

# **SUMMER SESSION I:**

## **GECS 188: Human/Nature: European Perspectives on the Climate Crisis and What To Do About It**

### **Contact Details**

Sabine von Mering

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### **Meeting Times**

#### **Classes**

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 11:10am-1:40pm ET on Zoom

#### **Student Hours**

Office Hour: I will arrange a one-on-one with each student in the first and last week of our 5-week course. You will also be asked to meet with me one-on-one to discuss your final project some time in week two. Throughout the course, please email me at any time to arrange a time to meet on Zoom. I usually respond within a couple of hours. If you don't hear from me within a 24 hour period, just re-send your email or use our slack channel to reach out.

### **Course Description**

#### **Learning Goals:**

This class aims to introduce you to the global problem of climate change and familiarize you with proposed solutions through the lens of the humanities, highlighting German/European perspectives. You will leave this class with an understanding of the specific historical trajectory of German and European responses to environmental challenges in general and climate change and climate justice in particular, and how these responses are different from and also in conversation with those in the US and in other countries around the globe. You will be able to

distinguish the role of ethics and aesthetics in conjunction with climate change and develop your skills of humanistic inquiry, critiquing documentary film, nature writing, and ecocriticism, artistic, and journalistic work, which provides much-needed critical reflection of the socio-political and economic processes affecting humanity today. In your own oral responses, op-eds, and the final project you will use what you have learned and harness your own creativity to explore new avenues for change inspired by European artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, and activists. Throughout the course you will practice using a critical lens onto the connections between climate change and other social and political injustices in Europe and other parts of the world. You will be able to detect historical continuities and discontinuities, compare and contrast the approaches of different political actors - from nation states to social movements. You will develop your critical voice and communicate your thinking as an expressive and communicative op-ed writer, be empowered to do your own in-depth research on a comparative subject for your final project, and explore the role of the arts in addressing climate change.

You will greatly improve your confidence as a critical thinker, and your ability to give succinct, eloquent, powerful oral presentations on the subject of climate change.

### Teaching/learning strategies

This course covers many bases and is also highly interdisciplinary, which means I will be using a host of different teaching strategies - including visually-enhanced instruction, inquiry-based learning, and cooperative learning. Obviously, we'll be online so we will be using technology throughout - mainly [Zoom](#), Moodle, and googledocs.

### Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites for this class. You do not need to know anything about climate change or Europe or humanistic inquiry. All you need is your curiosity!

### Credit Hours:

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of **36 hours per week**, which means **28 hours of study/homework time** in addition to the 8 hours of class time each week. So you should expect to be working *outside* of class for 5-6 hours every workday (including on days when we don't have class). Here is a sample week:

Please block the following times on your own calendar for this week (36 hours total):

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday*	Sunday*
<b>Read or Watch</b>	[2.5]	[2.5]	[2.5 hours]	[2.5 hours]	[2.5]		

	hours]	hours]			hours]		[2.5 hours]
<b>Practice:</b>		[30 min.]	[30 min.]	30 min.	30 min		30 min.
<b>Participate</b> on Moodle	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour		1 hour
<b>Attend</b> class 7-9pm EDT	2 hours 30 min.	2 hours 30min.		2 hours 30 min.			
<b>Review</b> slides & notes	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour		

Green color indicates where students should be active online or preparing for class.

\* Students should take either Saturday or Sunday off to enjoy nature, reflect, relax, engage with friends and family (this table models Saturday off)

## Course Requirements

### Academic Integrity

Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Infringement of academic honesty by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions (see section 20 of R&R). Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Citation and research assistance can be found at [Brandeis Library Guides - Citing Sources \(https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723\)](https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723)."

### Accommodations

**Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order**

**to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).**

## **Assignments**

### **Written Assignments**

1. Two weekly one-paragraph Reading Responses and Commentary to be posted on MOODLE. Responses and comments should be critical and reflect upon a particular point/issue raised by the reading. Students must post eight weekly reading responses and reply to at least two responses per week.
2. Two short (800-word “op-eds”) in which you use your own voice and experience to engage with the material. Instructions on how to best write an op-ed will be given in class. Students who feel uncomfortable writing op-eds can also choose to write regular close-reading analyses instead. You will be asked to revise your papers once.
3. 2-page Group Project Reflection Paper: As part of the group project each student will independently write a 2-page paper reflecting upon the experience on the project. The paper will be due at the end of the term. Students will also submit a self- and peer review as part of the group project.
4. Final research project. Your final research project is an opportunity for you to dig deeper into one question. You are welcome to use one of the short papers as your point-of-departure.

This course is a writing intensive course. You will have a chance to revise your papers, and you are also encouraged to do peer-reviews before submitting them. It would be great for you to attempt to get your op-eds written in the course of the class published somewhere. Please make ample use of study partners, the writing center, and office hours. Due dates are spelled out in the syllabus. Exact assignments will be given in class. Late papers will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

### **Oral communication assignments**

This course fulfills the oral communication requirement. Most importantly: Students must participate regularly in class. Asking questions counts as participation and helps you improve your oral communication. You will also have several practice oral communication assignments, and two graded oral communication assignments. One will be recorded. One will be held in class. In both cases you will submit a draft and we will discuss it before you submit your final version.

### **Lateness policy**

This course intends to cover the material normally taught over the course of 13 weeks in a

regular semester in 5 weeks. You therefore absolutely must pay attention to time management and submit all papers on time. Please plan ahead. Late papers will immediately receive an F.

### **Submitting assignments through MOODLE.**

All papers and assignments must be submitted on MOODLE. I will insert requests for corrections and re-upload your paper to the same place where you uploaded it.

### **Exams/Quizzes**

There will be no graded exams and quizzes. We will have short recall-quizzes after each session that will have to be completed as part of your participation grade.

### **Participation**

In order to succeed in this class, all students must first of all attend class regularly. I will also ask that you meet regularly with me during office hours. Participation also includes completing the readings before coming to class and using the focus questions to prepare for class discussions, raising questions as soon as ideas become unclear (either in class or via online communications between classes), listening actively and attentively, responding thoughtfully and constructively to the comments made by other class members, reading and responding to course-related e-mails and posts.

If you have a medical emergency, please send me an e-mail ahead of class so I can make sure you are not penalized for your absence. This course is meant to provide you with an opportunity to engage in discussion with your peers. Pedagogical research has shown that students retain a lot more when they have to articulate their own thoughts instead of only “absorbing” a lecture by someone else. If you wish to obtain a high grade in this class your participation must be active, regular, and productive. Please contact me if you have any difficulty participating in class. Please note that more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. Imagine that each day during the summer session is equal to a week in a regular semester. If you accumulate more than four unexcused absences you may fail the class.

### **Portfolio**

Please begin the semester by creating a google folder for this class and share it with me. Keep all your completed assignments in that folder so we can easily keep track of them and know what still needs to be completed and when. You will be asked to post work samples and reflective paragraphs about those samples that demonstrate their mastery of each skill set listed in the Course Description.

### **Evaluation**

Rubrics for all assignments will be posted on MOODLE. Please review them carefully before you begin your work so you know what I expect you to accomplish.

Since this is a humanities class, class participation in discussion is a major part of your grade. It includes how well-prepared you come to class. Please provide documentation for why you cannot complete an assignment on time. All your work will be evaluated based on the effort you put into it, the engagement with the course material, and your ability to articulate your thoughts in a clear and concise manner. I will provide you with examples of what successful real-world work in this area looks like. We will compare/critique that work before you begin working on your own assignments.

Class Element	Grade Percentage	Learning Goals	Due date
In-class participation	35%	regularly practice articulating your own ideas about the readings; critiquing the work of others; posing questions; debating with your peers; short recall quiz (non-graded) checking attendance	daily
Reading Responses	30%	succinctly zoom in on one aspect of the reading and explain what questions it raises for you	two written responses per week (total of eight) plus two oral responses
Two short Papers	20%	practice your writing skills; practice revision	Spelled out in syllabus

Group Project	15%	transfer what you learned in class onto a new subject: art.	During the last two days of the session
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## Essential Resources

### Accommodations

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, I want to support you. **In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance.** I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact [Student Accessibility Support \(SAS https://www.brandeis.edu/accessibility/\)](https://www.brandeis.edu/accessibility/) at 781.736.3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).

### Course Materials

#### Required Readings / Optional Readings

All readings for this class will be made available electronically on MOODLE.

You are welcome to obtain physical copies of the following if you'd like to read the books in their entirety:

- Luisa Neubauer and Alexander Repenning: *Beginning to End the Climate Crisis. A History of Our Future.* (2023)
- Andreas Malm: *The Danger of Fossil Fascism.*
- Ilija Trojanow: *The Lamentations of Zeno*

Given the short time we have in the summer session we will focus on individual chapters of the books. If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

### Apps or Tools/Equipment

You will need a computer and access to the internet for the duration of the session.

## **Moodle**

MOODLE is the Brandeis learning management system:

<https://moodle.brandeis.edu/my/courses> Login using your UNET ID and password.”

## **Library**

The [Brandeis Library](#) collections and staff offer resources and services to support Brandeis students, faculty and staff. These include workshops, consultations, collaboration, materials and instruction on emerging trends in technologies such as machine learning, emerging trends in research such as data visualization, and emerging trends in scholarship such as open access. Librarians at the Circulation Desk, Research Help Desk, Archives & Special Collections, Sound & Image Media Studios, MakerLab, AutomationLab, and Digital Scholarship Lab are available to help you. <https://www.brandeis.edu/library/about/index.html>.

## **Privacy**

Our course sessions will be recorded in order to provide students in different time zones access to the information. If you do not wish to be recorded on video, please mute your video. I do recommend strongly that students unmute their video in class, however, in order to provide as real a community experience as possible.

## **Student Support**

Brandeis University is committed to supporting all our students so they can thrive. The following resources are available to help with the many academic and non-academic factors that contribute to student success (finances, health, food supply, housing, mental health counseling, academic advising, physical and social activities, etc.). Please explore the many links on this [Support at Brandeis](#) page (<https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html>) to find out more about the resources that Brandeis provides to help you and your classmates to achieve success.”

## **Teaching Continuity**

In case class has to be cancelled due to illness or extreme weather I will consult with all students to find an appropriate make-up date.

## **Course Plan**

### **Semester Syllabus**

n.b.: This may change over the course of the semester.

Changes will be discussed in class, and updated versions made available on MOODLE

Please be prepared to discuss the films/readings listed for each date!

## **Week One:**

### I. Let's Talk about the Climate Crisis and why it is an Issue for the Humanities

**M June 1** Introduction: How do we communicate about climate change? Oral communication instruction.

**Skills:** How to prepare a successful oral presentation; understand why climate change is a topic for the humanities

**Readings and focus questions:** How do climate scientists know the climate is changing?

**In-class activities:** Review of introductory lecture; discussion; oral presentation practice

### II. On Taking Action

**T June 2** Luisa Neubauer/Alexander Repenning: *Beginning to End the Climate Crisis. A History of Our Future*, pp.1-47. First Reading Response due on MOODLE before class. **Op-ed writing training.** [[Guide to a good op=ed](#)]

**Skills:** understand how to write a good op-ed and what it is meant to accomplish

**Readings and focus questions:** What must be done to address climate change?

**In-class activities:** Discussion; Op-Ed writing practice

**Th June 4** Luisa Neubauer/Alexander Repenning: *Beginning to End the Climate Crisis. A History of Our Future*, pp.48-120. Op-ed writing training, part II

**Skills:** How to write a good op-ed; understand and be able to articulate the basics of climate science

**Readings and focus questions:** Why has climate change not been addressed so far?

**In-class activities:** Discussion; Op-Ed writing practice

**M June 8** Luisa Neubauer/Alexander Repenning: *Beginning to End the Climate Crisis. A History of Our Future*, pp.121-163, Daniel Hofinger and Maximilian Becker "System Change, not Climate Change" In: von Mering et al, *The Routledge Handbook of Grassroots Climate Activism* (2025), **First Paper due on MOODLE by 5pm.**

**Skills:** understand how modern society understands itself vis a vis nature, and what this means for climate change discourse

**Readings and focus questions:** What is enlightenment? What defines the relationship between humans and nature? What role does literature play in our attempt to make sense of the relationship?

**In-class activities:** Discussion; make believe exercise

### III. Why We Have Not Solved the Problem Yet: The Connections between Climate Change Denial, War, and Fascism

**T June 9** Timothy Snyder: 'Conclusion: Our World' in: *Black Earth. The Holocaust as History and Warning*. P.319-344.

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique what Snyder proposes is the connection between the Holocaust and climate change

**Readings and focus questions:** Is Snyder making a convincing argument for the comparability of the Holocaust and climate change? Why (not)?

**In-class activities:** Review of the literature and historical events; discussion

**Th June 11** Film: *Merchants of Doubt* [Moodle] Robert J.Brulle: *Climate Obstruction in Europe* (excerpts)

**Skills:** understand, be able to identify climate denial

**Readings and focus questions:** What is the reason for wide-spread climate denial among conservative voters in the UK, Australia, and the US?

**In-class activities:** practice FLICC concept; discussion

**M June 15** Andreas Malm: *On the Danger of Fossil Fascism* (2021); Richard Lindzen: *Global Warming for the Two Cultures.*, Manleen Dugal: "War as a Catalyst: Europe's Energy Security Reckoning" *Earth.org* (April 2026) [MOODLE]

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique what Malm proposes is the threat of fossil fascism; understand the motivation behind climate deniers

**Readings and focus questions:** What connects racism and climate denial? How does that connection manifest in today's Europe?

**In-class activities:** Review of the literature and historical events; discussion; prepare first oral presentation for The Climate Change Debate

### IV. Germany's Unique Path from Nuclear Ambitions to Energy Democracy

**T June 16** Is Nuclear Energy Part of the Solutions? Julie Ault, [Saving Nature under Socialism](#) (excerpts). **First Paper revision due**

**Skills:** understand and be able to articulate what happened at Chernobyl, and Germany's decision to shut down all nuclear power plants by 2022.

**Readings and focus questions:** What happened at Chernobyl? What role did Chernobyl play in Germany? What are the reasons that nuclear power is viewed so negatively in Germany and so positively in France?

**In-class activities:** Review of the literature and historical events; discussion

**Th June 18** Germany's Climate Leadership: Craig Morris/Arne Jungjohann, *Energy Democracy. Germany's Energiewende to Renewables* (2016); Carol Hager and Thomas Lekan: Green Germany, von Mering et al, *Cultures of Climate Action in Germany* (excerpts). [MOODLE]

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate how Germany was able to shoulder the start-up costs of the renewable energy revolution [Energiewende]

**Readings and focus questions:** What is Energiewende? How did it start? What is happening with it now?

**In-class activities:** Review of the literature and historical events; discussion

## V. The Ethics and Aesthetics of Climate Change

**M June 22** Film: *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004)

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique what Wolfgang Emmerich does with climate change in this film

**Readings and focus questions:** What roles does narrative film play in solving the climate crisis? Does a film have to be accurate in order to be politically effective?

**In-class activities:** discussion

**T June 23** Food, Consumption, Bioersivity. Film: [Meat the Truth](#) (2007, by the Party for the Animals, The Netherlands) [Our Daily Bread](#) (dir.Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Austria, 2006); Film: *Plastic Planet*. [MOODLE] (dir. Werner Boote, Austria, 2011); [Banking on Nature](#). (dir. Denis Delestrac, France, 2016)

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique how the documentaries portray their topic

**Readings and focus questions:** What decisions do documentary-makers have to make about their subject? What works/what doesn't work? Why?

**In-class activities:** short presentations, discussion; thesis writing workshop

**Th June 25** Film: *Thule/Tuvalu* (Germany/Tuvalu, Greenland, 2015). **Second Paper due on MOODLE on Sunday at midnight**

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique what the filmmakers do in comparing Thule and Tuvalu; DJW

**Readings and focus questions:** What are the differences and similarities between Thule and Tuvalu? How do people's lives differ from ours?

**In-class activities:** discussion; thesis writing workshop

VI. A World of Solutions

**M June 29** Film *Demain* [Tomorrow] (France; 2015) Reducing carbon in our lives: ecovillages and urban solutions. The Transition Movement

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique the solutions presented in the film; DJW

**Readings and focus questions:** What can we do to solve the climate crisis? What about individual vs collective vs governmental action? How does 'Demain' aim to inspire you to act? Could you imagine living in an eco-village? What would be pros and cons? Can eco-village concepts be transferable to other places like cities and suburbs? If so, how?

**In-class activities:** discussion

**T June 30** From Donut Economy to Postgrowth/Degrowth. Excerpts from Kate Raworth, Niko Paech, Matthias Schmelzer and others.

**Skills:** understand, be able to articulate, and critique the concept of Degrowth; DJW

**Readings and focus questions:** What is Degrowth? What is bioeconomy? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?

**In-class activities:** breakout rooms; discussion; thesis writing workshop

**Th July 2** **GROUP PRESENTATIONS** **Second Paper revision due.**