Course Overview

This seminar covers major traditions of thought regarding climate, climate change and its impact on society, drawing on history, science and anthropology. In this course, we ask:

- How does knowledge about the earth’s climate evolve? How does such knowledge circulate, change and become entangled with political ecology?
- In what ways do societies, past and present, interpret weather events and climactic perturbations?
- How do differences in climate shape or inform societal organization?
- How do different societies cope with extreme climatic events? How do they reflect, reveal, and reproduce socio-economic structures such as inequality?

The course is divided into three parts. The first, “Reconstructing the Climate” concerns the epistemologies that we use to understand the climate, their strengths and limitations as well as how climate knowledge influences state-society organization. In the second part, “Climate Perturbations in Human History,” we analyse various interpretations of how climate has historically influenced past currents of societal change, including theories of environmental determinism and collapse. The final part of this course, “Contemporary Climate Change” invites us to examine and critique present approaches to climate policies, using case studies from past climate-induced events and paying particular attention to the notions of risk and resilience.

Course Structure: E-learning

The course will conducted in a three-hour weekly seminar. Due to the NTU guidelines on Covid-19, all the seminars will be conducted online on Zoom, every Wednesday, 9.30 am to 12.30 pm. Each seminar will comprise of a short lecture, after which students will break out into discussion rooms to discuss the sessions readings. After discussions, we will reconvene for student presentations and Q&A.

While we are unlikely to be able to meet in person as a group, it is probable that we can meet in small groups on campus from October onwards. I will then be able to hold consultation sessions for students who would like to meet me in person.

Course assessment

The assessment components in this course aim to build up your analytical skills in reading and writing, with a view towards unpacking arguments in public discussion, discerning between reliable and unreliable sources of information and

1. **Assessment Component 1: Participation (15%)**
   **Deadline:** Continuous
In class, you will learn from each other and build up your skills in close reading, constructing convincing arguments and articulating these arguments verbally. You are expected to regularly attend class but attendance alone will not give you participation points. Participation in class will be rewarded for the depth, frequency and quality of your contributions to classroom discussion in each weekly seminar.

2. **Assessment Component 2**: Class Presentation (20%)  
   **Deadline**: Weekly rotation

   From Weeks 2-13, each student will be assigned a reading and to present on that reading for the week. The presentation should comprise of a synthesis of its major arguments, an evaluation of the sources used to make them and the presenters’ view of the article. This component aims to help you learn from each other about different ways of approaching the readings and gives you an opportunity to sharpen your public presentation skills.

3. **Assessment Component 3**: Film analysis (20%)  
   **Deadline**: Week 8

   You will be required to select and view one of the films assigned in this course (see below) and write a review for the film that you viewed. A film review is a useful exercise in which you will synthesize the main arguments presented in a film, analyse the imagery and visual evidence presented in the film and evaluate its effectiveness. A sample review will be provided to you as guidance. The films assigned are available on Netflix. Throughout the semester, I will be holding viewing ‘parties’ online for students without Netflix access. You may also choose other films subject to the instructor’s approval.

   (a) Anthropocene: The Human Epoch  
   (b) Chasing Coral  
   (c) Okja  
   (d) Cowspiracy

4. **Assessment Component 4**: Quiz (20%)  
   **Deadline**: Week 13

   A 1.5 hour take-home quiz during our final week, covering all the key concepts in the readings through MCQs, short response questions and a short essay.

5. **Assessment Component 5**: Poster on Singapore’s Climate Action Plan (25%)  
   **Deadline**: Reading Week

   You will each be given a report on Singapore’s Climate Action Plan. Using research from media reports, press statements and publicly available ministry reports about Singapore’s environmental challenges, you will analyse the plan’s strengths and vulnerabilities, drawing appropriate comparisons with other case studies covered in the course and citing the appropriate literature. Design a research poster, presenting your findings through graphics.

**Schedule and Readings**
(A) (Re)constructing the Climate

Week 1: Aug 12, 2020
Introduction: Continuities and Change in ‘Climate Theory’


Week 2: Aug 19, 2020
Early Religious Traditions of Climate Thought


Optional

Week 3: Aug 26, 2020
“Folk” Knowledge of the Climate


Optional

Week 4: Sep 2, 2020
The Expert View


**Week 5: Sep 9, 2020**

**Environmental Determinism**


Optional

**Week 6: Sep 16, 2020**

**Collapse?**


Optional

**Week 7: Sep 23, 2020**

**The Little Ice Age**

Week 8: Oct 7, 2020 – Film Review Due

“Natural” Disasters


Week 9: Oct 13, 2020

Contestations in Climate Narratives


Week 10: Oct 20, 2020

Risk and Resilience


Optional

**Week 11: Oct 27, 2020**
**Climate in Local Politics**


Optional

**Week 12: Nov 4, 2020**
**Climate in International Politics**


Optional

**Week 13: Nov 11, 2020 – Quiz**
**Narrating the Climate**


**Week 15: Nov 30, 2020 – Research Poster Due**