

# ENV 375

## CROSSING THE CLIMATE CHANGE DIVIDE

Professor Meera Subramanian  
Office: PEI Guyot Hall, Rm M44  
Office Hours: Wed. 9:00am – 11:00am and by appointment  
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Cross-listing: ENG275, JRN375

Fall 2019  
W 1:30pm – 4:20pm  
Location: Jones Hall 102



“The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.... We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”

- John F. Kennedy

### Description

The effects of climate change are here, now. Yet Americans are divided on this singular issue. Or are they? While media often portray climate change debates as binary—fact-averse conservative denialists vs. Green-New-Deal leftists—the reality is that all Americans are experiencing changes in their own backyards. For some it is the impact of devastating extreme events such as wildfires or storm flooding; for others, it is noticing quieter shifts such as when spring blooms and birds arrive. How they process and understand these changes will be the focus of our semester.

Journalist and Visiting Professor Subramanian traveled across the country collecting climate change stories told by conservative farmers, ranchers, dogsledders, evangelical Christians, and others, many of whom depend on climate-related industries for their livelihood. Drawing on her work along with a wide range of books and articles, we'll explore why facts alone can fail and how political, economic, socio-cultural, and religious beliefs shape the climate debate for people far away from academia.

The ideological divide between the political left, which generally accepts the scientific consensus that climate change is happening and human-caused, and the political right, which is often more skeptical of the science or about the human role in any changes, has varied dramatically over the past thirty years. We will likely see continued changes... even as the class is underway. We will learn about how and why this pendulum has swung, thinking about how the complicated world of scientific findings relates to the everyday lives of people with their own stories, concerns and belief systems.

As we explore the nuances and complexities about how people think (or don't) about climate change, we will explore the role empathy and compassion play (or don't) in understanding the power of people's own narratives. We will also turn the lens upon our own cultural biases. I expect you to engage with the readings and class discussions in a meaningful way, responding to them with your heart and head both, and be able to articulate your thoughts. At its core, this seminar is an investigation of how we form opinions about the world we inhabit and how those opinions interact with others' views, as well as how and when minds get changed about these fundamental issues.

## Required Reading

### Books:

- Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*
- Andrew J. Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate*
- Michael Mann and Tom Toles, *Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial is Threatening Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, and Driving Us Crazy*
- Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*
- Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*
- Earl Swift, *Chesapeake Requiem: A Year with the Watermen of Vanishing Tangier Island*
- Elizabeth Rush, *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore*
- Candis Callison, *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*
- Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas, *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and A Healthy Environment*
- Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home*

**Other readings will be available on Blackboard.**

## Learning Outcomes

In this course, you will learn about the current scientific consensus on climate change and the ways that people come to accept, reject, ignore, or wrestle with such science. You will learn about the specific ways that climate change is impacting communities today, and how those communities are responding. In the process, you will analyze and contextualize their beliefs within historic, economic, socio-cultural, and religious frameworks, gaining a better understanding of the reasons for the current cultural divide about the issue of climate change, especially between conservative and liberal Americans and among the wide range of people who fall somewhere between the poles.

## Course Content Warning

In this class we will be exploring fundamental belief systems that shape people's worldviews while exploring our own values and beliefs. We will approach the inquiry with a combination of critical intelligence and sensitivity, while understanding that confronting difficult arguments and challenging texts is critical to our work in the humanities. Please feel free to meet with me during office hours to discuss any difficult personal reactions you might have (or anticipate having) to our readings or discussions.

## Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (15%). This course is run as a conversation. Please come to each seminar with a thorough comprehension of the reading and be prepared to discuss it. Bring physical copies of the reading to class each day. You will not be able to participate fully without the text in hand. Students with more than one or two unexcused absences should expect poor class participation grades. Active participation, which means speaking as well as engaged listening to others, is rewarded.
2. Weekly reading responses (10%). Each week, in response to the reading(s) for the upcoming class, you will write one page, single-spaced, due at 5pm on the day before class. This allows time for *everyone to read each other's responses before class the next day*. It should be clear and grammatically correct, but it should also be informal and conversational, like an email or a blog post. The goal is NOT to summarize the reading(s) but to interact with and respond to them, exploring your criticisms or agreements, questions they inspired or other ideas that you were reminded of, perhaps from other classes. Be inspired by the words of author Joan Didion: "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear." Content is *not* graded but you will receive credit for posting and lose credit for failing to do so. Please title your response each week with "Your Name" and "Response 1"/ "Response 2" eg: "Meg Taing Response 3". Please cut and paste your response as a post on the Blackboard Discussion Board and

*do not upload your response as a word doc*, as that prevents printing out all the responses at once.

3. Oral Presentation (10%). Each student will be responsible for leading the discussion on a particular book or set of readings. It should be short (5-7 minutes long), stating the topic, noting key terms used, and explaining the main arguments the author(s) made. Please also find a complementary piece (it could be a book review, scientific paper cited in the reading, a critique, a parallel piece on the same subject but by a different writer, or even a podcast or video) and speak about its connection to the reading(s). Please post this complementary piece to Blackboard by 8pm two days before class in case your fellow students would like to read/listen/watch it, although they are not required to. Also have a few questions prepared for the class to initiate the conversation. There will also be an informal presentation about the final paper while it is in process.
4. Midterm Exam (25%): one-hour, in-class exam consisting of written one-paragraph answers.
5. Final Paper (40%): Referring back to your weekly responses, think about which part of the class has inspired the most curiosity. Here is your chance to take this interest and expand upon it. The final paper can take the form of a creative essay drawing on personal experience or it can be an academic research paper. It should be 12-14pp, double-spaced. A one-page (single-spaced) prospectus of your piece is due on Dec. 4, providing the general shape of your piece and the sources it will draw upon. The final paper is due on Jan. 14, 2020 at 11:59pm

## Grading

Attendance and Class Participation:	15%
Weekly Reading Responses:	10%
Oral Presentation:	10%
Midterm Exam:	25%
Final Paper:	40%

## Grading for Papers

Papers will be graded in light of organization, spelling and grammar, argument, evidence, and style:

A: Superb. Paper is elegant and clearly organized, contains no grammatical or spelling errors, presents a clear and convincing thesis, which is supported by relevant evidence. Moreover, this thesis contains original insights and provocations.

A-: Excellent. Paper is clearly written and organized, contains no more than one or two grammatical or spelling errors, presents a clear and convincing thesis, which is supported by relevant evidence.

B+: Very good. Paper is well written and tolerably well organized, contains no more than a few grammatical or spelling errors, presents a clear and convincing, though fairly predictable thesis, supported by reliable evidence.

B: Very good. Paper is adequately written and may be somewhat haphazardly organized, contains no more than a few grammatical or spelling errors, presents a clear, though perhaps fairly predictable thesis supported by some evidence.

B-: Good. Paper is not particularly well written and may be somewhat haphazardly organized, contains a handful or more of grammatical or spelling errors, presents a thesis that is either unclear or unconvincing or both supported by some evidence.

C+ and below: Subpar. Paper is difficult to read and to follow, contains various grammatical or spelling errors, presents no clear thesis.

## Late Papers/Makeup Exams Policy

The midterm exam will not be rescheduled. If the final paper is handed in late, it will be marked down one third of a letter grade for each day or portion of a day it is late. Please let me know if you will be late. Exceptions only for illness with doctor's note or death/sickness in the family.

## Plagiarism: Don't Do It.

In keeping with Princeton University's policies, plagiarism will be penalized severely. Don't do it. Please know that I refer cases of suspected academic misconduct to the Dean's Office, and follow Princeton's Honor Code: <https://odoc.princeton.edu/curriculum/academic-integrity>

## Electronic Devices in the Classroom: No Cell Phones or Laptops

In this course, you may not use a laptop, tablet, smart phone, or any other electronic device during class, unless it is specifically for a presentation of multimedia to the entire class. Please do not take this course if you are not willing to follow this policy. Why this rule? This course is run as a conversation and conversations require everyone to be fully engaged. Forays online or onto your cellphone distract to those around you and your instructors. There is now a lot scientific research proving that multitasking is impossible; when we think we are multitasking we are just toggling back and forth from one task to another and becoming unproductive at each. A Stanford study showed that those who multitask more remember less. Another study showed that the IQs of people who fielded emails and phone calls dropped by 10 points—more than double the drop attributed to smoking pot. Other studies demonstrate that students who take notes by hand retain far more than those who take notes on a laptop, in part because the act of writing notes begins the process of sifting the information (rather than merely writing it down like a stenographer). See, e.g., See Adam Gorlick, "Media Multitaskers Pay Mental Price, Stanford Study Shows," *Stanford News*, August 24, 2009, <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/august24/multitask-research-study-082409.html>; and Peter Bregman, "How (and Why) to Stop Multitasking," *HBR Blog Network*, May 20, 2010, <http://blogs.hbr.org/2010/05/how-and-why-to-stop-multitaski/>; Cindi May, "A Learning Secret: Don't Take Notes With a Laptop," *Scientific American*, June 3, 2014,

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>.

## Illness

We all want everyone to stay as healthy as possible, so please stay home and take care of yourself if you are ill, even if you think you're "over it." Let me know by email me. But please do not use the excuse of illness as an opportunity to skip class, because you may become ill later, and that will entail missing too many classes. Regular class attendance is mandatory.

## Disability Accommodations

Students with disabilities who need accommodations should speak with me directly as well as contact Princeton's Office of Disability Services for guidelines and assistance:

<https://ods.princeton.edu/>

## Class Schedule and Assignments:

### SECTION ONE: Introduction

#### **Week 1 / Sept. 11: Introduction: Getting our Bearings**

- Reading:
- Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (Labyrinth)
- [IPCC Global Warming 1.5 ° C report, Summary for Policymakers](#) (Blackboard)

#### **Week 2 / Sept. 18: When Science and Stories Clash**

- Reading:
- Andrew J. Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* (Labyrinth)
- Yale Center on Climate Change Communication report "[Climate Change in the American Mind](#)," 2018 (Blackboard)
- Guest speaker via Skype: Ed Maibach, George Mason Center for Climate Communication

#### **Week 3 / Sept. 25: Shifting Positions**

- Reading:
- Michael Mann and Tom Toles, *Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial is Threatening Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, and Driving Us Crazy* (Labyrinth)
- Adam Frank, "[When Is It OK For Scientists To Become Political?](#)" NPR (Blackboard)

- Larry Bartels and Katherine Cramer, "[White people get more conservative when they move up — not down — economically. Here's the evidence.](#)" *Washington Post* (Blackboard)

## SECTION TWO: Connecting the Dots

### Week 4 / Oct. 2: Agnotology: Culturally Induced Ignorance

- Reading:
  - Naomi Oreskes and Erik. M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, Introduction pp. 1-9, Ch. 1 pp. 10-35, Ch. 4 pp. 107-135, Ch. 6 pp.169-215, Conclusion pp. 240-265, Epilogue pp. 266-274 (Labyrinth)
- Optional reading:
  - Nathaniel Rich, "[Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change.](#)" *The New York Times* (Blackboard)

### Week 5 / Oct. 9: Finding Middle Ground

- Watch:
  - "[Van Jones Ignites Conversation for Climate Change](#)" (YouTube)
- Reading: Choose *any five* of Meera's pieces:
  - Meera Subramanian, "[It's Going to End with Me': The Fate of Gulf Fisheries in a Warming World.](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Meera Subramanian, "[They Know Seas Are Rising, but They're Not Abandoning Their Beloved Cape Cod.](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Meera Subramanian, "[The Flash Drought Brought Misery, but Did It Change Minds on Climate Change?](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Meera Subramanian, "[Fly-fishing on Montana's Big Hole River, Signs of Climate Change are Everywhere.](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Meera Subramanian, "[Wind Power Means Jobs in Texas, and Partisan Politics Isn't Going to Stop It.](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Meera Subramanian, "[As Snow Disappears, A Family of Dogsled Racers in Wisconsin Can't Agree Why.](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Meera Subramanian, "[In Georgia's Peach Orchards, Warm Winters Raise Specter of Climate Change.](#)" *InsideClimate News* (Blackboard)
  - Guest speaker via Skype: Meera Subramanian(!)

### Week 6 / Oct. 16: Building "Empathy Bridges"

- Reading:
  - Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (Labyrinth)
- Optional reading:
  - Charles Duhigg, "[The Real Roots of American Rage.](#)" *The Atlantic* (Blackboard)

### Week 7 / Oct. 23: Midterm Exam

- No Readings

- Mid-term exam
- Open discussion and brainstorm final paper ideas. Come with ideas.



## SECTION THREE: View from the Water's Edge

### Week 8 / Nov. 6: Vanishing Landscapes

- Reading:
- Earl Swift, *Chesapeake Requiem: A Year with the Watermen of Vanishing Tangier Island*, Introduction pp. 1-6, Part One pp. 7-93, Part Five pp. 325-378 (Labyrinth)
- Optional reading:
- The rest of *Chesapeake Requiem*

### Week 9 / Nov. 13: Should I Stay or Should I Go?

- Reading:
- Elizabeth Rush, *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore* (Labyrinth)
- Guest speaker via Skype: Elizabeth Rush

## SECTION FOUR: Voices & Assumptions

### Week 10 / Nov. 20: An Ethical Question

- Reading:
- Candis Callison, *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*, Intro, Ch. 1, Ch. 2, (NOT Ch. 3), Ch. 4, Ch. 5, Epilogue (Labyrinth)
- John Broome's Tanner Lecture: "The Public and Private Morality of Climate Change," available as a PDF in course materials or also linked here: [Tanner lecture](#).
- Guest speaker Kian Mintz-Woo, postdoctoral research associate at Princeton University who works on moral philosophy, both theoretical and applied to climate change policy

### Thanksgiving recess

### Week 11 / Dec. 4: What, If Anything, Would Jesus Do?

- Prospectus for final paper due
- Reading:
- Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home* (Labyrinth)
- Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas, *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and A Healthy Environment* (Labyrinth)



- Meera Subramanian, “Generation Climate: Can Young Evangelicals Change the Climate Debate?” *InsideClimateNews* (Blackboard)
- Meera Subramanian, “Seeing God’s Hand in the Deadly Floods, Yet Wondering about Climate Change,” *InsideClimateNews* (Blackboard)
- Optional reading:
- Candis Callison, *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*, Intro, Ch. 3
- Guest speaker: Michelle Frazer, Ph.D. student in the Program in Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, Princeton

**Week 12 / Dec. 11: Conclusion: Moving Forward in A Warming World**

- Final presentations and closing discussion and celebration!

**FINAL PAPER DUE DATE: Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2020 11:59pm**

