

# POLS 362 Global Environmental Politics

Fall 2023

TTh 12:30–01:45 PM

**Instructor:** Dr. Iasmin Goes (she/her)

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## Course Description and Objectives

Among scientists, there is an overwhelming consensus that human activity has a negative impact on the environment: global warming, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, poor air quality, and undrinkable water are all human-induced problems. So why are these problems politicized, and why is it so difficult to tackle them at the global level? In this course, we will discuss how state and non-state actors negotiate multilateral agreements, regimes, or other forms of cooperation to protect the environment. We will examine the competing interests of the Global North and the Global South; the potential trade-off between environmental protection and economic development; the challenge of taking climate action in democracies, which rely on deliberation and compromise; and the extent to which individual consumption choices can help mitigate environmental problems.

There isn't always a single correct answer to the questions we will discuss. The goal of the course is to develop analytical tools that help you think like a social scientist: together, we will evaluate the validity of competing answers and discuss what evidence we would need to see in order to gain confidence in one answer and reject others. You are welcome — even encouraged — to disagree with the answers proposed by the assigned readings. If this is the case, you should be able to formulate an evidence-based counter-argument that convinces your colleagues to reject alternative explanations. This analytical exercise will help you prepare for a career in settings where there are no clear-cut answers, such as consulting, research, finance, public policy, or law.

## Readings

Our main references will be the following textbooks:

- Pamela S. Chasek and David L. Downie. 2020. *Global Environmental Politics*. 8th edition. Taylor & Francis.
- Regina S. Axelrod and Stacy D. VanDeveer. 2019. *The Global Environment: Institutions, Law, and Policy*. 5th edition. Sage Publishing.

Several other readings will come from the following handbook, which is available for free at the library:

- Paul G. Harris (ed). 2022. *Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics*. New York: Routledge.

Additional readings will consist of articles in scientific journals, all available on Canvas.

**Optional:** If you need a general IR theory refresher, the following textbook is a good companion to our main textbooks:

- John Baylis, Patricia Owens, and Steve Smith. 2014. *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. 8th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Assignments

**Participation (10%)** Preparing for the classes and engaging in discussion is a requirement for this course, which is why this grade evaluates the *frequency* and *quality* of contributions. I will not take attendance; if you miss class, I trust that you have legitimate reasons to do so. However, frequent absences might reduce your ability to engage in class discussion, which in turn will affect your participation grade.

**Quizzes (20%)** Every week, a short online multiple choice quiz will gauge your comprehension of the readings and class discussions. Quizzes open on Friday at 11:59 PM and close on the following Friday at 11:59 PM, covering the materials of all classes in between. Late quizzes will be accepted until Friday, September 22. Students who join the course late should go back and complete missed quizzes in order to receive credit. There will be a total of 11 quizzes and I will drop the 3 lowest scores. Since I am dropping the 3 lowest scores, *there will be no make-up quizzes*.

**Group Projects (20%)** Teams of 3–5 students will be formed at the beginning of the semester. You will work together on the following assignments:

1. **Op-Ed (7.5%)** Suppose you are an expert who has strong opinions about a topic in environmental politics. Pick a newspaper that would be a good outlet for your op-ed. Write 1–2 paragraphs justifying your choice of newspaper (e.g. this newspaper might have run similar op-eds in the past, your topic might be of interest to the readers, etc). Then, write an op-ed that is about 750–800 words long; you can use the [Washington Post Op-Ed Guide](#) as a reference. The op-ed is due on **Friday, September 22 at 11:59 PM**. Please include an annex with the sources you used.
2. **Policy Brief (7.5%)** Suppose you are a lobbyist. A private company has hired you to advocate for their interests in Congress. For example, Pacific Gas and Electric has hired you to defend a cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions, or maybe ExxonMobil has hired you to oppose carbon regulation. Write a 2–3 page policy brief addressed to a Member of Congress on behalf of this actor. You can check out real cases of lobbying on [Open Data Secrets](#) or just come up with a case of your own. The policy brief is due on **Friday, December 1 at 11:59 PM**. Please include an annex with the sources you used.
3. **Good News of the Month (5%)** On **September 28**, **October 26**, and **December 5**, each group will give a 10-minute in-class presentation. The group members will present an article (or a series of articles) of their choice, covering good news related to the environment. This can be an environmentally-friendly technology, a new climate policy, an update about a new plant species, a new study about deforestation, or anything that catches your attention. The only requirement is that this news brings you hope. Not all group members need to present on all days, but every group member must present at least once.

All team members are expected to deliver equal contributions and will receive the same grade.

**Midterm Exam (20%)** An in-class exam on **Thursday, October 19** will cover material from the readings, lectures, and class discussions up until that point (Parts 1 & 2 of the class). The exam will consist of a combination of providing definitions of terms and short essay questions. To help you prepare for the exam, there will be a review session on Tuesday, October 17.

**Final Exam (30%)** A final exam on **Wednesday, December 13** from 6:20 to 8:20 PM will cover material from all the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The exam will consist of 7–10 essay questions. To help you prepare for the exam, there will be a review session on **Thursday, December 7**.

## Course Policies

**Communication** The most reliable way to get in touch with me is via email. You should expect a response within 48 business hours.

**Beyond Class** While not required, I encourage you to keep up with current events in economics and politics by reading reputable newspapers and magazines (e.g. New York Times, Washington Post, Financial Times, The Economist, The Guardian, etc). Please check your emails regularly, as I may share pertinent articles with the class every week. I also encourage you to share news with your colleagues using the Canvas discussion board.

**Academic Honesty and Integrity** This course will adhere to the CSU Academic Integrity Policy as found on the Student' Responsibilities page of the [CSU General Catalog](#) and in the [Student Conduct Code](#). At a minimum, violations will result in a grading penalty in this course and a report to the Office of Student Resolution Center.

**Accommodations** Your experience in this class is important to me. If you require any accommodation, let me know ahead of time what would be helpful so that we can plan together for you to succeed. You do not need to share private information with me, but you must provide verifiable documentation to the [Office of Student Case Management](#) or [Student Disability Center](#). For religious accommodations, please complete the [Religious Accommodation Request Form](#). Please provide verifiable documentation *to them* (not to me!) ahead of time and ensure that they forward me this information *at least one week* prior to the assignment for which accommodations are required. I cannot make adjustments after the fact.

**Late Assignments** I will accept no late assignments. Exceptions are granted only if the [Office of Student Case Management](#) is able to provide documentation of a health emergency or other life emergency. If you experience an emergency, please contact Student Case Management, which will then contact me.

**Midterm and Final Exam** If you need to take an exam at an *early* date, contact me at least two weeks in advance. Students who miss any of the scheduled exams — on Thursday, October 19 or Wednesday, December 8 — will not be able to take the exam at a *later* date. Their exam grade will be zero. Exceptions are granted only if the [Office of Student Case Management](#) is able to provide documentation of a health emergency or other life emergency.

**Grievances** If you are unhappy with your grade on an assignment, please wait 48 hours after the assignment is returned before contacting me. This provides the opportunity to let the initial emotions subside and think more clearly about the issue at hand. After 48 hours, you can contact me with a written explanation of why you feel your grade should be different. "I worked hard" is not a good explanation; I can only grade the quality of the work that you give to me! Based on this petition, I will decide whether to re-grade your assignment. However, be advised that your grade may move upwards or downwards.

## Grading Policy

Grade	Range
A+	100% to 96.67%
A	<96.67% to 93.33%
A-	<93.33% to 90.0%
B+	<90.0% to 86.67%
B	<86.67% to 83.33%
B-	<83.33% to 80.0%
C+	<80.0% to 76.67%
C	<76.67% to 70.0%
D	<70.0% to 60.0%
F	<60.0% to 0.0%

## Additional Resources and Policies

Check out this link or QR code for policies relevant to your courses and resources to help with various challenges you may encounter: <https://col.st/2FA2g>  
This includes information about technical support, universal design for learning/accommodation of needs, undocumented student support, etc.



## Course Outline

### Week 1: Introduction

- Chasek and Downie, Chapter 1 – The Emergence of Global Environmental Politics (pp. 1-27, until the end of “Sustainable Development: Rise of an Alternative Paradigm”).
- **Recommended:** Climate Change Debate, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (watch [here](#)).

### Week 2: Democracy and the Environment

- Cameron Abadi. 2022. “[What if Democracy and Climate Mitigation Are Incompatible?](#)” *Foreign Policy*.
- Vegard Tørstad, Håkon Sælen, and Live Standal Bøyum. 2020. “The Domestic Politics of International Climate Commitments: Which Factors Explain Cross-Country Variation in NDC Ambition?” *Environmental Research Letters* 15(2): 1-10 (skip pp. 6-7, “Empirical Analysis”).

**Thursday, August 31: NO CLASS**

**Friday, September 1: Quiz 1 due**

### Week 3: Economic Development and the Environment

- Chasek and Downie, Chapter 6 – Environmental Politics and Sustainable Development (pp. 257-290).
- Justin H. Vassallo. 2023. “[Degrowing Pains.](#)” *The Baffler*.
- Chandran Nair. 2015. “[Ecomodernism is Anti-Progress – A View from Asia.](#)” *Degrowth Blog*.
- **Recommended:** Kathryn Hochstetler. 2021. “Climate Institutions in Brazil: Three Decades of Building and Dismantling Climate Capacity.” *Environmental Politics* 30:49-70.

**Friday, September 8: Quiz 2 due**

## Part 1: Big Players

### Week 4: The US and the EU

- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 6 – Domestic Sources of US Unilateralism (pp. 163-190).
- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 7 – Promoting Environmental Protection in the European Union (pp. 191-219).
- **Recommended:** Chasek and Downie, Chapter 2 – Actors in the Environmental Arena (only pp. 45-51, “Nation-State Actors: Roles and Interests”).
- **Recommended:** Chasek and Downie, Chapter 1 – The Emergence of Global Environmental Politics (only pp. 32-35, “The Precautionary Principle”).

**Friday, September 15: Quiz 3 due**

## Week 5: China and the Global South

- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 8 – How China’s Domestic Energy and Environmental Challenges Shape Its Global Engagement (pp. 220-244).
- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 9 – The View from the South: Developing Countries in Global Environmental Politics (pp. 245-268).
- **Recommended:** Ruth Maclean and Dionne Searcey. 2022. “Congo to Auction Land to Oil Companies: ‘Our Priority Is Not to Save the Planet.’” *New York Times*.
- **Recommended:** Eric Roston. 2022. “A New Era of Climate Disasters Revives Calls for Climate Reparations.” *Bloomberg*.
- **Recommended:** Abrahm Lustgarten. 2022. “The Barbados Rebellion: An Island Nation’s Fight for Climate Justice.” *New York Times*.
- **Recommended:** Listen to the podcast “Blue Bonds: A Market Solution to the Climate Crisis?”

**Friday, September 22: Op-ed due**

**Friday, September 22: Quiz 4 due**

**Friday, September 22: Last day to catch up on quizzes**

## Part 2: Non-State Actors

### Week 6: Nongovernmental Organizations, Civil Society, and Good News

- Chasek and Downie, Chapter 2 – Actors in the Environmental Arena (pp. 71-76, “Nongovernmental and Civil Society Organizations”).
- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 2 – Architects, Agitators, and Entrepreneurs: International and Nongovernmental Organizations in Global Environmental Politics (pp. 48-67, from “Nongovernmental Organizations and the Global Environment” until the end).

**Thursday, September 28: Good news day**

### Week 7: Business, Industry, and International Law

- Chasek and Downie, Chapter 2 – Actors in the Environmental Arena (pp. 76-86, from “Business and Industry” until the end).
- David Gelles. 2023. “She’s on a Mission From God: Suing Big Oil for Climate Damages.” *New York Times*.
- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 3 – International Law and the Protection of the Global Environment, pp. 68-100.

**Friday, October 6: Quiz 5 due**

### Week 8: International Organizations

- Chasek and Downie, Chapter 2 – Actors in the Environmental Arena (pp. 51-71, from “Intergovernmental Organizations” until the end of “Regional and Other Multilateral Organizations”).
- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 2 – Architects, Agitators, and Entrepreneurs: International and Nongovernmental Organizations in Global Environmental Politics (pp. 35-47, “International Governmental Organizations and the Global Environment”).
- Check out the [Wikipedia article](#) about the creation of a potential United Nations Environment Organization.
- **Recommended:** Frank Biermann. 2001. “The Emerging Debate on the Need for a World Environment Organization: A Commentary.” *Global Environmental Politics* 1(1): 45–55.

**Friday, October 13: Quiz 6 due**

## Week 9: Review Session and Midterm Exam

Tuesday, October 17: Review session

Thursday, October 19: In-class midterm exam

## Part 3: Cases, Issues, and Policies

### Week 10: Population and Good News

- Paul R. Ehrlich. 1975. *The Population Bomb*. Rivercity Press, pp. 1-17.
- Michael Shermer. 2016. “[Why Malthus Is Still Wrong](#).” *Scientific American*.

Thursday, October 26: Good news day

Friday, October 27: Quiz 7 due

### Week 11: Trade and Waste

- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 14 – Free Trade and Environmental Protection (pp. 389-411).
- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 11 – Global Politics and Policy on Hazardous Substances (pp. 305-331).
- **Recommended:** Chasek and Downie, Chapter 3 – The Development of Environmental Regimes (pp. 115-125, “Hazardous Waste”).

Friday, November 3: Quiz 8 due

### Week 12: Fossil Fuels and Nuclear Power

- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 15 – Consumption, Commodity Chains, and Global and Local Environments (pp. 412-437).
- Matthew Dalton. 2022. “[Nuclear Power Is Poised for a Comeback. The Problem Is Building the Reactors](#).” *Wall Street Journal*. You can also listen to the podcast [here](#).
- **Recommended:** [MIT Climate Primer](#).

Friday, November 10: Quiz 9 due

### Week 13: Aviation and Carbon

- UNFCCC. 2023. [About Carbon Pricing](#).
- Listen to the podcast “[How Canada Figured Out a Carbon Tax and Gave the Money Back](#)”. You can also read the article: Akshat Rathi. 2023. “[How Canada Rolled out a Carbon Tax Without Calling It One](#).” *Bloomberg*.
- Stefan Gössling and Andreas Humpe. 2020. “The Global Scale, Distribution and Growth of Aviation: Implications for Climate Change.” *Global Environmental Change* 65(102194), pp. 1-12.
- **Recommended:** World Bank. 2022. [State and Trends of Carbon Pricing 2022](#). (pp. 15-32, Chapter 2: Carbon Pricing and Emissions Trading Systems).
- **Recommended:** Akshat Rathi, Natasha White, and Demetrios Pogkas. 2022. “[Junk Carbon Offsets Are What Make These Big Companies ‘Carbon Neutral’](#)” *Bloomberg*.

Friday, November 17: Quiz 10 due

### Week 14: Thanksgiving Break

### Week 15: Deforestation, Biodiversity, Oceans, and Good News

- Chasek and Downie, Chapter 4 – The Development of Environmental Regimes: Natural Resources, Species, and Habitats (pp. 164-215).

- Axelrod and VanDeveer, Chapter 12 – Global Biodiversity Governance: Genetic Resources, Species, and Ecosystems (pp. 332-358).
- **Recommended:** Listen to the podcast [“An SOS From the Ocean.”](#)
- **Recommended:** Natasha White. 2022. [“UN Says New Biodiversity Credits Can Succeed Where Carbon Offsets Failed.”](#) *Bloomberg*.
- **Recommended:** Benji Jones. 2022. [“Some People Launder Money. Other People Launder Cattle.”](#) *Vox*.

**Friday, December 1: Quiz 11 due**

**Friday, December 1: Policy brief due**

## **Part 4: Looking Behind and Looking Ahead**

### **Week 16: Good News and Review Session**

**Tuesday, December 5: Good news day**

**Thursday, December 7: Review session**

**Wednesday, December 13: Final exam**