ENV451 CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS - FS 2020
SYLLABUS

First class: September 11th, 2020
Fridays: 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Location: Online/synchronous
Instructor: Dr. Erich Vogt
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TA: Brian Pentz
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Office hours: by appointment only

Course Description

Global environmental dangers are among the most profound challenges facing humanity. They fundamentally undermine the quality of life and threaten the organic infrastructure that supports all life on earth. It is within this context that the course explores the socio-political dynamics of global environmental affairs. The course will also look into the multiple causes of environmental harm and, with students’ help, try to identify effective response mechanisms. Finally, it endeavors to examine a number of key challenges - including food and agriculture, water, energy, and climate change – as they are being addressed in both academe and professional practice.

Drawing on both official and informal studies and field work from around the world and diverse sources, academic papers, news accounts and editorial pages of journals and newspapers, major negotiation conferences and informal meetings, as well as the insights of leading thinkers and thinking leaders in both the developing and developed worlds, the course will foster ‘deep’ learning (as opposed to ‘strategic’ learning), creative thinking, collaborative learning and critical debate. Students are encouraged to ask probing questions and offer comments, however tentative, in class.
This is a "capstone" course and invites students to draw on their years of studies across all academic disciplines. It is designed for students coming to the end of their undergraduate study of the environment and preparing to move on to the next phase of their academic and professional development and competence. In other words, it calls on and encourages students to synthesize insights gained throughout their academic journey.

**Course format/Blackboard Collaborate**

The course will be delivered by way of ‘Blackboard (Bb) Collaborate’. The delivery of the lectures will take place ‘live’ at the designated times (Fridays, 1 pm – 4 pm). Attendance and participation in the lectures is expected.

This course, including your participation, will be recorded and made available for your review after each session in the designated Modules on Quercus.

Course videos and materials belong to your instructor and are protected by copyright. Do not download, copy, or share any course or student materials or videos without the explicit permission of the instructor. Students creating unauthorized audio recording of lectures violate an instructor’s intellectual property rights and the Canadian Copyright Act. Students violating this agreement will be subject to disciplinary actions under the Code of Student Conduct.

For a basic introduction to both Quercus and Bb Collaborate I suggest consulting the following posts:

- [https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Participant/Get_Started](https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Participant/Get_Started)
- [https://qstudents.utoronto.ca/blackboard-collaborate-ultra-student-use/#more-602](https://qstudents.utoronto.ca/blackboard-collaborate-ultra-student-use/#more-602)
- [https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/46670/pages/student-quercus-guides#h_326108522141535558104934](https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/46670/pages/student-quercus-guides#h_326108522141535558104934)

**Course framework**

The course material is presented in three ways: course readings, lectures and breakout group discussions. Students will be asked to write three papers (critical review, memorandum to political decision makers, research/policy paper).
Despite the online delivery format, every effort will be made to make the course as interactive and participatory as possible. This, however, requires that students attend, do the assigned readings and follow lectures closely, preferably ‘live’.

**Learning Objectives**

Those who participate fully in this course should by its end:

- Have improved their critical thinking capacity;
- Have a well-rounded and balanced understanding of the multiple causes and implications of a range of current environmental challenges and of different forms of response;
- Comprehend and appreciate the role of science, the state system, the global political economy, and civil society in exacerbating and/or mitigating environmental problems;
- Understand and articulate the difference in perspectives of developed and developing countries and appreciate the tensions between conservation and development;
- Demonstrate proficiency in framing more effectively research questions and approaches, analysis, verbal presentation, and writing skills.

**Readings**

Readings for each class are listed in the Lecture Topics section below. I have made every attempt to make all of them available electronically, and in some cases also as hard copy. You can find the readings on Quercus in the Library Resources file. Required readings are marked with an “R”, all unmarked readings are complementary.

I traditionally do not spend time in class reviewing books’ and readings’ content; rather I will selectively pick on some of the main themes and hypotheses of writers’ works, then test and pick them apart – with your help!!!
Please be aware of the wide range of resources for writing support available in the Faculty of Arts and Science. Undergraduate students in FAS are eligible to seek help at their home college's centre and at other centres for work in college program courses. All seven FAS writing centres will be fully operational, and all will be offering remote instruction. The modality may differ by college. I strongly encourage students to visit each individual centre's site for information on how to make an appointment. The FAS centres are listed at https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science.

Students whose first language is not English are encouraged to make us of UofT’s English Language Learning program (ELL)'s offerings. For detailed information consult http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell, or contact the ELL coordinator Leora Freedman at leora.freedman@utoronto.ca.

**Communication**

Emails are normally responded to within 48 hours, but not during weekends or on public holidays. All official communications and announcements from the instructor and TA will be sent either via the ‘Announcement’ file on Quercus, or students’ official UofT-issued e-mail addresses.

**Course Assignments: All papers must be submitted electronically via Quercus**

1) **Critical review - 25 Percent**

Based on the information and insights gained in previous (environmental) courses, you will be asked to critically review a contemporary environmental essay as written by a designated author. Specific instructions will be provided in the lectures and accompanying students’ guidance note by the end of the first couple of weeks of classes.

Three (3) pages, 1.5 spacing, TNR 12 font, endnotes and bibliography. A selection of essays will be posted roughly 2 weeks before due date on Quercus, and papers are expected to be submitted electronically on Quercus. **Due: October 9th, 2020**

2) **Memorandum - 30 Percent**
You are the special climate change envoy of a G20 country of your choice. Write a climate change memorandum for the Sherpa of your chosen G20 country and present your arguments for overhauling the existing (part of) policy. More specific instructions will be given in the lectures and students’ guidance note.

Due: November 6th, 2020

3) Research/Policy paper – 35 Percent
The purpose of this combined research/policy paper is to give students an opportunity to explore and develop a paper that focuses on SDG 13. This five (5) page paper must: (1) examine the chief causes/drivers of the issue(s)/problem(s) - as you see them based on your own critical assessment; (2) outline what the international community has agreed to do about it (targets, indicators); and (3) provide ideas and recommendations of how best to move the solution from concept to practice. More specific instructions will be given in the lectures and students’ guidance note.

The paper shall have 1.5 spacing, with 1 inch margins, 12 points font, endnotes and bibliography.

Due: December 4th, 2020

Evaluation criteria of all written work products
The primary criteria used in evaluating students’ written work are the following:

1) **Content**: Content is Queen/King!!!
2) **Mechanics**: Defined as freedom from minor factual errors and spelling and grammatical errors. Where asked, students are expected to include thorough, accurate and consistent references in any bona fide academic referencing style that includes page numbering.
3) **Writing style**: It should be appropriate for an academic environment. Beyond that, style will be evaluated primarily in terms of clarity. Proper use of the English language is expected!
4) **Structure**: Papers will also be evaluated in terms of their organization and coherence. The structure of the paper must logically flow from the assignment question(s) and must add up to a coherent whole.
5) **Precision and accuracy**: Precision means saying exactly and specifically what you mean, avoiding ambiguity and vague generalities. Accuracy refers to absence of major factual errors.
6) **Analysis:** Analysis will be evaluated in terms of success in using evidence in the form of data/information to construct a logical argument which convincingly answers your assignment question(s).

4) **Participation in weekly lectures - 10 Percent**

Students are expected to attend all classes and actively engage in ensuing breakout group discussions. Participation means making insightful comments, asking probing questions, and being involved in the ongoing discussions in ways that show students have done the readings and are thinking critically about the content and discourse of the class.

**Evaluation criteria of all oral contributions**

1) **Success in communicating** key concepts succinctly and accurately, thereby demonstrating sound understanding of the work being presented.

2) **Mechanics of communication,** such as manner of speaking (including good diction and tone), structure of the presentation and level of organization.

3) **Ability to respond** appropriately and fairly to questions and contribute to and stimulate unstructured discussion among peers.

There will be no mid-term and no final assessment/exams

**Late penalties**

No due dates will be extended unless discussed with and agreed upon by the TA. Penalty for late work will be 2% of the assignment mark per day late, including weekends. **Late papers will be accepted only for one week after the due dates.** Papers submitted later will not be reviewed and assessed. The only exemption from this penalty will be for work that is late for health reasons, provided that students submit the proper documentation by way of the Absence Declaration Tool

For students to access the Absence Declaration Tool they must sign into ACORN and click on “Profile and Settings” at the top left corner of the webpage. Absence for other than health reasons must be documented through proper notifications from either UofTs Accessibility Services or the College Registrar. In both cases the relevant documentation must be submitted to the instructor.

**Grading scheme**

The course will follow the University of Toronto’s undergraduate courses grading scheme:

- **A+**: 90 - 100%
- **A**: 85 - 89%
- **A-**: 80 - 84%
- **B+**: 77 - 79%
- **B**: 73 - 76%
- **B-**: 70 - 72%
- **C+**: 67 - 69%
- **C**: 63 - 66%
- **C-**: 60 - 62%
- **D+**: 57 - 59%
- **D**: 53 - 56%
- **D-**: 50 - 52%
- **F**: 0 - 49%

More information is available here: [https://fas.calendar.utoronto.ca/rules-regulations#grading](https://fas.calendar.utoronto.ca/rules-regulations#grading)

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that you earn will be valued
as a true indication of your individual academic achievement, and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* ([http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm](http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm)) and ([https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/](https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/)). It is the rule book for academic behaviour at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- In papers and assignments:
  - Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
  - Copying material word-for-word from a source (including lecture and study group notes) and not placing the words within quotation marks
  - Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor
  - Making up sources or facts
  - Including references to sources that you did not use
  - Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including:
    - working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
    - having someone rewrite or add material to your work while “editing”
  - Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission

On tests and exams:

- Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone
- Looking at someone else’s answers
- Letting someone else look at your answers
- Misrepresenting your identity
- Submitting an altered test for re-grading

Misrepresentation:
• Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including doctor’s notes
• Falsifying institutional documents or grades

You can get further guidance on academic integrity from the website of the Office of Student Academic Integrity at: www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students

Accessibility needs

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible at https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca
CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS
Class topics, activities and readings

Week I: September 11th, 2020
Introduction to the course – Drivers of Environmental Change

Readings
Joshua Rothman, “The Big Question: Is the world getting better or worse?,” The New Yorker (23 July 2018), pp. 26-32

Week II: September 18th, 2020
Environmental studies and issues reassessed and redefined – Why are humans causing the ecological crisis?

Readings
http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/2016_5_final_0.pdf


Ellis, Erle C.) “Why is Human Niche Construction Transforming Planet Earth?” in

- **Guest speaker:**
  Douglas Macdonald, UofT, School of the Environment, TBC

Week III: September 25th, 2020

**Intellectuals reflect and chime in**

**Readings**


Jennifer Clapp/Paul Dauvergne, Paths to a Green World, MIT Press, 2011, pp. 1 – 17

James Gustave Speth: Environmental Failure: A Case for a New Green Politics, https://e360.yale.edu/features/environmental_failure_a_case_for_a_new_green_politics

Yash Tandon, End Aid Dependency, Pambazuka Publishers, 2008


Week IV: October 2nd, 2020

**The State, Private Sector and Civil Society – who has the (strongest) voice and visibility?**

**Readings**


James Gustave Speth, “Environmental Failure: A Case for a New Green Politics”; see https://e360.yale.edu/features/environmental_failure_a_case_for_a_new_green_politics

Week V: October 9th, 2020
Biodiversity – let’s face up to it, it’s all about us

Readings


• Guest speaker:
Barbara Zimmerman, Director Kayapo Project, International Conservation Fund of Canada, TBC

Critical Review due

Week VI: October 16th, 2020
Climate change – in search of the game changer

Readings
The Paris Agreement; see http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

Dale Jamieson, Reason in a Dark Time – Why the struggle against climate change failed – and what it means for our future, pp. 11-60, Oxford University Press, 2014

Erich Vogt, “Current State of Climate Politics”, pp. 188–198, in Environmental Policy and Law (42/3), 201


“Climate change visualized: How Earth’s temperature has changed since 1970”, see https://www.axios.com/climate-change-earth-temperature-change-902e2958-451b-4044-a6a3-8dab46902da6.html?fbclid=IwAR0vIGfdduQ0v4mpzFvEBK8U1qdTQHOQ8YS5gZgJ3keZYbSOXX9vbTtUcNc

Week VII: October 23rd, 2020

Climate change – the North-South divide, the financing instruments, and a higher calling

Readings


Task Force 20, Climate Change and Environment, G20 Summit, 2019, Japan, see https://t20japan.org/task-forces/climate-and-environment/

Week VIII: October 30th, 2020

Food & Agriculture – two sides of a coin?

Readings
Homi Kharas/John McArthur, “The world is off track to end hunger, so what’s the solution”; see https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2017/10/23/the-world-is-off-track-to-end-hunger-so-whats-the-solution/
“Agriculture Department buries studies showing dangers of climate change”, Politico, see https://www.politico.com/story/2019/06/23/agriculture-department-climate-change-1376413
Ifad.org “As climate shocks intensify, UN food agencies urge more support for southern Africa's hungry people”, see https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/news-detail/asset/41402041

• Guest speaker:
  Bryan Dale, Ph.D., University of Toronto, TBC
  Brian Pentz, Ph.D. candidate, UofT/UTSC, TBC
Week IX: November 6th, 2020

**Plundering the Earth – with energy “to kill”?**

**Readings**

- **Guest speaker:**
  Jochen Bezner, Orange Solar, TBC

**Memorandum due**

Week X: November 13th, 2020

**Reading week, no classes**

Week XI: November 20th, 2020

**Water – flowing between Cooperation and Conflict**
Readings
8th World Water Forum in Brasilia/Brazil,
http://www.worldwaterforum8.org/node/942
David C. Victor, “Oceans on the front lines of global climate change”, see https://www.brookings.edu/blog/planetpolicy/2017/10/31/oceans-on-the-front-lines-of-global-climate-change/

- Guest speaker:
  Lawson Oates – Director, Toronto Water, TBC

Week XII: November 27th, 2020

Environmental Waste – from rags to riches?

Readings

“Sweden’s recycling is so revolutionary, the country has run out of rubbish”, see YouTube video [https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/sweden-s-recycling-is-so-revolutionary-the-country-has-run-out-of-rubbish-a7462976.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/sweden-s-recycling-is-so-revolutionary-the-country-has-run-out-of-rubbish-a7462976.html)


European strategy for plastics, European Commission, 2019, see [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/plastic_waste.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/plastic_waste.htm)

“What is e-waste?”, electronix redux, see [https://rogersmembercentre.com/rmcapp/remc.html#/registration](https://rogersmembercentre.com/rmcapp/remc.html#/registration)


Guest speakers:

Ms Elisabeth Perlikowski, SickKids Hospital, TBC
Mr. Stephen Miranda, Canada Fibers Ltd., TBC

Week XIII: December 4th, 2020

Students’ reflection/evaluation – What went well, what not, what should be done differently?

Readings

None
Research/Policy paper due

Good luck on your upcoming FINALS!!!