CUST 3590H – Climate and Culture – Fall 2021

Instructor:
Dr. Anne Pasek (she/her)
Email: annepasek@trentu.ca
Office: Traill College, Scott House, Room 204

Meeting Times:

*Lecture:* 
12:00-2pm EST on Tuesdays in Room B104 of the DNA Building

*Seminars:*
F01: 3-4pm EST on Thursdays in Room C3 of the CCW building
F02: 4-5pm EST on Thursdays in Room C3 of the CCW building
F03: 7-8pm EST on Thursdays in Room C3 of the CCW building

Student Office Hours:
By appointment, and over Zoom. Just email me whenever you’d like to have a meeting, and we can chat! Potential topics you can bring to office hours include: help understanding the course assignment criteria, help with your paper progress, lingering discussion topics from the class, climate anxiety, and help with academic career planning.

Department:
Cultural Studies
   Academic Administrative Assistant: Patricia Heffernan
   Email Address: cultstudies@trentu.ca
   Phone Number: 1771

Description/Overview:
Climate change is an urgent and unprecedented problem; effectively addressing its challenges requires an ambitious reconfiguration of almost every aspect of contemporary life. Yet, as the past decades of climate advocacy attest, these changes will not be achieved unopposed, nor without significant disruptions to current social relations and cultural norms. Climate politics, accordingly, needs a better understanding of cultural politics: the disputed processes by which climate solutions and actors are made obvious or elided in the framing of social problems, and how older cultural legacies run deep within seemingly new environmental logics. Why, for example, do we seem to worry more about the climate impacts of individual consumer
behaviours than collective action opportunities? When we say that we ‘believe’ in climate change, do we all mean the same thing? And who is this ‘we’ anyways?

This course focuses on culture as a site of potential and peril for the climate movement, emphasizing why climate change is taken up differently within and across different social groups, how some groups work to shape or foreclose different conceptualizations of the problem of climate change, and what’s gained and lost in approaching climate as an apolitical, rational, or universal issue.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

➢ Identify and analyze how particular social values are embedded in discussions of climate change in popular and political cultures.
➢ Demonstrate how climate change impacts different social groups differentially, with consequences for how urgent and how singular the problem seems to be, as well as how meaningfully and inclusively potential solutions can be imagined.
➢ Identify and discuss different forms of climate denial, as well as different explanations for climate denialism as a social formation.
➢ Explain how the cultural politics of emotion work to shape climate politics, opening some opportunities for action while foreclosing others.
➢ Evaluate the extent to which different climate solutions are poised to continue or disrupt prior patterns of social inequity

Assignments:

Your grade in this course will be divided between active participation in class discussions and a series of short written assignments, culminating in a longer research paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Assignment</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10% + 10% (20% total)</td>
<td>Nov 9+ Dec 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short cultural analysis paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Oct 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentations</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 page paper plan</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Nov 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer review reports</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Dec 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to peer reviews</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Dec 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Dec 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation: Participation will be formally evaluated at two periods in the course (week 6 and week 12) based on your continued preparation for and contributions to the wider class discussion. Active engagement, either synchronously or asynchronously, as well as posting thoughtful questions to the class discussion board every week, are key to securing a high participation grade. Students who do not feel comfortable participating verbally in class discussion (or miss class) will need to post a voice/video memo to the week’s discussion board and substantially engage with other students’ posts in order to demonstrate their critical thinking about the material and their peers’ ideas.

Short cultural analysis papers: As a lead up to the final paper, students will prepare a 1-2 page analysis of a cultural object pertaining to climate change (a political ad, song, movie, newspaper article, consumer good, etc.) of their choosing. The papers should discuss the cultural politics of the object, as well as the audiences it seems to imagine (or omit). The paper should draw connections between the object and the class discussion, drawing on at least two readings to explain how the object works to socially situate climate.

Class Presentations: At the start of the course students will sign up to lead a presentation related to a particular reading in their seminar. The presentation will review key concepts from the reading and introduce a case study (a cultural object, a political event, a personal experience, etc.) where the student sees evident connections in support of the reading’s argument (or a potential challenge to the reading’s claims). The presentation will end with 2-3 discussion questions for the group. Depending on class numbers, this work may be done in pairs.

Final paper: You will demonstrate your knowledge of the course materials through a 12-15 page argumentative essay, due at the end of the course. The paper should draw on at least 5 sources from the syllabus and at least 5 additional scholarly and journalistic sources of your choosing. It should demonstrate significant critical engagement with the course themes through the development of an original argument. It may take the form of a lengthier analysis of a cultural object – or a comparison of several cultural objects – or may alternatively describe and evaluate current debates within climate politics and their social dimensions.

Your final paper will be developed through an extended process of research and feedback, including a 1-page final paper plan, peer review reports, and responses to your own peer review reports. These preparatory components of the assignment will be assessed on a pass/fail basis, per criteria distributed on the first day of class.

Evaluation

A = Excellent. This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures, and readings while also interrogating their premise and posing new directions. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute readily, generously, and insightfully.

B = Good. This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis that may not be especially novel, but is nevertheless applicable. Classroom participation is consistent and demonstrates a basic understanding of the readings.
C = Satisfactory. This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inconsistent and sometimes demonstrates a lack of preparation.

D = Poor / Minimal. This work is partially incomplete and/or evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is minimal or tangential.

F = Failed. This grade indicates an incomplete assignment. Participation is significantly lacking and/or disruptive, working to the detriment of other students' learning.

NB: For conversions between letter grades, percentage grads, and grades on a 4.0 scale, see the Undergraduate Calendar (p.491).

Required Readings:

All materials will be made available as .pdf, .epub, or .mp3 files on Blackboard or they will be linked directly in the document below. Students are not required to purchase any materials.

Schedule:

September 14 - Introductions and course overview

Optional background reading if you’d like a Climate 101:


September 21 – In which we define what we mean by 'the cultural politics of climate change’

- Hulme, Mike. 2009. “Why we disagree about climate change.”

NB: September 23 is the final add/drop date for the class.

September 28 – In which we look at “climate vernaculars” and the ways in which the idea of climate change travels around and gets translated into different forms of meaning, for different communities
October 5 – *In which we question one incredibly common climate vernacular that isn’t serving us too well: personal consumer action.*

- Heglar, Mary. “*I work in the environmental movement. I don’t care if you recycle.*” *Vox* 2019

Due: Short Cultural Analysis Paper

October 12 – *In which we survey demographic divergences in how different groups tend to think about climate change.*

- Adam R. Pearson et al. – “Race, Class, Gender and Climate Change Communication”

October 19 – *In which we think about the cultural politics of emotion and all the ways they complicate climate journalism and action.*


October 26 - Reading Week (No class)

November 2 – *In which we think about who and when we are a ‘we’ in climate politics*

- Liboiron, Max. “*There’s No Such Thing as ’We.’*” *Discard Studies.* 2020.

Due: 1 page research paper plan

November 9 – *In which we think about climate denialism from a structural vs. cultural point of view*


NB: This is the final date for withdrawal from fall-term courses. After this date, you’re locked into getting a grade. So, if you’ve been struggling so far in the course, you might weigh whether or not it makes sense to withdraw. Please reach out to me if you’d like some help weighing this question.

November 16 – In which we think about energy transitions as cultural transitions


November 23 – In which we learn about the history of climate movement and debates about its dominant tactics

• McKibben, Bill. Oil and Honey, Chapter 2.
• Malm, Andreas. How to Blow Up a Pipeline, Chapter 1.

Optional reading:

• Aravind, Sakshi. “How to Write About Pipelines.”
• “The Sunrise Movement: how a US grassroots youth movement helped set the national climate agenda for rapid change,” Rapid Transition Alliance.

November 30 – In which we discuss strategies for providing effective peer review and revising works in progress

In class workshop- no readings.

Due: Draft Paper & Cover Letter (bring 3 copies to class)

December 7 – In which we provide feedback to our peers’ drafts

In class peer review workshop – No readings

Due: Peer Review Report [bring 3 copies to class]

December 13th – In which you hand in your well-edited, hard work!

Due: Final Paper & Reviewer Cover Letter [email me a pdf by 5pm]

University Policies
Sharing and Distribution of Course Content

Sharing and distribution of any course content, other than between individual students registered in the course, is not permitted without written permission of the instructor. Material recorded belongs to the instructor and can only be used for personal study of the course in question. The University requires anyone in possession of course content to safeguard the privacy and intellectual property rights of all persons in the learning environment. Regulations and limits surrounding the recording of class content are covered in the fair dealings section of the Federal Copyright Act.

Academic Integrity:

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from failure on an assignment to expulsion from the university. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University’s Academic Integrity Policy. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent’s Academic Integrity website to learn more: www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity.

Access to Instruction

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and documentation from a regulated health care practitioner and feels that they may need accommodations to succeed in a course, the student should contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (SAS) at the respective campus as soon as possible. (https://www.trentu.ca/wellness/sas).

Absenteeism

Students are responsible for completing all course requirements, including attending classes, completing examinations and meeting assignment deadlines on the dates specified on their syllabus. Specific accommodations can be implemented for students registered with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), but it is the responsibility of the student to make these arrangements in advance, and to discuss accommodations of due dates with their instructors. Adjustments to dates for assignment submissions, tests and final examinations are not automatic. Normally a doctor’s note or supporting documentation is not required. However, when a student’s success in the course or program is in jeopardy as determined by the instructor, documentation may be requested.

Syllabus Notice Regarding Mid-terms, Tests and Exams

Students are required to be available for all mid-terms, tests and exams that are scheduled by the instructor or the Registrar’s Office and listed in their course syllabus. Students can notify the Registrar’s Office of their wish to observe cultural or religious holidays during scheduled examination periods by the deadline set in the academic calendar. Vacation, job-related or any other travel plans are not acceptable reasons excuses for missing tests or exams. Adjustments and deferrals of tests and final examinations are not automatic. It is the student’s responsibility to email their instructor immediately if they are unable to fulfill academic requirements. Depending on your program, either the instructor or the chair/director may decide on alternative arrangements for exams and tests.
Course Policies

Collegiality policy:
We’re going to be discussing a range of topics that at times intersect with longer histories of racism, sexism, colonialism, and other such unpleasantness. You may also bump into these topics when looking for examples for your assignments. Do not, however, share materials that include prejudicial slurs, hate speech, sexually graphic imagery, or anything else that could be distressing to your classmates. You can expect your TA and I to give you a head’s up in advance of discussions on this stuff in class and to heavily moderate these conversations to ensure that we critically analyze---but do not amplify---these themes.

Resubmissions and Extra-Credit:
Because I do not have the time to mark resubmissions or extra credit assignments for the whole class, my policy is to disallow them for everyone. The grade that you get for your work is final and non-negotiable. However, I’ve also designed the class such that a bad grade on any given assignment won’t sink your chances for a good grade overall. Please meet with me if you’re concerned with your grades and we can discuss how you can improve on future assignments.

Accessibility, Accommodations, and Adaptive Learning:
I strongly value inclusivity in my classroom and I want to do all I can to ensure that everyone is able to learn in a fair and equitable environment. If there is anything I can do to improve and adapt the learning environment for you—including but not limited to greater textual, visual, or auditory cues; different speeds of speech; repetition of course concepts; or supplementary digital materials—please do not hesitate to let me know. This is true at any period in the semester, whether or not you identify as having a disability, and whether or not you are formally registered with Student Accessibility Services.

Have a different name or pronoun than the one you’re registered under? Let me know and I’ll be happy to use them.

Attendance & Absences
We’re still in a global pandemic and so the delivery of this class could change if school policies and public health regulations shift. It’s also the case that some students are struggling with borders, housing, work, and a range of problems that can make it difficult to be in class, in person, every week. Moreover, it’s fair to say that the past year and a half has left us all pretty exhausted, under-resourced, and risk intolerant. And so, no matter our intentions, this won’t be a normal semester.

Accordingly, there is no strict, face-to-face attendance policy for this class. If you’re sick, if you’re overwhelmed, or if you’re out of the country, you can join in-class discussions via Zoom. If you’re unable to attend synchronously (or if you show up to class without having done the readings) the expectation is that you will later contribute extensively to the week’s discussion on Blackboard by posting a voice/video memo of your reflections and questions, and responding to
posts by your peers. This allows us to rewards you for your participation, while recognizing that participation can, and sometimes needs to, take many different forms.