

## **PUBP 3315 / 6310 Syllabus**

Environmental Policy and Politics, Section MG, 3 Credits

Fall 2026

### **Instructor Information**

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### **General Course Information**

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#### **Description**

This course examines the factors that shape environmental policy in the United States. We will explore why environmental policies are needed, focusing on issues such as negative externalities and public goods. Next, we will investigate how environmental policies are crafted and how those policies are administered or implemented across different levels of government. A central focus of the course is the jurisdictional complexity of environmental policymaking in the U.S. Responsibility is shared and, at times, contested among federal, state, and local governments, as well as among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. We will analyze how overlapping and sometimes conflicting jurisdictions influence environmental policy outcomes and enforcement.

We will review major federal environmental legislation, examine variation in state and local policy approaches, and assess recent policy trends. We will seek to understand how the institutional and political contexts at each level of government shape environmental decision making and implementation. Overall, the first part of the course will focus on the structural and organizational features of environmental policymaking. The second half will examine specific policy topics and dilemmas, explore potential solutions, and apply tools of policy assessment and analysis.

This course is conducted in-person. The classroom format will consist of weekly modules. Each module will include a combination of one to two class periods (lectures and group assignments), readings, videos, podcasts, and current events materials. If we need to move a class period online, a zoom link will be provided via email.

#### **Course Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete this course will have a stronger understanding of the historical and present factors that shape and constrain environmental policy. The work you do outside of class will be as important as the work in class. Course goals include:

1. Critically analyze environmental policy problems and pros and cons of potential solutions.
2. Understand the roles and interactions of federal, state, and local governments in environmental policymaking, and how political and institutional contexts affect policy.

3. Communicate analyses of environmental policies in a professional tone and present findings to peers.
4. Develop skills in critical thinking and professional-style writing relevant to environmental policy analysis and assessment.

**Required Course Materials**

*Textbook:* Vig, N. J., Kraft, M. E., & Rabe B.G. (Eds.). (2024). *Environmental Policy: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century* 12th Edition. Sage.

Other readings will be provided to you electronically via Canvas. Additional required readings and materials (e.g., podcasts, news articles) may be assigned as current events occur.

**Grading Policy:**

There will be 385 total possible points. Final grades will be determined based upon the percentage of total points accumulated.

*Grading Scale*

At Georgia Tech, final course grades are awarded on a scale of A-F with no +/- grades permitted. Final grades will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

*Assignments*

Assignment	Points per assignment
News stories	35 points (5 points each)
Midterm exam	25 points
Congressional Hearing Report	100 points
Environmental Policy Memo	200 points
Final exam	25 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>385 points</b>

**Description of Graded Components**

**News stories:** Every few weeks, all students are required to bring in one news article regarding environmental policy. We will set aside time multiple class sessions to discuss news stories in groups and draw connections between current policy debates in the news and our textbook readings. Students are required to submit the following information via Canvas before new story assignments are due: Article Title, Date of Publication, Source,

web link to the online article, paragraph summarizing the content of the article. Summaries should be between 250 to 500 words. E-mails with this information will not be accepted.

**Exams:** The course will have two exams – a midterm and a final exam. The midterm will cover material from the first half of the semester, and the final exam will cover the second half of the semester. *Students needing accommodations should contact me before the exam to ensure proper arrangements are made.*

**Congressional hearing report:** For this assignment, you will watch a full U.S. congressional committee hearing about an environmental topic, and then write a 4-page (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins) report that:

1. Summarizes the key issues that were discussed at the hearing,
2. Identifies the main players included in the conversations (e.g., *committee members*, who ask questions and guide the discussion, and *witnesses*, who provide testimony and respond to lawmakers' inquiries based on their expertise or experience), and
3. Provides an analysis of the underlying policy and political issues that you can infer from the interactions among the officials and/or between the officials and individuals testifying at the hearing.

U.S. House Committee Hearings and Meeting Videos can be found here:

<https://www.congress.gov/committees/video>. Videos of U.S. Senate committee hearings can often be found on individual Senate Committee websites. Please reach out if you need assistance in identifying a committee hearing video of interest.

**Environmental policy memo:** Students will work on a semester-long research project that culminates in a final 5-7 page policy memo (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). Each student will select a policy proposal that aligns with an environmental issue they are personally interested in exploring. The policy should aim to alleviate or solve that environmental problem. It may be a proposal currently under consideration at the federal, state, or local level, OR it may be a new policy proposal developed by the student to address their chosen issue.

Each student will select a specific legislator to whom the memo will be addressed. The selected official should have appropriate jurisdictional authority over the proposed policy. For example, if you select an Atlanta policy that would provide subsidies to homeowners who install rain barrels, convert pavement to lawn, etc., you will want to choose an Atlanta City Council member. Students will discuss the environmental problem the policy aims to address, analyze the potential impact of the policy, the legislator's strategic position (given their background and constituency), and finally, make a recommendation to the legislator on whether to support the policy.

The policy memo is broken into four components:

- (1) **Policy proposal identification:** Clearly identify and describe the policy proposal that you will address in your memo. (20 points)

- (2) **Legislator selection:** Choose the legislator or relevant official to whom the memo will be directed, and briefly explain why they are an appropriate choice for your proposal. (30 points)
- (3) **Policy memo outline:** Create an outline that organizes your memo, highlighting the main sections and key points you will address. (50 points)
- (4) **Final policy memo:** Write a full 5-7 page policy memo, incorporating feedback from earlier stages. (100 points)

## Course Policies

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### Attendance and/or Participation

Although attendance is not graded, active participation is critical for each student to achieve the course outcomes. You are expected to attend all class sessions unless you have a compelling reason not to do so.

### Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the student [Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

### Core IMPACTS

This is a Core IMPACTS course (part of the Social Sciences area): Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals. This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question: How do I understand human experiences and connections? Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome: Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change. Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies: Intercultural Competence, Perspective-Taking, Persuasion.

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

### Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student

body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

### **Collaboration, Group Work, and Use of Generative AI**

In this course, using generative AI tools in the work of the course (including programming assignments, discussions, language editing) is allowed. As with any technology, generative AI tools need to be used critically and according to academic and professional expectations. When using generative AI tools, you are expected to adhere to the following principles:

**Responsibility:** You are responsible for the work you submit. This means that any work you submit should be your own with any AI-generated assistance appropriately disclosed (see Transparency below) and any AI-generated content appropriately cited (see Documentation below). It is your responsibility to ensure that any factual statements produced by a generative AI tool are true, and that any references or citations produced by the AI tool are correct and verifiable.

**Transparency:** Any AI-generated content you use in the work of the course should be clearly acknowledged. Transparency in attribution is needed not only when you use content directly produced by a generative AI tool, but also when you use a generative AI tool in the process of composition or discovery (for example, for brainstorming, outlining or synthesizing information sources, or translation).

**Documentation:** You should cite any content generated by an AI tool as you would when quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing ideas, text, images, or other content made by other people.

**A word of advice:** Please do not simply copy an LLM output verbatim. I suggest keeping documentation of your chat prompts and output, particularly for attribution of specific programming lines or tasks and in replication of your analyses. Using generative AI tools in the course without adhering to these principles may be considered an infraction of the Georgia Tech Honor Code, subject to investigation by the Office of Student Integrity. Go here for more information about Georgia Tech's personal information privacy policy: <https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/legal/personal-information-privacy-policy>

### **Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams**

Due dates for all assignments are non-negotiable. Late work will not be accepted. Exceptions to these guidelines will be made only under unusual circumstances and will require valid documentation from the student. Please contact me if illness, family medical problems, or emergencies occur.

## Campus Resources for Students

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### **Undergraduate Student Academic Success Resources:**

A list of resources for undergraduate students' academic success and information about advising can be found at [Success at Tech](#).

Academic Support: Academic Success and Advising (a unit in the Office of Undergraduate Education & Student Success) provides free support for your courses. Students can attend scheduled supplemental review (PLUS) sessions, stop by Drop-In Tutoring, or schedule a one-on-one appointment through Knack. To explore what options work best for you, please visit us online at [success.gatech.edu/tutoring](http://success.gatech.edu/tutoring), email us at [tutoring@gatech.edu](mailto:tutoring@gatech.edu), or come see us at Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons, Suite 283.

### **Graduate Student Academic and Professional Success Resources:**

A list of resources for graduate students is given on the [Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education](#) website. Specific information for [current graduate students](#) includes

- [Academic Resources](#) such as the Communications Center, Language Institute, Library, Catalog, Registrar, resources for conducting research, Advocacy and Conflict Resolution resources, and how to manage unexpected situations that may impact your academic performance;
- [Student Resources](#) such as Campus Services, Child Care/Family programs, Health & Wellness, Career Services, and the Student Resource Guide; and
- [Professional Development](#) such as the programming from the Career Center and other professional development resources and events”

### **Student Well-Being:**

At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A [comprehensive list](#) of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being ([student-resource-guide \(gatech.edu\)](http://student-resource-guide.gatech.edu))

### **Communication:**

Email is the preferred method of communication. All email messages must originate from your Institute-sponsored email account. Please use a professional salutation, proper spelling and grammar, and patience in waiting for a response. I reserve the right to not respond to e-mails that are drafted inappropriately. Please email me directly ([michelle.graff@pubpolicy.gatech.edu](mailto:michelle.graff@pubpolicy.gatech.edu)) rather than through the Canvas message system. More resources on supporting student well-being on the syllabus and beyond are available through the [Learning Well Initiative](#).

**Accommodations for religious observances:**

I respect your right to observe your religion and will do what I can to accommodate your needs. With this in mind, you are permitted to be absent from class to take part in religious observances. For planning purposes, I ask that you provide me with written notice (i.e., email) of your upcoming absence within the first two weeks of class. For more information on Georgia Tech's policy regarding student rights and responsibilities around planned absences from class, please see <http://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>

**Inclusion:**

The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts supports the Georgia Institute of Technology's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in the broader society.