

Political Science 543 (Spring 2015)
Challenges Facing Global Climate Change Policy
Thursdays 5:45-8:30 PM

Global climate change is the big challenge of the 21st century. When this century draws to a close, we will be judged by how we face that challenge. Despite initial enthusiasm for the Kyoto Protocol in the 90s and the lofty goals of the Copenhagen Accord more recently, greenhouse gas emissions have risen by as much as 40% since 1990. Considering this trend, some have suggested that such attempts at regulating greenhouse gas emissions are worse than doing nothing at all, because the ineffective treaties give the illusion of doing something without really doing anything at all.

This course will explore the theoretical, political, and practical challenges that face the development and implementation of climate policy. Some of the issues that we will cover are (but not necessarily limited to):

- International climate policy
 - What are the barriers to establishing an international policy for GHG regulation?
 - What sorts of emission targets should we set for wealthy industrial countries? For developing countries?
 - What role does/ought economics play in developing such targets?
- Intergenerational hazards of climate change
 - What sorts of problems does our limited political time-horizon present for climate policy?
 - What are the structural similarities exist between the intergenerational issues of climate change and the intergenerational issues of the federal deficit?
 - How do the non-identity problem and the discounting of future generations frustrate the economic and political analyses of climate change?
- Mitigation strategies
 - Must a successful mitigation strategy be a global strategy or can small players implement it locally?
 - Does the focus on mitigation dismiss climate-related issues in the developing world?
- Adaptation strategies
 - Would it be cheaper to eschew mitigation altogether and focus on adaptation instead?
 - What about geo-engineering?
 - Can we truly estimate the costs of adaptation?
- Denialism, dismissivism and skepticism
 - What is the level of uncertainty in climate prediction? What is the scope of said uncertainty and what are its sources?
 - When is skepticism healthy and when is it merely denialism?
 - What are the political motivations of denialism and dismissivism?
 - How do such movements affect policy image?