THE POWER DIALOG: CONVERSATIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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RPOS 204
Course # 19400
2:45 – 4:05
Monday and Wednesday
Humanities B20

Office hours on request

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course explores the current scientific and social understanding of climate change and the responses to it on the global, national, state and local levels through a series of conversations with climate scientists, government leaders and advocates, specifically about energy policy. This course is geared toward an April 5 public meeting with top state government officials about how to meet the goals of the December 2015 Paris Agreement, the national Clean Power Plan and New York’s commitments to clean energy. This meeting is part of a national project to engage students in a collaboration about these critical issues. Students from several other New York colleges are also studying these issues this semester and will attend this meeting in Albany.

This course will explore a number of substantive topics and is divided into modules. We will begin with an introduction to the course and a briefing about the current state of climate change science by a working climate scientist. We will then turn to a substantive discussion in four modules, each covering several different topics. Module I sets the context for the Power Dialog with an introduction to the global negotiations over countries’ responses to the climate change crisis. Module II begins with an overview into the energy system and how it works; and includes a review of the federal government policies to respond to climate change, beginning with the laissez-faire approach of the George Bush administration and covering the Clean Air Act, decisions of the Supreme Court, and the regulatory response of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Module III explains New York State’s policies toward clean energy, and the state’s current processes and decisions about the implementation of the Clean Power Plan and other greenhouse gas emission reduction initiatives. In Module IV, we will explore public participation in climate change and energy policy and methods of discourse and advocacy. At the end of the course, we will reflect on the experience.
REQUIREMENTS

Students will be expected to attend class and participate in class discussions. Participation in class will be reflected in students’ final grades. Students will also be expected to participate in group projects during the semester, simulating current processes at the global and the state level concerning combatting climate change and increasing the amount of solar and other forms of renewable energy in New York State.

The final grade is allocated among the difference assignments during the semester as follows: Preparation for and participation in group exercises (30%); preparation for and participation in the April 5, 2016 Power Dialog process (30%); final project on climate change and energy (40%).

MATERIALS

The main materials for the course are Bill McKibben, EAARTH available at the Bookstore and primary and secondary source materials provided on the course Blackboard site. Participation in this class requires you to access these materials, to have them with you in class, and to work with them in participating in the group projects. This will be a low-carbon impact class – we will minimize the distribution of paper materials.

SYLLABUS

Introduction to the Power Dialog: Overview of Climate Science and Policy

Weeks One and Two:
Reading: McKibben, EAARTH, chapters 1 and 2
Bill McKibben, Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,
(link on Blackboard web links)

Wednesday, January 20: Introduction to the course- Professor Eleanor Stein

Monday, January 25: Introduction to Climate Science: what is the current understanding?
Professor Matthias Vuille, Department of Atmospheric & Environmental Sciences

Wednesday January 27: What is the Power Dialog and what is the Clean Power Plan?
Professor Eban Goodstein, economist and Director of the MBA in Sustainability and the Center for Environmental Policy at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, coordinator for New York State’s Power Dialog.

MODULE ONE: THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Monday February 1: The Sustainability paradigm
Wednesday February 3: Distribution of materials for post-Paris process –Professors Stein and Mallia

Monday February 8: Class meets in groups to discuss roles/simulation

Wednesday February 10: Treaty negotiation: assessment of the Paris Agreement

MODULE II – THE ENERGY MARKET AND NATIONAL POLICY

Monday February 15: Basics of energy and the energy market – Rudy Stegemoeller, Special Assistant for Energy Policy, New York State Public Service Commission

Monday February 22 - Prof. Richard Perez – the solar and renewable potential

Wednesday February 24- Roots of the Clean Power Plan: the Clean Air Act and the Supreme Court decision in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*

Monday February 29: Overview of the Clean Power Plan and the judicial challenges to it

MODULE III – NEW YORK STATE’S CLEAN ENERGY CHALLENGE

Wednesday March 2: New York and the Clean Power Plan

Monday March 7: New York’s climate change aspirations and targets: How do we reach these goals? The promise of and obstacles to renewable energy development? Group exercise on siting of wind turbines

Wednesday March 9: Environmental and climate justice

*March 12 – March 18 SPRING BREAK*