Description:
"Climate and Society" is an intermediate Environmental Studies EVS elective about how societies understand and respond to climate change. We will analyze the values, assumptions, and perceptions that contribute to our understanding of climate change. The main topics are: ethics, justice and responsibility; definitions of nature; cost-benefit analysis and the precautionary principle; geoengineering; contrarianism; framing and communication; social engagement; and education. Central questions include: Is climate change a technical or social problem? What makes climate change uniquely challenging to understand and respond to? Which ethical and perceptual frameworks are best suited for both understanding and responding to climate change? Who is responsible, and what moral implications does this have? What assumptions about values, behavior, economics, and nature do we make when discussing climate change? How are causes and solutions to climate change framed? How does climate change challenge our conceptions of nature, morality, society, and economics? Does climate change pose a special challenge to society, or does it simply amplify existing challenges? What is at stake? Throughout the course, we will analyze the viability and permissibility of proposed solutions to climate change. The course carries a prerequisite of Environment and Society (ENVST-UA 101) or permission of the instructor; Climate Change (ENVST-UA 226) is recommended.

Texts (available at the NYU Bookstore): McKibben, End of Nature; Oreskes and Conway, Merchants of Doubt; Gardiner, Shue, Jamieson & Caney, eds., Climate Ethics; Readings on Google Drive. Recommended supplementary reading: Jamieson, Reason in a Dark Time; Gardiner, A Perfect Moral Storm; Nordhaus, Climate Casino.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

The Problem
9/14: Introduction, Context and Central Questions
  ○ Readings assigned

9/21: Does Climate Change result in the 'end of nature'?
  ○ McKibben, End of Nature 1-2
  ○ Group projects assigned

9/28: Understanding Climate Change
  ○ McKibben, End of Nature 3-5; Hansen, Storms from my Grandchildren, 7, 8, 9, 11; Orr, Down to the Wire 2, 3; Jamieson, "Energy, Ethics, and the Transformation of Nature"

10/5: Misunderstanding Climate Change
  ○ Oreskes and Conway, Merchants of Doubt, 1, 2, 6; excerpts from Lomborg (goo.gl/cFUFl ); Kahan et al, "The polarizing impact of science literacy and numeracy on perceived climate change risks"
  ○ Quiz 1 in class.

10/12: No Class - NYU holiday

10/19: What Kind of Problem is Climate Change?
  ○ "A Perfect Moral Storm"; "Ethics, Public Policy and Global Warming"; "One Atmosphere" (from Climate Ethics); Sagoff, "The Poverty of Climate Economics," Steffen, "A Truly Complex and Diabolical Policy Problem"

The Solutions
10/26: Justice and Future Generations; NYC's Social Resiliency Planning; Guest: Maryam Hariri
  ○ Gardiner, "Climate Justice"; Broome, "The Future vs. the Present"

11/2: Cost-Benefit Analysis and the Precautionary Principle
  ○ Sunstein, Laws of Fear, 1, 7; Revesz, RETAKING RATIONALITY, 1.1, 1.3, 2.6, 2.9; Sunstein, "Of Terrorism and Climate Change"; Ackerman and Heinziker, Priceless, 1, 4, 5; Gardiner, "Cost-Benefit Paralysis"; Shrader-Frechette, NDPR review of Risk and Reason

11/9: Responsibility, Wealth and Pollution Markets
  ○ Quiz 2 in class.

11/16: Why We Fail to Respond to Climate Change
  ○ Dale Jamieson, "The Nature of the Problem"
11/23: Geoengineering, Adaptation
  ● "Is "Arming the Future" with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?"; "Deadly Delays"; "Adaptation, Mitigation and Justice" (from Climate Ethics); excerpt from Superfreakonomics; Kolbert New Yorker review (goo.gl/nCRWh)

11/30: Social Engagement and Change
  ● WWF, Weathercocks and Signposts; Moser and Dilling Creating a Climate for Change, 14, 17, 28, 32; Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons," Maniates, "Individualization"; 350.org; http://thebreakthrough.org/

12/7: Solutions
  ● Shrader-Frechette, "Solutions"; McKibben, Eaarth, 4; Curren IMPACT, 2, 5, conclusion

12/14: Final Presentations (class ends at 5pm)
  ● ES Capstone final presentations (5-8pm) (recommended)

Assignments and Grading:
This course, including the list of central questions above and below, is designed to foster close reading and conceptual analysis of complex, interdisciplinary subjects. Active class conversation is required in order to develop and unpack the assumptions, arguments and implications of the topics we discuss. In the interest of fairness to other students, extensions and incompletes are only given in exceptional circumstances. Details and grade percentages are as follows.

**Participation.** Your active participation in class discussion is required (15%). This is constituted by weekly discussion on Google Drive and via the class listserv (climateandsociety-fall15-group@nyu.edu). Since the success of the course depends heavily upon class participation, you are expected to attend all sessions and participate actively. Missing more than one class without permission will negatively impact your grade. If you cannot make a class, please email me in advance and get notes from your peers. I will not be able to re-teach you the material. In addition, you will closely analyze one week’s readings and write shared notes (a 2-page outline and 3 analytical or content questions; 5%) by Friday at 1pm the week before we discuss that reading. Readings will be assigned during the first class. Depending on class size, you will either do this alone or split the assignment with another student and collaborate on the outlines and presentations. During class, you will briefly present the key concepts, concerns and counterarguments to the assignment. In some cases, this will take the form of a debate between the two presenters.

**Exams and quizzes.** Exams 1 and 2 are sets of four 1-page essay responses to prompts. You will not have an exam during finals period. Each exam constitutes 20% of your grade. The grading criteria are: comprehension, clarity of presentation, coherence, and engaging the question critically and productively. The quizzes (10% each) will cover class content. The content you will be asked to analyze is from the entire course up until the exam.

**Project Presentations and Papers.** Your independent research projects will be selected early in the semester. We will discuss the projects, requirements and presentations in class that day, as well as in subsequent classes. The written part of the project is due 12/14 by 3:30pm by email, and presentations will take place on the same date. The project presentation and written component (~20 pages plus references) constitute 20% of your grade.

**Methods:**
In this course, we will analyze applied, interdisciplinary subject matter through an ethical lens. All content is to be approached critically. Many claims that are empirical in nature arise in these texts. If you find discrepancies, please research them independently in order to understand the nature of the claim. The central analytical questions for each class are:
  ● What unique ethical and social challenges does climate change raise?
  ● How should we balance multiple (ethical, cultural, social and aesthetic) values?
  ● What is the relationship between individual action (e.g., energy use) and solving environmental problems?
  ● What assumptions about values, behavior, economics, and nature do we make when discussing climate change? How are causes and solutions to climate change framed?
  ● Does climate change pose a special challenge to society, or does it simply amplify existing challenges?

**Plagiarism and Academic Support:**
Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to your academic dean. It includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes and references; not citing a source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or inadvertently copying verbatim from any source. More detail can be found at http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity. NYU offers academic support and tutoring at the University Learning Center: www.nyu.edu/cas/ulc, (212) 998-8085.

**Supplements and Resources:**
1. Bard’s Center for Environmental Policy series of call-ins and podcasts with climate change experts: http://www.bard.edu/cep/programs/climateseminar/
2. Articles on Google Drive
3. Your professor - just ask me!