

University of Toronto, School of the Environment  
**ENV 1202: Media, Democracy, and Climate Justice**  
Winter 2025: Dr. Hanna E. Morris  
Thursday 11am-1pm (Eastern time zone)

**Contact Information:**

Dr. Hanna E. Morris, email: [hanna.morris@utoronto.ca](mailto:hanna.morris@utoronto.ca)

Office Hours: **Fridays 3:30-4:30pm**, See Quercus for my office location. **By appointment.**  
**Please email me at least 1 day in advance to schedule a time to meet during my office hours.**

**Course Location:**

See Quercus for room details, Thursday 11am-1pm (Eastern time zone)

**Course Overview:**

***Description:** The rise of antidemocratic politics and worsening conditions of climate change demand critical and interdisciplinary attention across the social sciences and humanities. Through a humanistic social science lens, this course examines today's political and climatic challenges through close study of theories of democracy, media, and climate justice. In this course, students will engage with a range of classic and contemporary texts from political theory, media studies, the environmental humanities, decolonial studies, and postcolonial theory, among other fields, to understand how present political and climatic conditions came to be and what can be done about it. Topics to be discussed include: theories of news, media, and democracy; radical democracy and the green energy transition; petro-nationalism and the settler nation-state; digital capitalism, neoliberalism, and authoritarianism today; climate justice and activist media; the pluriverse and decolonization; internationalism and concepts of solidarity across borders.*

***Structure:** Weekly 2-hour discussion-based graduate seminar. Please note that there is quite a bit of reading and other work outside of our weekly classes—full engagement and preparation will make our class sessions better.*

### ***Assignments (further details at the end of the syllabus)***

- ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (weekly) – 20%
- CLASS READING SUMMARY PRESENTATION (as assigned) – 15%
- FILM REFLECTION (March 20) & TWO REPLIES (March 27) – 15%
- FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATION (April 3) – 15%
- FINAL PROJECT (April 10) – 35%

### **Policies and Expectations**

#### ***In general:***

In this course, you can expect that I will strive to be fair, respectful, prepared, responsive, and enthusiastic. In return, I anticipate you will be respectful of your classmates and of me, be prepared, and be flexible. We are all learning new skills, practices, norms and – as the global pandemic has shown us – doing so amidst a series of personal, community, and global challenges. I hope that together we can foster a safe and engaging classroom, and I will rely on all of you to help create that environment.

#### ***Online course site:***

We will have a course website (Quercus) for readings, course announcements, course materials, and discussions. Please check in frequently with the Quercus site. Please also be patient with our online tools, as we will encounter glitches and challenges. If/when communication on the site goes awry, please feel free to use email for assignments, questions, etc.

#### ***Deadlines and late penalties:***

I anticipate all assignments will be submitted on time. However, some of you may find yourselves with valid conflicts and challenges, especially in light of your diverse programs and courses of study, and the exceptional challenges of this particular time (illness, caregiving duties, housing and financial insecurity, technological connectivity challenges, etc.). Please contact me as early as possible if you anticipate being unable to meet deadlines. As this is a seminar class, attendance is the bedrock of the course, enabling us to build a strong community and develop enriching conversations across weeks. If you know in advance you need to miss class, it helps me tremendously to be aware of these absences.

#### ***Backups and rough drafts:***

You are strongly advised to keep rough drafts and backup copies of all assignments and essays you submit. Please take a minute at the start of the term to set yourself a backup strategy. Whether it's a backup external hard drive, a web-based cloud service like Dropbox or Google

Drive, or some other option, it's important you have multiple copies of your work in the case of a hard drive failure or computer problem (this is important not only for this course, but also (especially!) for your research and thesis/dissertation projects).

**Names:**

If your name on the official course registration list does not, for any reason, match the name by which you would like to be addressed (and under which you would like to submit assignments and sign emails and be addressed in class) please let me know. I am not able to change official course lists, but I can certainly call you by your preferred name. Also, please let me know the pronouns you use (mine are she/her/hers).

**Exceptions and Assistance:**

The University has many resources to help students who need assistance for any number of reasons, both in and outside of the classroom, including library, academic, and health and counseling resources. Let's aim to work together as a class to help each other find academic support in the midst of challenges. The University remains committed to providing allowances for religious observances, as do I. A few helpful resources:

- <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/gradlife/Pages/Grad-Wellness.aspx>
- <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Writing-Centre.aspx>
- <http://uoft.me/religiousaccommodation>
- <http://familycare.utoronto.ca/resources/>

If you are struggling or you encounter unanticipated challenges or crises during the term (whether for academic and/or personal reasons), please seek the support you need as early as possible, as best you can. Some students find themselves facing challenges unexpectedly. If you find yourself in a difficult situation, even if you have not yet gone through all the official channels, it is best to let me know right away that you are seeking university assistance and may need accommodations (you do not need to disclose the details of your situation to me). If you will need accommodation from me for any reason, in the classroom or on coursework and assignments, please let me know as soon as you can.

**Academic integrity:**

The seriousness of academic integrity really cannot be stressed enough. Academic integrity remains **essential** to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously, seeing these as serious academic offenses. As graduate students, your academic integrity will be the foundation of your scholarly and practitioner careers.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, through the School of Graduate Studies. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional

information from your instructor or other institutional resources. As some norms differ across disciplines and universities, please take a moment to familiarize yourself with UofT policies.

- <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/facultyandstaff/Pages/Academic-Integrity.aspx>
- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>
- [www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students](http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students)

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Using someone else's words without using quotation marks
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without instructor permission
- Making up sources or facts
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

## Class Schedule and Readings (all readings are available on Quercus)

### UNIT 1: RECKONING WITH MEDIA, DEMOCRACY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

#### January 9 CLASS 1: Introduction & Background

Critical discussion questions for this week: *What is the link between "antidemocratic" politics and climate change? What are the climate and political impacts of the massive expansion of digital media and tech?*

#### Readings:

- (1) Solnit, R. (2024). In the Shadow of Silicon Valley. *The London Review of Books*.  
<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/no3/rebecca-solnit/in-the-shadow-of-silicon-valley>
- (2) O'Connell, M. (2018, February 15). Why Silicon Valley billionaires are prepping for the apocalypse in New Zealand. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/15/why-silicon-valley-billionaires-are-prepping-for-the-apocalypse-in-new-zealand>
- (3) Schleifer, T., Haberman, M., & Swan, J. (2024, December 6). The Silicon Valley Billionaires Steering Trump's Transition. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/06/us/politics/trump-elon-musk-silicon-valley.html>

#### January 16 CLASS 2: What is the climate "crisis"?

Critical discussion questions for this week: *How do media and discursive formations shape (and limit) how climate change has come to be known?*

#### Readings:

- (1) Lilley, S., McNally, D., Yuen, E., & Davis, J. (2012). "Introduction: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth" in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, pp. 1-14.
- (2) Carruth, A. (2022). The Environmental Humanities Beyond Planetary Crisis. *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 10(1), 10-14.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/res.2022.a904096>.
- (3) Solnit, R. (2010). "Prelude: Falling Together" in *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, pp. 1-10.

### **January 23 CLASS 3 What is climate “justice”?**

Critical discussion questions for this week: *Historically, how have grassroots environmental justice movements thought about the state? How do climate justice movements think about the state as well as possible alternatives to the state but without moving in a libertarian direction? How do climate justice movements think about and use social media as a terrain for organizing?*

#### Readings:

- (1) Pellow, D. N. (2018). “Critical Environmental Justice Studies” in *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* Polity, pp. 1-33.
  
- (2) Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (2019). “Introduction: The Black Snake, #NoDAPL, and the Rise of a People’s Movement” in Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (Eds.) *Standing with Standing Rock*. Minnesota University Press, pp. 1-10.

### **January 30 CLASS 4: What is “the media”?**

Critical discussion questions for this week: *How do political economy and cultural studies scholars conceive of “the media” in relation to the state and its potential social harms and opportunities?*

#### Readings:

- (1) Herman, E., & Chomsky, N. (1994 [1988]). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. London: Vintage Books. Chapter 1: A propaganda model, pp. 1-35.
  
- (2) Hall, S. et al. (2013 [1978]). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Plagrave Macmillan. Chapter 1: The Social History of a ‘Moral Panic’, pp. 7-31.

### **February 6 CLASS 5: What is “democracy”?, part 1; Begin *What is Democracy?* film in last 45 minutes of class**

Critical discussion questions for this week: *What is “democracy”? What is the relationship between democracy, the media, and climate change? What have been the impacts of global capitalism and neoliberalism on all three?*

#### Readings:

- (1) Carpentier, N., & Wimmer, J. (2025). *Democracy and Media in Europe: A Discursive-Material Approach*. London: Routledge. Part 1: Democracy, pp. 5-43
  
- (2) Fenton, N. (2025). *Democratic Delusions: How the Media Hollows Out Democracy and What We Can Do About It*. Cambridge: Polity Books. Chapter 1: Democratic Delusions and the Media.
  
- (3) Brown, W. (2024). The Violent Exhaustion of Liberal Democracy. *The Boston Review*. <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/the-violent-exhaustion-of-liberal-democracy/>

**February 13 CLASS 6: What is “democracy”?, part 2 Finish watching *What is Democracy?***  
Critical discussion questions for this week: *What would “robustly democratic” responses to climate change look like? And how can media support or hinder these responses?*

Readings:

- (1) Mouffe, C. (2022). *Towards a Green Democratic Revolution: Left Populism and the Power of Affects*. Verso. Chapter 1 & 2, pp. 1-33.
- (2) Hanna, T., & Brennan, M. (2020). “There’s No Solution to Big Tech Without Public Ownership of Tech Companies,” *Jacobin*, Dec 21. <https://jacobin.com/2020/12/big-tech-public-ownership-surveillance-capitalism-platform-corporations>

**February 20 – NO CLASS; READING WEEK**

*UNIT 2: RADICAL FUTURISMS: RE-IMAGINING WHAT COULD BE*

**February 27 CLASS 7 RADICAL FUTURISMS**

Critical discussion questions for this week: *What are “radical futurisms”? What is a “just transition” to “green” energy?*

Readings:

- (1) Demos, T.J. (2023). *Radical Futurisms: Ecologies of Collapse, Chronopolitics, and Justice-to-Come*. Chapter 1.
- (2) Riofrancos, T. (2022, February 7). [Shifting Mining from the Global South Misses the Point of Climate Justice](https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/07/renewable-energy-transition-critical-minerals-mining-onshoring-lithium-evs-climate-justice/?tpcc=recirc_latest062921). *Foreign Policy*.  
[https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/07/renewable-energy-transition-critical-minerals-mining-onshoring-lithium-evs-climate-justice/?tpcc=recirc\\_latest062921](https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/07/renewable-energy-transition-critical-minerals-mining-onshoring-lithium-evs-climate-justice/?tpcc=recirc_latest062921)

**March 6 CLASS 8: RADICALLY UNSETTLED SUBJECTIVITIES**

Critical discussion questions for this week: *Who is an “expert”, “environmentalist”, “authority”? How is “expertise” determined—by whom and for whom? How are critical scholars and climate justice activists unsettling traditional centers of power for more equitable and “robustly democratic” climate decision-making processes? What role does / could media play here?*

Readings:

- (1) Escobar, A. (1995) “The Making and Unmaking of the Third World through Development” in Rahnema, M. and Bawtree, V. (Eds.). (1997). *The Post-Development Reader*. London, UK: Zed Books, pp. 85-93.

- (2) Hawthorne, C., and Lewis, J.S. (2023). "Black Geographies: Material Praxis of Black Life and Study" in *The Black Geographic: Praxis, Resistance, Futurity*, pp. 1-24.
- (3) Vergès, F. (2017), Racial Capitalocene: Is the Anthropocene Racial? In: Verso Blog. Available at: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>

### **March 13 CLASS 9: WATCH HOW TO BLOW UP A PIPELINE**

### **March 20 CLASS 10: FROM THE UNIVERSAL TO PLURIVERSAL**

\**How to Blow up a Pipeline* film reflection due

Critical discussion questions for this week: How does / could the concept of the "pluriverse" open up radical re-imaginings for both climate politics and media? How can theories of the pluriverse, media, and democracy be put into conversation with each other?

Readings:

- (1) Rosa, F. R. (2022). From community networks to shared networks: the paths of Latin-Centric Indigenous networks to a pluriversal internet. *Information, Communication & Society*, 26(11), 2326–2344.
- (2) Cleaver, H. M. (1998). The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric. *Journal of International Affairs*, 51(2), 621–640.

### **March 27 CLASS 11: LAND BACK AND DECOLONIZATION**

*How does decolonization relate to climate justice? What would a decolonized form of climate media look like / entail?*

Readings:

- (1) Lehedé, S. (2024). An alternative planetary future? Digital sovereignty frameworks and the decolonial option. *Big Data & Society*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231221778>
- (2) Estes, N. (2019, August 6). A Red Deal. *Jacobin*. Retrieved from <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/08/red-deal-green-new-deal-ecosocialism-decolonization-indigenous-resistance-environment>
- (3) Samudzi, Z. (2022). JOURNEY FROM "THE CENTER OF THE WORLD": ON U.S. EXCEPTIONALISM AND DISGUST. *The Funambulist*. <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/decentering-the-us/journey-from-the-center-of-the-world-on-u-s-exceptionalism-and-disgust>

**April 3 Class 12:** Final project presentations

**Final Projects are due by April 10<sup>th</sup>**

## Assignment Details

### ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

- This is a reading-intensive, discussion-based graduate seminar. Active participation in each class is required. Please closely read each assigned text prior to the class meetings.

### CLASS READING SUMMARY PRESENTATION

- On your assigned class date, you will need to come to class prepared to share key insights, critiques, and/or questions for each reading due that day. Please spend no more than 5 minutes presenting on each reading (i.e., 5 minutes per reading due that day. Most days have 2 to 3 readings so these presentations will range from around 10 to 15 minutes). Slides are recommended but not required. No need to hand in anything written.

### FILM REFLECTION & REPLIES

- Write a brief, 1 to 2 page single-spaced reflection on the film *HOWTO BLOW UP A PIPELINE* that we will watch together in class the week prior. Upload your reflection to the Quercus Film Reflection Discussion thread. Additionally, you must comment on at least two of your peers' reflections. Each comment should be at least a paragraph in length.

### FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATION

- On the last day of class, you will deliver a 10 minute presentation on your final project. There will be an additional 5 minutes of Q&A following your presentation.

### FINAL PROJECT

- OPTION 1: ~15 page double-spaced comparative critical media analysis of three different climate media "texts" (e.g., film, art exhibition, news image, news story, podcast, etc.) drawing upon the critical theories and concepts we discussed in class
- OPTION 2: Creative media production & short media-maker statement. The ~6 page media maker statement should briefly explain the intention behind your project and how course readings and discussions helped inform your creative media production.