

INTA 4040/8803: Environmental Politics

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Course Description

Environmental issues are some of the most pressing problems facing the world today. Pollution, ocean acidification, climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, desertification, and fisheries decline threaten to destabilize societies, economies, and the earth systems that allow for a habitable planet. Despite the unified recommendations of scientists, countries, individuals, and regional governments often fall short in addressing these issues. Why does this happen, and what can be done to move in a more sustainable direction?

This course has two primary components. First, it provides several frameworks for understanding environmental problems generally, and how they intersect with political decision making. While doing this, it introduces students to historical and contemporary environmental political issues, from concerns about dwindling forests in Medieval Europe to the modern reckoning with anthropogenic climate change. Second, the course takes these frameworks and applies them to environmental issues at the individual, subnational (i.e. state/local governments), national, and international levels. It will examine which frameworks help to explain which types of environmental issues, and allow students to develop their own understandings of contemporary environmental politics. Throughout, the course will examine how political institutions and interests have interacted in determining environmental outcomes.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this seminar, students will:

- Identify and define key environmental problems.
- Understand and apply theoretical frameworks on environmental politics to contemporary and historic environmental issues.
- Analyze the root political and economic causes of environmental issues, identify potential solutions, and discuss roadblocks to their implementation.
- Effectively communicate independent thought on the above.

Required Reading/Materials

There are no required textbooks for this course. I will provide PDFs for all articles that are assigned, which are available through the Georgia Tech library. This course is relatively light on reading, so students are expected to read **in full, before class**, and to **carefully think** about assigned readings. Also note that I will sometimes only assign part of an article — pay close attention to the Canvas file name.

Course Components and Grading

Grading and Requirements

The course will consist of the following:

1. Participation (10%)
2. Discussion/reflection posts (20%)
3. Midterm (25%)
4. International negotiation simulation (10%)
5. Final project presentation (12.5%)
6. Final project (22.5%)

Note for graduate level students

This is a cross-listed section with both upper-division undergraduate and graduate students. The expectations and requirements for graduate students will be higher than those for undergraduates, although not overly so. I will note below the differing expectations in each course component. See below for a detailed description of each component.

1. Participation (and Attendance)

This is an in-person course and as such there will not be remote attendance options nor recorded lectures (with some scheduled exceptions). We will have in-depth class discussions throughout the semester. I will provide multiple avenues to participate in these discussions. Students are expected to have completed the readings prior to class. Attendance, preparedness and level of engagement are all factors of the participation grade. I reserve the right to call on individuals at random or administer reading quizzes, although I prefer not to. You are allowed three unexcused absences; after this, failure to attend will negatively impact your participation grade.

2. Discussion/Reflection Posts

This component consists of two options that encourage reflective engagement with both the material in the course and your fellow students. Each is a weekly assignment, starting in Week 2. Each requires a minimum of **one half single spaced page** of writing to get full credit. Students are encouraged to do a mix of both, but a **minimum of two** of each are required. Details for both are below. **Students may not use AI in any way for these assignments**, which I want to represent your independent, original thinking (see AI usage policy below). They are very short and not intended to take much time. There will be 14 total weekly assignments, and I will drop the lowest grade. These assignments are due at 11:59pm on Friday of each week. Late submissions are accepted for maximum half credit up until the beginning of class the following Monday. No credit or makeups for each week will be offered after that (this is because I will use the discussion/reflection to shape the next week's content, and because your discussion and reflection will be most valuable for you if done that week).

Each weekly submission is graded on a 2-point scale, with partial credit available:

- 0 = was not submitted
- 1 = was submitted but lacks substance or does not meet minimum length requirement
- 2 = was submitted and demonstrates genuine engagement with discussion or reflection

Detailed instructions for each option follow:

- A. Discussion Posts: I will post discussion questions pertaining to the course material from the preceding or upcoming week each Monday by 3pm on the Canvas discussion board. These will pertain to the readings, videos, current events, and in-class discussion. Individual contributions responding to the question as well as replies building on others' thoughts count toward the minimum contribution. Students are also encouraged to begin new discussions that are related to environmental politics generally, such as posting a news article and giving thoughts on it, or reflecting on a recent political event.
- B. Reflection Posts: The second option is designed to be a space to practice reflexivity—to consider what you learned during the week and how your priors and engagement with the material (through participation) facilitated learning. These will be submitted directly to the instructor rather than posted publicly. The point of the assignment is to reflect on your learning for the week and how your participation in the course contributed to it. More specifically, your half page writing should do the following:
 - a. Explain, specifically, something you learned during that week. You should cite a particular reading or a particular comment/discussion during lecture and specifically identify something you learned. By “learned,” I mean something that you had not thought of before, something you did not know before, a way of thinking to which you had not been exposed, a perspective you had not heard.
 - b. Explain, specifically, your prior understanding of the “thing” you identified as having learned. Perhaps prior to the week, you had never considered the “thing,” perhaps you held an opposing perspective, perhaps you held the same perspective but through learning the “thing,” you came to understand your own perspective better. Reflect on what the learning of the specific “thing” you identified interacted with your previous knowledge and how it changed, reinforced, or complicated your prior knowledge and experiences.
 - c. Finally, consider and explain how your participation in class that week facilitated your learning this “thing.” Like before, participation can mean many things—it can be speaking up during lecture to the whole group, it can be speaking during small-group discussion, it can be contributing to a virtual discussion, it can be taking focused notes, it can be asking/answering a classmate's question, etc. All of these forms of engagement with the course material can help you do the learning. In the assignment, identify something you did that week that helped you arrive at the “thing” you learned.

Graduate Expectations: Graduate students' discussion contributions or reflections should be $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page in length in total, rather than $\frac{1}{2}$. In addition, graduate students will also present a mini-lecture about a course topic of their choosing. Details about these presentations will be released in week 3.

3. Midterm

The midterm examination will take place in class, and will be a mix of multiple choice and short/medium length written answers. It is designed to test your understanding of the important ideas from the class to that point and ability to apply them to environmental issues. It is not designed to test recall of specific figures. Because the exam will take place in a limited time window, I will offer opportunities for an "oral clarification," where students can meet with me individually to expand upon or clarify their written responses. Up to $\frac{1}{2}$ of missed points per question can be gained back depending on the quality of responses during the oral clarification. Note that I will ask follow-up questions based on your discussion to probe the logic and application of your responses (so you cannot just memorize a speech).

Graduate Expectations: Graduate students will have additional questions in the exam and will be graded with higher expectations.

4. International Negotiation Simulation

The simulation will take place in class toward the end of the semester. Grading will be based on outcomes as well as active participation. Details will follow.

5. Final Project

I will release the prompt for this essay during the third or fourth week of the course, so students can consider their responses throughout the course. Students are allowed (and encouraged) to discuss the essay with other students, and may work in groups (up to 3). However, standards for grading will increase for groups. All writing must represent the student's/group's own work. Students can brainstorm together, but they must outline, write, and revise alone/in their group. Groups should also include a cover page detailing which group member contributed what. The essay will not require research beyond information provided during the course, although students may conduct such research if they choose. Students are allowed to reference their own experiences and impressions (using first person) in the essay.

Students must use at least six concrete examples from at least four different readings or videos we discussed in the course as evidence, with proper attribution/citation. The general idea of the final project is:

- Identify and describe an environmental problem
- Argue for which framework fits it best

- Propose novel solutions
- Discuss difficulties with implementation

Students will present their projects in class at the end of the semester. **12.5%** of the final grade will be based on the presentation, which **must take place in person**. Students will have at least one week from presentation to final project submission, and **should incorporate feedback received during the presentation Q&A into the final project**. Because of grading turnaround, no late submissions will be accepted for the written final project. Students will also submit a final project proposal/early draft at the end of week 12.

Graduate Expectations: Graduate students will have a longer final project length requirement, be required to cite more sources, and be graded more stringently in both the presentation and written component.

Other Policies

Core IMPACTS Statement

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is 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 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 Outcomes:

- 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

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty in the form of cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. In brief, plagiarism is defined, for the purposes of this class, as: copying, borrowing, or appropriating another person's work and presenting it as your own in a paper or oral presentation, deliberately or by accident. Acts of plagiarism will be reported in accordance with the Honor Code. In order to avoid being charged with plagiarism, if you use the words, ideas, phrasing, charts, graphs, or data of another person or from published material, then you must either: 1) use quotation marks around the words and cite the source, or 2) paraphrase or summarize acceptable using your own words and cite the source. The plagiarism policy is not restricted to books, but also applies to video and audio content, websites, blogs, wiki's, and podcasts. Plagiarism includes putting your name on a group project to which you have minimally contributed. For information on Georgia

Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit

<https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-life/academic-honor-code>. Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on an assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations. The student will also receive a grade of zero on the assignment at the instructor's discretion. Note that generative AI content cannot be considered to be written by the student, and must be annotated as such. See more information in generative AI below.

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.

Use of Technology in Classroom

Many students use their laptops, tablets, and (less commonly) phones to take notes in class. We will work under the assumption that all technology use in class is course related until I am given reason to believe that is not the case. I reserve the right to prohibit use of electronic devices in class if their use becomes distracting. I would rather not do this, so please use your devices only to facilitate class participation and note-taking.

Accessibility Statement

The Institute does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status in the administration of admissions policies, educational policies, employment policies, or any other Institute governed programs and activities. The Institute's equal opportunity and non-discrimination policy applies to every member of the Institute community. The Institute's affirmative action program, Title IX program, and related policies are developed in compliance with applicable law. Pursuant to Title IX, the Institute does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its education programs and activities. As such, the Institute does not tolerate any kind of gender-based discrimination or harassment, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment. Inquiries concerning the Institute's application of or compliance with Title IX may be directed to the Title IX Coordinator, Burns Newsome, burnsnewsome@gatech.edu, 404-385-5151.

AI Usage Policy

Students can employ AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly) or their peers as a limited tool to support their work, but not as a substitute for completing the assignment themselves. Note that there are several ethical and environmental reasons to be cautious with using generative AI, which we will discuss in class. I highly encourage independent thinking and idea generation in this course, even at the expense of perfect writing style or structure. However, I recognize that many of you incorporate AI into your study habits, so I am providing these guidelines. Students cannot use AI or peers to produce a full draft of an assignment, to produce drafts for sections of the assignment, nor for rewriting entire sentences or paragraphs. **Students also cannot use AI to summarize assigned readings rather than reading it for themselves.** Acceptable uses of AI include the following:

- *Identifying resources.* Students can use ChatGPT or similar platforms to identify a story or song for their presentation, as well as to identify non-fiction sources for the annotated bibliography/presentation. They should then locate those resources to read and integrate them on their own. Being able to read, understand, and consolidate information is a skill you must develop yourself. As such, students will and must be able to pinpoint and appropriately cite the original source of any statistics, quotations, or claims. AI platforms often fail to accurately document the source of information they provide; in this respect, these platforms do not constitute an acceptable source.
- *Light copy editing.* Students can use tools like Grammarly to check subject-verb agreement, punctuation, spelling, etc. However, they cannot use Grammarly or other AI tools to write or rewrite entire sentences or paragraphs. Learning to compile information and write competently is a skill you must develop for yourself.

Any usage of AI must be noted within submissions, including both which AI resources were employed and how. **Students are advised to keep records of their work progress, including rough (unedited) drafts and/or AI transcripts, to demonstrate compliance with course policies** in case their work is flagged for a potential violation of academic integrity. Students may also be asked to discuss the ideas represented in their assignments to confirm that it represents original work.