

Sonoma State University

Department of Sociology

SOCI 329 Sociology of Climate Change, FA 2021

Instructor Contact Information

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Office Hours: Tu/Th 5-6PM, W 3-4PM

Office Link <https://SonomaState.zoom.us/j/98940628224?pwd=WVNYcHhwK1dySEU3ZHEjREU3Uzd2dz09>

Meeting ID: 989 4062 8224

Passcode: 265529

General Course Information

Class Days/Time: Weds 5PM – 7PM Synchronous Class Time + 2 hours of Asynchronous class per week

Classroom: Zoom link embedded in Canvas page

Catalog Description

This course approaches anthropogenic (human caused) climate change as a social problem. It addresses the social, political, economic and cultural factors that shape drivers, impacts, and responses to global climate change. Rather than studying global warming as an environmental problem or one caused by humanity as a whole, this course focuses on the systems of stratification and inequality that give some humans power over others to shape planetary systems. It emphasizes the study of intersectional power dynamics that produce climate change, the unequal impacts of climate change on communities, and various existing or possible responses societies adopt in the face of unprecedented environmental risk. The course explores processes of environmental change, but also asks what it means to be human in a dynamic, ecological system.

Course Description

One of the most widely recognized symbols of climate change is a polar bear on a melting glacier. Media coverage identifies fossil fuels as the cause of climate change. Policy makers negotiate the acceptable limits of temperature rise in numbers like 350 ppm. Despite a consensus that climate change is anthropogenic (human driven), the way we talk about it often obscures the social dimensions of the problem. Where are the humans in talk of polar bears, fossil fuels, and ppms?

This class will explore the **social, political, economic** and **cultural** factors that shape **drivers, impacts, and responses** to climate change, an issue some have dubbed a “super wicked problem”. A super wicked problem is a problem that is incredibly difficult to solve because it is interconnected with other problems, and because we have incomplete or contradictory knowledge and many people and opinions involved. Further, solving wicked problems like climate change produces major social and economic changes. The emission of greenhouse gasses is driven by modern social structures, including, the nation state system, capitalism, colonialism,

and historical processes that shape the way humans relate to the environment. By applying the tools of sociology to the problem of climate change, we will ask what it means to recognize that climate change is human caused. Rather than studying global warming as an environmental problem or one caused by humanity as a whole, this course focuses on the systems of stratification and inequality that give some humans power over others to shape planetary systems. The course emphasizes the study of (1) power dynamics that produce climate change, (2) the unequal impacts of climate change on communities, and (3) various existing or possible responses societies adopt in the face of unprecedented environmental risk. This course of study will allow us to better understand processes of environmental change, but it will also help us make sense of what it means to be human, in a dynamic, ecological system.

Learning Objectives & Operating Assumptions

Course Learning Outcomes (SLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the social dimensions of climate change from a sociological perspective.
2. Explain competing theoretical perspectives that theorize the causes, effects, and potential responses to climate change.
3. Assess public, scientific, and political claims about climate change.
4. Interpret, and analyze climate change as a social problem.
5. Compare and contrast a variety of social responses to climate change from communities in the US and globally.
6. Identify policy changes and public actions that can further the projects of mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

Operating Assumptions

People's experiences of and knowledge about the world (including the environment) differ by race, class, gender and nationality, amongst other variables that inform our cultural worldviews. Although we recognize that different groups may have their own perspectives on environmental problems, we take as a shared starting point that environmental damage, including climate change, is happening, and humans are its primary agent.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbooks

Required Books

1. Klein, Naomi. 2014. "This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate." Simon & Schuster, New York.
2. Marino, Elizabeth. 2015. "Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground: An Ethnography of Climate Change in Shishmaref Alaska." University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks.
3. Nagel, Joane. 2016. "Gender and Climate Change: Impacts, Science and Policy." Routledge, New York & London.

4. Miller, Todd. 2017. "Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration and Homeland Security." City Lights Books, San Francisco.

Optional Book (digital PDF will be provided but you may purchase if a hard copy is preferred)

5. Méndez, Michael. 2020. "Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement". Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Additional readings will be posted to Canvas.

Other Equipment/Material Requirements/Software

Students may be asked to pay a small rental or licensing fee to access digital films, ranging from \$3-7 per film. Whenever possible, library or free resources will be used, or films will be screened in class.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete all required readings, and review all additional course materials (films, lectures, etc.) prior to the class meeting that week. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course. Active course participation is expected, and will be demonstrated via participation in class, completion of class activities, a weekly journal entry, and participation in presentations and papers.

Evaluation

This course requires high levels of engagement and participation, both in and out of class. Because this is an upper division course, I assume that you are proficient at college-level reading, writing, and thinking, and expect you to synthesize high volumes of material, and develop your own ideas in response.

The following assignments will be used to evaluate student learning, engagement, and proficiency in course concepts.

Quizzes – 10%

Quizzes are unscheduled and will be used to keep students on track with reading, and to assess student reading comprehension.

Discussion Board Posts – 10%

Students will be asked to participate in Canvas discussion boards in which they respond to posted questions and reflect on films, activities, and current events throughout the term.

Reflective Journal Writing – 15%

Students will keep a journal of their thoughts about course materials and the ideas they encounter in the class.

Group Discussion Lead – 15%

Students will work in groups to lead a class discussion on an assigned reading. Sign ups will happen in the second week of class.

Climate Ethnography – 50%

Throughout the term, students will work on a climate ethnography, a form of qualitative research that involves observing people in their everyday lives, taking field notes, conducting interviews, and looking for patterns. This project is designed to help students consider how communities might experience climate change differently, based on social location, cultural worldview, economic status, and other sociological variables. The ethnography includes the following parts, which will be due throughout the semester:

1. Proposal
2. Understanding Ethnography
3. Field Notes
4. Interview transcripts
5. Memos
6. Write up of analysis (Final project)

A note on writing: This is a writing intensive class! You are encouraged to take this opportunity to develop your writing skills. Learning how to write well is one of the best things you can do in college! It will help you tremendously in the future. Therefore, I expect all writing to be well organized, well crafted, and free of typos.

Tips for writing well: Consider purchasing *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, a tiny book with lots of tips on how to write well.

Visit the SSU Writing Center: The Writing Center has an online scheduling system for appointments! Students can schedule up to 2 one-hour writing tutoring appointments each week. Visit <http://mywco.com/ssularc> to make an appointment. For additional assistance, I strongly recommend getting familiar with all resources provided by the Learning and Academic Resource Center (LARC): <https://web.sonoma.edu/writingcenter/index.html>.

Evaluation & Grading

More detailed instructions for each assignment will be provided on Canvas.

This class is designed to reward students for effort, engagement, and improvement. This means you must complete all the work to pass the class. Failure to turn in any major assignment will result in an F grade for the class. Students who miss more than 3 class activities or journal entries will not pass the course.

Late Assignments

Assignment deadlines are posted on the syllabus and in Canvas. Any updates to assignment deadlines will be made via Canvas announcements. If there is a conflict between the syllabus and the deadline posted on Canvas, trust Canvas as the most up-to-date source of information.

Although I am firm about completing work, I am flexible about the timeline in which you do so, and willingly offer extensions for students who are struggling with work/life balance, health and wellness, family obligations, and other challenges that make it hard to complete work by the preferred deadline. Please email me if you need an extension.

Following deadlines keeps us on track and makes sure we all move through the course at roughly the same pace. I have a strong preference for following deadlines, but I understand that we are living in pandemic conditions during times of climate change, economic insecurity, social unrest and racial injustice. If you need additional time to complete an assignment in a meaningful fashion, please let me know as soon as extenuating circumstances come to light. Deadline extension requests should include a proposed alternative deadline that you think is feasible--be sure to give yourself sufficient time to rest and recover from whatever has made it difficult for you to meet the original deadline though!

I do not penalize assignments that are just a little bit late (i.e. the deadline is 11:59PM and you submit it at 12:05AM), so just get it in and don't worry about it. You do not need to email me about these incidences.

End of term deadlines are firm, as I will be working within the University's grade submission deadlines, as well as my own personal time allotment for completing and submitting your final grades.

Late assignments will not receive feedback as quickly as assignments turned in by the deadline.

Grading

A passing grade requires completion of all written work and exams. If you believe you must gain a particular grade in this course it is your responsibility to earn it. Per University policy, final grades can only be changed in cases of mathematical or clerical error. Grades of "incomplete" are only given to students who have completed at least 50% of the course requirements, have produced work of passing quality, and have good cause.

Graded Assignments

For graded assignments, and the final course grade, the grade scale is as follows:

- A Excellent (90%+ [of total points])
- B Good (80-89%)
- C Fair (70-79%)
- D (Below expectation 70%)
- F (Very poor, not passing)

Feedback

Most assignments for this course are written, which takes time to grade. I try to provide regular, meaningful feedback throughout the term, but some assignments will receive more attention than others. You are always welcome to reach out to me to ask for additional feedback if you don't understand why you received the grade you earned. If you would like feedback on a specific assignment, please bring it to my attention in office hours or via e-mail.

Major assignments will ideally be graded within two weeks, unless things are on fire, literally or figuratively.

Some class activities may not be updated immediately, but if you did them according to instructions, you can count on full credit.

Challenging a Grade

If you disagree with a grade for a written assignment, please bring your concern to my attention via e-mail. Only do so after reading and reflecting on all the feedback you received on the assignment. If you still believe the grade is unfair, send me an email, explaining why you think so, including evidence from your work. I will either respond via email, or suggest that we set up an appointment to discuss your concern.

If you believe there is an error in the grading of an automatic assignment, such as a Canvas quiz, please let me know and I will check the Canvas settings.

Percentages represent the available points students can earn in each of these areas. Regardless of points, students cannot pass this class without completing all assignments.

Course Reading Plan

Note: This syllabus provides an overview of the course reading schedule. Students should check Canvas weekly for updates and changes. Also note that we only meet once a week but have an assigned 4 credits worth of class time. The reading schedule reflects this. Each week includes both core readings, and current events or updates. Focus on core readings but spend some time thinking about how they relate to the current events. Additional “recommended” readings will be posted on Canvas if students wish to pursue a topic they find interesting, but these readings are not required.

UNIT 1: Guiding Question – What is the state of the climate? How do we know, and how do social factors shape this knowledge?

WEEK 1 – Introduction to thinking about climate change socially

8/18/21

Read:

Atkins, Emily. 2021. "[What can I do? Anything.](#)” Heated.

Willox, Ashlee Consolo. 2012. Climate change as the work of mourning. Environment & Ethics. (Canvas)

Nagel, Joan. 2015. Gender & Climate Change. Introduction, pp. 1-7 and Ch 1, “What is Global Climate Change?” pp. 9-21 (Textbook)

Spera, Stephanie. 2021. “[234 scientists read 14,000+ research papers to write the IPCC climate report – here’s what you need to know and why it’s a big deal](#)” The Conversation.

Watch:

Sammartano, Mike. 2019. Weather vs. Climate. (4:39)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Aigcv7UnTU>

NASA Space Place. 2020. What is the Greenhouse Effect? (2:29)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SN5-DnOHQmE>

Assignments

Reflective Journal Week 1

Introductory discussion post

WEEK 2 – Climate change as a social problem

8/25/21

Read:

Weart, Spencer. 2011. “The Development of the Concept of Dangerous Anthropogenic Climate Change” in Oxford Handbook. (Canvas)

Oreskes, Naomi. 2004. “The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change.” Science. 306(5702):1686 (online)

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1995. “The Sociology of the Mind” from Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology. Harvard University Press. (Canvas)

Gleiser, Marcelo. 2016. “[After 10 Years, 'An Inconvenient Truth' Is Still Inconvenient](#)”. NPR. (online)

Watch:

[An Inconvenient Truth](#) (free on Pluto TV, with ads, or on Amazon Prime for subscribers)

Assignments

Reflective Journal Week 2

Discussion post – An Inconvenient Truth Response

WEEK 3 – Climate and Inequality

9/1/21

Read:

Méndez, Michael. 2020. Ch 1, “Seeing Carbon Reductionism and Climate Change from the Streets”, in [Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement](#). (online access via SSU library)

Méndez, Michael. Ch 2, “Climate Embodiment”, in [Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement](#). (online access via SSU library)

“[Understanding Ethnography](#)” from [Ethnography Made Simple](#) (online)

Berwyn, Bob. 2021. “[Global Ice Loss on Pace to Drive Worst-Case Sea Level Rise](#),” Inside Climate News. January 25. (online)

Watch:

[An Inconvenient Sequel](#) (SSU library)

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #1]

Climate Ethnography Part 1 – Proposals

Reflective Journal Week 3

Discussion Post – An Inconvenient Sequel Response

WEEK 4 – Climate Change & Indigenous Peoples

9/8/21

Read:

Marino, Elizabeth. 2015. *Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground*, Ch 1-4, pp. 1-44. (Textbook)

Whyte, Kyle Powys. *Our Ancestors Dystopia Now*. (Canvas)

“[Thinking Like an Ethnographer](#)” and “[Collecting Data and Taking Notes](#)”, from [Ethnography Made Simple](#) (online)

Watch:

The Condor & the Eagle [maybe—access pending]

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #2]

Climate Ethnography Part 2 – Understanding Ethnography

Reflective Journal Week 4

Discussion Post – The Condor & the Eagle Response

WEEK 5

9/15/21

Read:

Marino, Elizabeth. 2015. *Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground*, Ch 4-6, pp. 45-100. (Textbook)

Flavelle and Goodluck, 2021. “Dispossessed Again: Climate Change Hits Native Americans Especially Hard” <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/27/climate/climate-Native-Americans.html> (online or Canvas)

Watch:

No film this week

Assignments

Reflective Journal Week 5

UNIT 2: Guiding Question – What causes climate change?

WEEK 6 – Energy

9/22/21

Read:

Smil, Vaclav. 2017. “Energy and Society” and “Between Determinism and Choice” from *Energy and Civilization: A History*. (Canvas)

Shove, Elizabeth, & Walker. “What Is Energy For? Social Practice and Energy Demand.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 31.5 (2014): 41-58. (Canvas)

Watch:

[Blowout: Inside America’s Energy Gamble](#) (Amazon)

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #3]

Reflective Journal Week 6

Discussion Post – Blowout Response

WEEK 7 – Capitalism & Climate

9/29/21

Read:

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything*; Introduction, Ch 1, “The Right is Right: The Revolutionary Power of Climate Change,” Ch 2, “Hot Money: How Free Market Fundamentalism Helped Overheat the Planet” Pp. 1-95;

[skim] Carbon Majors Report, 2017 (Canvas)

CDP. 2017. “[New report shows just 100 companies are source of over 70% of emissions](#)”

Watch:

Merchants of Doubt

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #4]

Reflective Journal Week 7

Climate Ethnography Part 3 – Field Notes (4 observations)

Discussion Post – Merchants of Doubt

WEEK 8 – Gender

10/6/21

Read:

Nagels, Joan. *Gender & Climate Change*, Ch 2, 3, 5 (Textbook)

MacGregor, Sherilyn. 2009. A stranger silence still: the need for feminist social research on climate change. *Sociological Review*. (Canvas)

Daggett, Cara. 2018. Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. (Canvas)

Watch:

No film this week

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #5]

Reflective Journal Week 8

WEEK 9 – Globalization, Colonialism, and Racism

10/13/21

Read:

Timmons Roberts & Parks. 2009. Ecologically Unequal Exchange, Ecological Debt, and Climate Justice: The History and Implications of Three Related Ideas for a New Social Movement (Canvas)

Gardener, Beth. 2020. “[Unequal Impact: The Deep Links Between Racism and Climate Change](#)” Yale360. (online)

Sealey-Huggins, Leon (2018) The climate crisis is a racist crisis: structural racism, inequality and climate change. from *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence*. (Canvas)

Watch:

[Mossville: When Great Trees Fall](#) (56:04)

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #6]

Reflective Journal Week 9

Discussion Board – Mossville Response

UNIT 3: Guiding Question- How do people experience/respond to climate change differently based on social location?

WEEK 10 – Climate change, security, and climate refugees

10/20/21

Read:

Miller, Todd. *Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration and Homeland Security*. Ch 1, 2, 3 (Textbook)

Watch:

Climate Refugees

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #7]

Reflective Journal Week 10

Climate Ethnography Part 4 – Interview Transcripts

Discussion Post – Climate Refugees

WEEK 11 – Implicit Denial

10/27/21

Read:

Norgaard, Kari. 2012. “Climate Denial and the Construction of Innocence: Reproducing Transnational Environmental Privilege in the Face of Climate Change”. *Race, Gender & Class*. (Canvas)

Ford & Norgaard. 2020. “From Denial to Resistance: How Emotions and Culture Shape Our Responses to Climate Change.” In *Climate and Culture*, Edited by Giuseppe Feola, Hilary Geoghegan and Alex Arnall. (Canvas)

Watch:

[After the Fire](#) [We will watch this in class together]

Assignments

[Discussion Group Lead #8]

Reflective Journal Week 11

WEEK 12 – Explicit Denial

11/3/21

Read:

Nagel Ch 6, “Gender and Climate Change Skepticism” (Textbook)

Brulle, Robert. 2019. “Networks of Opposition: A Structural Analysis of U.S. Climate Change Countermovement Coalitions 1989–2015.” *Sociological Inquiry*.

Recommended:

McCright & Dunlap. 2003. “Defeating Kyoto: The conservative movement's impact on US climate change policy.” *Social Problems*. 50(3):348-373. (Canvas)

McCright & Dunlap, 2011. Cool dudes: The denial of climate change among conservative white males in the United States. *Global Environmental Change*. (Canvas)

Assignments

Reflective Journal Week 12

WEEK 13 – Climate Policy & Activism

11/10/21

Read:

Méndez, Michael. Ch 3, “Contentious Capitol Climates”, & Ch 4, “Changing the Climate from the Streets of Oakland” in *Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement*. (Canvas)

Assignments

Reflective Journal Week 13

Climate Ethnography Part 5 – Coding & Memos

WEEK 14 – Activism & Response

11/17/21

Read:

Méndez, Michael. Ch 5, 6 (Canvas)

Miller, *Storming the Wall*, Ch 6, 7 (Textbook)

Watch:

[Complex Movements](#) (7:37)

Assignments

Reflective Journal Week 14

Discussion Post – Complex Movements Response

WEEK 15 – Social Movements

11/24/21 – NO CLASS for Thanksgiving Holiday

Read:

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything*, Ch 9-13, & Conclusion (Textbook)

Assignments

WEEK 16

12/1/21

Read:

Méndez, Michael. Ch 7 in *Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement*. (Canvas)

Miller, Todd. Storming the Wall, Ch 8 (Textbook)

FINALS WEEK

Climate Ethnography due Monday 12/06/21 at 11:59PM

Inclusivity & University Policies

I am committed to making this class as inclusive as possible to all students. If you have a disability registered with Disability Student Services, or otherwise experience structural limitations to your ability to participate in this class, please let me know within the first days of class, or when the situation arises.

We all have lives outside of class, and sometimes circumstances occur that limit our ability to be fully present. Should this occur, please let me know so I can accommodate you. Your grade should not suffer because you are attending to an emergency, and I will do what I can to work with your situation. I also encourage you to seek the necessary support, some of which may be available via SSU. See below for campus policies and support services.

There are important University policies that you should be aware of, such as the add/drop policy; cheating and plagiarism policy, grade appeal procedures; accommodations for students with disabilities and the diversity vision statement. See [Important Policies and Procedures for Students](#).

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [How to Add a Class](#) has step-by-step instructions has step-by-step instructions. [Registration Information](#) lists important deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Campus Policy on Disability Access for Students

If you are a student with a disability, and think you may need academic accommodations, please contact [Disability Services for Students](#) (DSS), located in Salazar Hall, Room 1049, Voice: (707) 664-2677, TTY/TDD: (707) 664-2958, as early as possible in order to avoid a delay in receiving accommodation services. Use of DSS services, including testing accommodations, requires prior authorization by DSS in compliance with university policies and procedures. See SSU's policy on [Disability Access for Students](#).

Academic Integrity

Students should be familiar with the University's [Cheating and Plagiarism Policy](#). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at Sonoma State University and the University's policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified.

Additional Resources

Writing Support

The SSU Learning and Academic Resource Center (LARK), located at Schulz 1103, helps SSU students become better writers and produce better written documents. The knowledgeable and friendly tutors can help you with a wide array of concerns, from generating good ideas and organizing papers more clearly to learning citation formats and using semi-colons correctly. Visit the [Learning and Academic Resource Center \(LARK\) Homepage](#) for more information on how to schedule time with a Writing Center tutor.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS is a unit of the division of Student Affairs of Sonoma State University. CAPS offers confidential counseling to students experiencing personal problems that interfere with their academic progress, career or well-being. The [CAPS website](#) provides information only. If you would like to talk with someone or make an appointment, please call (707) 664-2153 between 8 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday during the academic year.