitable forms of capitalism?

*Extra resources: For another perspective on being f****d check out Bill McKibben “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math” 2012. And for another perspective on being fine check out Michael Shellenberger “On behalf of environmentalists, I apologize for the climate scare” 2020. And if you want to dive into the controversy stirred by Shellenberger, check out this article on Climate Nexus.
*Mid-term Exam – posted on Oct. 4, DUE 11:59 pm Oct. 12th*

**Module 4 Climate Science in Context II: Climate Policies**

Weeks 7 and 8: Oct. 5 – Oct. 18

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the main policy alternatives available to address climate change
- Examine the history of climate policy and politics
- Compare and assess contemporary climate policies and politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Instructional materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7    | • Read: Adam Briggle *Thinking through Climate Change* Chapter 3 “Walrus guts and snake brains”  
      • Read: Adam Briggle *Thinking through Climate Change* Chapter 7 “First world problems”  
      • Watch: Lecture The Kaya Identity and the Overton Window  
      • Watch: Lecture Adaptation, Mitigation, and Geoengineering  
      • Watch: Lecture The Contemporary Climate Policy Landscape: Toward Standards and Investments? | Quiz 4a |
| 8    | • Watch: Naomi Klein “The case for a Green New Deal” 2019  
      • Read: Ted Nordhaus “The empty radicalism of the climate apocalypse” 2019  
      • Watch: Lecture Decarbonization, Carbon Budgets, and Carbon Taxes  
      • Watch: Lecture The Green New Deal  
      • Watch: Lecture Electrify Everything | Quiz 4b |

Here are some questions we’ll ponder in Module 4

- What are the range of choices? Do we need to imagine and create a wider possibility space?
- Who has made what decisions up to this point?
- What are the major policy debates now?
- What is politics? How does it differ from policy? What does climate politics look like around the world?

**Module 5 Climate Change and the US Presidential Election**

Weeks 9, 10, and 11: Oct. 19 – Nov. 8

Learning Objectives:
• Compare and contrast the records and policy ideas proposed by the candidates
• Assess the candidates’ positions on climate change
• Examine the political discourse in the US around climate change and explore the implications of the Presidential election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Instructional materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9    | • Read: Stacy Feldman and Marianne Lavelle “Donald Trump’s record on climate change” 2020  
      • Watch: Lecture Deregulation, Energy Dominance, and the Trump Administration  
      • Watch: Lecture The Honey Badger in the Coal Mine | Quiz 5a |
| 10   | • Read: Read: James Bruggers “Joe Biden on climate change: where the candidate stands” 2020  
      • Watch: Joe Biden and Al Gore “A virtual climate change town hall” 2020  
      • Watch: Lecture Fracking during the Obama-Biden years  
      • Watch: Lecture The Stakes of the 2020 Election | Quiz 5b |
| 11   | • Read: TBD – election coverage  
      • Read: TBD – election coverage  
      • Watch: Lecture TBD – election reactions  
      • Watch: Lecture TBD – election reactions | Quiz 5c |

Here are some questions we’ll ponder in Module 5

• What are the candidates’ positions and policy ideas on climate change? How do they communicate their ideas?
• What differences exist on climate within and between the two major American political parties? What about the Green Party?
• What does the American public think about the candidates’ positions on climate change?
• How does climate rank in importance for the candidates and different parts of the public? How does climate relate to other issues at stake in the election?

Module 6 What Should We Do?

Weeks 12, 13, 14, and 15: Nov. 8 – Dec. 3

Learning Objectives:

• Examine the fundamental values and beliefs that ultimately drive climate change
• Assess alternatives and ideas about our ability to find technological solutions to climate change
• Explore different interpretations of climate justice, responsibility, and ethics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Instructional materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>• Read: <em>The Drawdown Review</em> 2020 Selections TBD</td>
<td>Quiz 6a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Lecture Our Way of Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Lecture Climate Change as a Collective Action Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Lecture The Tech-Fix Titans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>• Read: <em>The Drawdown Review</em> 2020 Selections TBD</td>
<td>Quiz 6b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Lecture Wishful Thinking and Climate Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Lecture Climate Justice as Growing vs. Sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/15</td>
<td>• Read: <em>The Drawdown Review</em> 2020 Selections TBD</td>
<td>No quiz but material will be on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Master Shi Heng Yi “5 Hindrances to Self-Mastery” 2020</td>
<td>final exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch: Lecture The Big Picture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are some questions we’ll ponder in Module 6

- How can we think through the ethics and justice dimensions of climate change?
- What should we make of different kinds of activist tactics? What should we make of different kinds of tech fixes?
- What alternative futures can we imagine? How do we get to better futures and avoid the worse ones?

* Final Exam -- posted by December 4, due at 11:59 p.m. on December 9

**Disability Accommodation**

UNT Policy 16.001 Disability Accommodation for Students and Academic Units.

“The University of North Texas (UNT or University) does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission, treatment, or access to its programs or activities, nor in employment in its programs or activities. The University is committed to providing equal educational access for qualified students with disabilities in accordance with state and federal laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as Amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition, the University is committed to making all programs and activities sponsored by UNT accessible, as required by the Texas Accessibility Standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. To this end, all academic units are willing to make reasonable and appropriate adjustments to the classroom environment and the teaching, testing, or learning methodologies in order to facilitate equality of educational access for persons with disabilities.”

**Student Academic Integrity**

UNT Policy 06.003 Student Academic Integrity Faculty Affairs.
“The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University’s actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.”