POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE
POLSCI 768 / GLOBALST 725
Fall 2020, Term 1

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Seminar: Wednesdays 8:30-11:20
Classroom: Virtual

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**Course Description**

This course provides students with an opportunity to investigate the global political economy of climate change. We begin by considering key issues such as theories about environmental issues, economists’ neglect of climate change, liberalism and climate governance, and climate change ‘myths’. Weeks 3 and 4 investigate how economists interpret the problem as one of market failure and propose a solution of carbon pricing. We then examine two large hurdles to addressing climate change – the problem of lock-in and the issue of overconsumption. The following two weeks explore how right and left wing politics intersect with climate change. Week 10 considers Indigenous Peoples’ experience and reaction to climate change. This is followed by a brief overview of climate change politics in several key developing countries. The course concludes by probing the climate change issue in the Canadian context and possibilities for the future. The focus of the course is on how political and economic factors shape responses to climate change. No formal training in economics is required.

**Course Objectives**

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

1. Develop a critical understanding of the interaction of political and economic factors on climate change.
2. Pursue one climate change topic in depth through a research paper.
3. Answer convincingly the following questions:
   - How has climate change become politicized and what are the implications of this?
   - What are the political obstacles to taking significant action on climate change?
   - What are the economics of climate change?

**Required Materials and Texts**

This course presumes you are familiar with the basic science of climate change. If you are not, you should read:

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (2018) ‘Summary for Policy Makers’ Special Report: Warming of 1.5° C available at:

https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/

In addition to weekly articles we will be reading large portions of two books which you may wish to acquire:


Class Format
Because of the pandemic we have been forced to make this an online course. We will use Zoom to run weekly two hour seminars. The third hour I will be available for individual consultation.

Students will be assigned to lead the discussion for particular weeks. I will post a guide for the discussant’s responsibility on Avenue. Prior to each seminar students will post on Avenue a one page summary document on the texts they have read. This document will contain:

1. A list of key concepts and terms found in the readings.
2. A summary of statement (four sentences maximum) of each author’s main argument. This statement should be written in your own words as far as possible. It should not be borrowed directly from the text of the reading.
3. Three or four issues or questions in the readings that are important and merit some discussion and that you would like to be addressed in the seminar. Formulate these in the form of a question.

Ten summaries are required during the course and each one will be worth one mark.

Although online seminars can be awkward, students will be expected to be active participants in class discussions. This involves leading discussions, highlighting points from the readings, engaging with the arguments of the texts, offering criticism of what you have read and asking questions about the text. Talking for the sake of talking or making irrelevant points does not contribute to your participation grade.

Course Evaluation – Overview
1. Seminar Participation 30% over the term
2. Critical Review 20%, due Oct. 21, 2020
3. Research Paper Proposal 5%, due Nov. 4, 2020

Course Evaluation – Details
Seminar Participation (30%), ongoing
The participation grade covers seminar attendance and participation. I will take notes on the seminar discussions. General seminar participation is out of 15. In addition, summary notes are graded as $10 \times 1 = 10$; leading a seminar discussion is marked out of 5.

Critical Review (20%), due Oct. 21, 2020
Students will write a critical review of Nicolas Stern’s book. The review is due on October 21st. Class discussion and other readings should feed into your review. The review will evaluate the central arguments made in the book. It should be no longer than 1,200 words.
Research Paper Proposal (5%), due Nov 4th, 2020
This paper is due in week eight, Nov. 4th. It should be three pages long and include:
- primary research question
- explanation of how it fits into course
- topics that will be addressed
- questions that need to be answered
- preliminary bibliography

Research Paper (45%), due Dec. 16, 2020
The final research paper is due on Dec. 16 which is one week after the final class. The paper should be no longer than 4,000 words, excluding bibliography. It must be based upon your paper outline and material beyond the course readings.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Sept. 16) Introduction
No readings

Week 2 (Sept. 23) Raising Issues
Before we launch into the political economy of climate change it is useful to consider some of the issues we will be dealing with over the course. This week we will reflect on theoretical approaches to environmental change, the relationship between liberalism and environmental governance, the field of economics' lack of engagement with climate change and climate change myths.

Readings:
- Andrew J Oswald and Nicholas Stern (2019) ‘Why does the economics of climate change matter so much, and why has the engagement of economists been so weak?’ *Royal Economic Society Newsletter* forthcoming.

Other Readings:
Week 3 (Sept. 30) Market Failure

Economists tend to view the issue of climate change as a market failure. Our task this week is to get a better understanding of their view and the types of solutions they propose. We will do this by sampling the work of two of the most prominent climate change economists Nicolas Stern and William Nordhaus.

Readings:

Urgency and Promise of Tackling Climate Change (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), pp. 91-130.


Other Readings:

**Week 4 (Oct. 7) Carbon Pricing Politics**

Economists tend to agree that the best way to deal with climate change is to put a price on carbon. The two primary tools are the carbon tax and cap and trade. While it is debatable whether pricing carbon is sufficient to deal with climate change, even this modest step has proved to be politically difficult to implement. This week we want to get a better understanding of the politics around carbon pricing.

Readings:
- Erik Haites (2018) ‘Carbon taxes and greenhouse gas emissions trading systems: what have we learned?’ Climate Policy, 18:8, 955-966

Other Readings:


**Week 5 (Oct. 14) Mid-term Recess, NO CLASS**

**Week 6 (Oct. 21) Lock in and Transition**

It is extremely difficult to change human civilization’s primary energy source. One of the concepts developed to capture the complexity of this task is ‘carbon lock in’. This week we have a number of short readings that throw a light onto the problem.

Readings:


• Thomas Spencer et.al., ‘The 1.5˚C target and coal sector transition: at the limits of societal feasibility’ *Climate Policy* Vol. 18:3 (December 2017), pp. 335-351.


Other Readings:

Notes: Critical Review due

Week 7 (Oct. 28) Consumption
Some observers have argued that environmental problems cannot be seriously addressed until we examine consumption issues. Begin by reading what the International Energy Agency (IEA) has to say about present levels of CO₂ emissions in the energy sector. Then read a series of short book chapters about the issue of consumption and the environment.

Readings:

Other Readings:
**Week 8 (Nov. 4) Right Wing Politics**

The last two decades has seen the centre of gravity in right wing politics in Western states shift to a more populist form. A key element of this populism has been an anti-environmentalist strain which denies the significance of climate change and is hostile to addressing the issue. The hostility extends to using traditionally conservative policy tools such as market instruments.

Readings:

Other Readings:

**Notes:** Research Paper Proposal due

**Week 9 (Nov. 11) Left Wing Politics**

Whereas right wing politics actively opposes attempts to deal with climate change, many on the left see climate change as an opportunity to transform the existing capitalist system.

Readings:

Other Readings:

**Week 10 (Nov. 18) Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change**

Indigenous people have been on the front lines of the battle against climate change. This week our task is to gain an understanding of the indigenous view of climate change and some of the struggles they are engaged in.

Readings:

Other Readings:

Week 11 (Nov. 25) Developing World Climate Politics
Climate change poses a particular set of challenges and threats to developing countries. This week we are interested in discovering how climate change is playing out in some key developing countries and how it impacts their international position.

Readings:

Other Readings:

**Week 12 (Dec. 2) Focus on Canada**

Canadians like to portray themselves as good international citizens, but on the climate front their actions lag far behind their rhetoric. Canadians are amongst the worst emitters of carbon on a per capita basis. What explains Canada’s lack of action on the climate change front?

**Readings:**


**Other Readings:**


**Week 13 (Dec. 9) Into the Future**

What are the prospects for climate action following the Paris Agreement and into the near future?

**Readings:**

- Peter Newell & Olivia Taylor (2020) Fiddling while the planet burns? COP25 in perspective, *Globalizations*, 17:4, 580-592
• Axel Michaelowa, Myles Allen and Fu Sha, ‘Policy instruments for limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C – can humanity rise to the challenge?’ *Climate Policy* Vol. 18:3 (2018), pp. 1-12.

Other Readings:

**Notes:** Research Paper due December 16

**Other topics:**

*Climate change and ecofascism*

Readings:
• Jason, Wilson, ‘Eco-fascism is undergoing a revival in the fetid culture of the extreme right’ *The Guardian* 19 March 2019.

Climate change and violent conflict:
• Michael Brzoska & Christiane Fröhlich (2016) Climate change, migration and violent conflict: vulnerabilities, pathways and adaptation strategies, Migration and Development, 5:2, 190-210
• Jan Selby & Clemens Hoffmann (2014) Rethinking Climate Change, Conflict and Security, Geopolitics, 19:4, 747-756
• Paul J. Smith, ‘Climate Change, Weak States and the "War on Terrorism" in South and Southeast Asia’ Contemporary Southeast Asia Vol. 29:2 (August 2007), pp. 264-285.
Books of Interest

Thinking
- George Marshall, Don’t Even Think about it: Why our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

History

Violence

Morality

Politics

Environmentalism/Consumption

Capitalism
- Naomi Klihn, This Changes Everything Climate vs. Capitalism (Knoph: Toronto, 2014).
North South

Future

**Course Policies**

**Submission of Assignments**
Written work must be submitted in the appropriate dropbox in the course Avenue to Learn shell.

**Grades**
Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

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<td>69-0</td>
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**Late Assignments**
I expect all work to be handed in on time. Speak to me if you are likely to miss a deadline. Late work will be penalized,

**Absences, Missed Work, Illness**
Please inform me of any absences or problems with the course.

**Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.
Academic Integrity
You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection
Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an Online Element
Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.
Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, including lectures by University instructors.
The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

**Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

**Course Modification**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.