

**(DRAFT SYLLABUS: FINAL VERSION DISTRIBUTED 5/19/10)**

**POSC 265g**



## **Environmental Challenges**

Summer 2010, May 19 – June 28

Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. – 1:50 p.m.

VKC 101

Website on Blackboard at [blackboard.usc.edu](http://blackboard.usc.edu)

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Office hours: 2:30 – 4:00 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays

Today, global climate change confronts humanity with one of our gravest crises. Earlier civilizations have collapsed under the weight of much lesser environmental challenges. The contemporary challenges from climate change for policy and politics loom at every scale, from the global to the personal. How can the world reach agreement on what to do? Can policymakers, business and the public in the United States alter the current course to achieve a sustainable economy? What changes would we as Americans have to make in our everyday lives to make sustainability possible? This course employs a variety of interactive methods to introduce you to these essential questions, and at the same time to provide an overview of U.S. policymaking and politics in general. Classes will be built around

films, group activities, and role-playing exercises on domestic and international policymaking.

In the first two weeks of the course, we will examine the early history of efforts to meet environmental challenges, the overall dimensions of contemporary global environmental challenges, and in particular the immense challenge that global climate change represents. We then turn to an overview of the institutional infrastructure of environmental law in the United States, and of policies like air pollution regulation that provide much of the current framework for efforts to address climate change. We will also consider what difference personal changes in lifestyles can make for meeting the challenge of climate change.

Most of the second half of the semester will center around exercises that will enable us to analyze the politics of climate change policy at the national level, and on the international stage. In one exercise, we will analyze law-making in the U.S. Congress to address the climate change issue. In a second exercise, we will examine the positions of the major global players in international negotiations, and prospects for coordinated international action on climate change issues.

The final class session will return to the local level. In the final course assignment, teams of students will each propose and make the case for a specific innovation at USC to address the challenge of climate change. This assignment will give you a chance to reconsider one more time how the possibilities for addressing the global challenge of climate change are also challenges for local communities like our university.

### **Readings:**

The following required texts have been ordered and are available for purchase in the Bookstore. They will also be placed on Reserve in Leavey Library.

John Houghton, *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Jonathan Harrington, *The Climate Diet: How You Can Cut Carbon, Cut Costs and Save the Planet* (Earthscan Publications, 2008).

Joseph Romm, *Straight Up: America's Fiercest Climate Blogger Takes on the Status Quo Media, Politicians, and Clean Energy Solutions*. (Island Press, 2010).

Additional articles, reports, etc. will be assigned over the course of the semester on a number of topics. All these readings will either be posted on the Blackboard website, or distributed in class, or both.

## **Course Requirements**

You will be required to do all assigned reading, attend class regularly and contribute actively to our discussions.

The written assignments are all coordinated with exercises that will enable us to examine the complex dimensions of the climate crisis and actions to address it, from the personal to the global levels. An initial Personal Sustainability Challenge will consist of a personal experiment in greenhouse gas reduction, to be discussed in a written report of 2-4 pages that will be due June 4. A final internet posting of 150-200 words will enable you to reflect again on this assignment at the end of the semester. Details on this assignment will be handed out in the first class session.

The second practical exercise, to be carried in teams of 2 students, will require you to think practically about how climate change can be addressed at the local level. In this Local Sustainability Challenge, you and a teammate will be responsible for developing a practical proposal to reduce greenhouse gases. A handout to be distributed by the second week of June will explain this assignment further. Along with a five-page paper explaining and making the case for your proposal, you will be expected to present your proposal in the final class session of the semester.

The remaining assignments will center on policymaking at the national and the global levels. For the National Policymaking Challenge, each student will research the positions on climate legislation taken by interest organization in the policymaking process, to be chosen from a list of environmentalist groups, industry representatives, etc., and one member of Congress. A 2-4 page Blackboard posting on the positions of both actors will be due by 3 p.m. on Tuesday, June 15. In the subsequent class, you will then be responsible for representing these viewpoints in a discussion of the coalitions have facilitated and frustrated national legislation on climate change in the United States.

In the case of the Global Policymaking Challenge, students will be assigned in groups to represent major countries in the process of negotiating a global

climate agreement. For this assignment you will be expected to research the positions you will be representing and prepare a 2-4 page written report as background for our in-class negotiating sessions. Your report will be due to be posted in the relevant Discussion Forum on the Blackboard website for the course by 3 p.m. on Tuesday, June 22. You should also come to class the following day prepared to discuss your and your classmate's positions, and to negotiate with other role players.

Further instructions on the two policymaking Challenges will be distributed in separate handouts, and signups will take place by June 9.

Final grades will be based on the following weights:

- Personal sustainability challenge: 25% (20% initial paper, 5% final posting)
- Local sustainability challenge: 25% (20% for written report)
- National policymaking challenge: 25% (20% for posting)
- International policymaking challenge: 25% (15% for written report)

This list of assignments is based on the assumption that all students will do all the required reading, attend all classes and participate regularly and constructively in discussions. Failure to do any of these tasks will be considered just cause for lowering of your final grade.

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

## **Semester Plan**

**(Note that one local field trip is also planned during the term; details on this to be arranged)**

### **May 19: Introduction and Organizational Session**

John Houghton, *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), (introduction to global warming (pp. 1-31)).  
Video in class: "Mullholland's Dream"

### **May 24: Environmental Challenges and Civilization**

How ancient civilizations built cities; environmental challenges as the cause of civilizational collapse; whether/how modern societies overcame these challenges

Jared Diamond, "The Last Americans," *Harpers* (June 2003), online at <http://www.mindfully.org/Heritage/2003/Civilization-Collapse-EndJun03.htm>  
Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science*, Vol. 162 (1968), pp. 1243 – 1248, online at <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/162/3859/1243>  
(also start reading for May 28-June 2)

### **May 26: Contemporary Environmental Challenges and Climate Change**

Global environmental challenges today (overview); resource scarcity and the tragedy of the commons; overview of climate history; currently ongoing climate change; causes and emerging consequences

Film in class: "An Inconvenient Truth"  
Houghton, pp. 35-65, 137-233, 260-274.  
International Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment: Overall "Summary for Policymakers" at [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4\\_syr\\_spm.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf)

### **June 2: What is to be Done?**

What can be done about climate change; possibilities for individual action; morality of climate change action; why personal action is difficult (or not?); influences on opinion about climate policy

Jonathan Harrington, *The Climate Diet: How You Can Cut Carbon, Cut Costs and Save the Planet* (Earthscan Publications, 2008), pp. 30- 123, 143-157).  
Houghton, chapter on philosophical foundations (pp. 239-257).

## **June 4, 5 p.m.: Personal Sustainability Challenge paper due**

### **June 7: National Policy and Politics of the Environment: An Overview**

Overview of the U.S. (environmental) policymaking process: the example of air pollution regulation; approaches to risk; market mechanisms in environmental policy

Michael E. Kraft, *Environmental Policy and Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Longman, 2009), pp. 59-87 (on Blackboard website).

Judith Layzer, *The Environmental Case* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press), pp. 26-53 (on Blackboard website).

Walter A. Rosenbaum, "More Choice: The Battle Over Regulatory Economics," in *Environmental Politics and Policy*, Sixth Edition (Washington, DC: CQ Press), pp. 140-152 (on Blackboard website).

Optional recommended reading:

Daniel Mazmanian, "Achieving Air Quality: The Los Angeles Experience", Bedrosian Center Working paper (2006), online at <http://www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/bedrosian/private/docs/mazmanianairquality.pdf>

### **June 9: Climate Change and Related Policy Issues**

Overview of energy resources; nuclear power; biodiversity and deforestation: the example of the Amazon; sustainable cities; set-up of national policymaking exercise

Film in class: "Who Killed the Electric Car?"

Houghton, pp. 325-384.

Joseph Romm, *Straight Up: America's Fiercest Climate Blogger Takes on the Status Quo Media, Politicians, and Clean Energy Solutions*. (Island Press, 2010) (excerpts to be arranged).

### **June 14-16: Climate Change Politics in the U.S.**

Current policy options; U.S. and state level policy initiatives; interests and coalitions in national policymaking; role-playing exercise in national law-making

Romm, excerpts.

(Packet of articles on recent U.S. climate legislation)

(work on National Challenge research project)

**Postings due on Blackboard website Discussion forum by 3 p.m. June 15**

**June 21-23: The International Politics of Climate Change**

The international dimensions of climate change; impacts by world region; the model of ozone regulation; the Kyoto treaty and subsequent remedies; role-playing exercise in climate change negotiations

Houghton, pp. 290-320.

(read International Panel on climate change Fourth Assessment online:

"Summary for Policymakers" of three individual panel reports, regional assessments in Second Panel Report, at <http://www.ipcc.ch/>)

Nicholas Stern, "Key Elements of a Global Deal on Climate Change," (London: London School of Economics, 2008), available at the Blackboard website and online at

[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/climateNetwork/publications/KeyElementsOfAGlobalDeal\\_30Apr08.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/climateNetwork/publications/KeyElementsOfAGlobalDeal_30Apr08.pdf)

(Packet of newspaper articles on Copenhagen Accord)

**Postings due on Blackboard website Discussion Forum by 3 p.m. June 22**

**June 28: Presentation of Local Sustainability Challenge Results and Papers; Concluding Discussion**