

Climate Change and Culture

Module code: 7SSG5208

Credit value: 20

Module coordinator: Professor Mike Hulme

Teaching arrangement: 20 hours of lectures; between 3 and 6 hours of seminars

Availability: Term 2

Assessment: One 1,000 word essay (33%); one 3,000 word essay (67%)

Educational aims

The module explores the underlying reasons why different people in different cultures assess the evidence for, risks of and responses to, climate change in different ways. This will be achieved by using a variety of theoretical and empirical arguments drawn from different disciplines to examine the nature of evidence for human modification of climate, how people evaluate this evidence and how/why they act upon it. The module is designed to allow students to understand the complex relationships that exist – in the context of climate change - between knowledge, cultural beliefs and personal behaviours.

Learning outcomes

On completion of this module students should be able to:

- drawing on insights from the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities understand the main reasons for disagreements about (i) the status of scientific claims about climate change and (ii) appropriate climate change ‘actions’
- appreciate the role played by language, metaphor and image in public discourse about climate change;
- understand the reasons why people in different cultures perceive and evaluate the risks of climate change in different ways;
- synthesise and evaluate leading-edge academic research, drawn from a variety of disciplinary perspectives;
- adopt and defend different climate risk perceptions and climate policy options drawing upon a wide repertoire of arguments.

Structure

This module introduces geographical, anthropological, sociological, historical and psychological approaches to understanding the idea of climate change in society. Climate change risks and opportunities are perceived very differently within and between societies and this module explores some of the reasons for these differences, including issues such as the status of experts, the cultural cognition of risk and climate contrarianism. The module also considers how climate change is represented in the media through language, metaphor and imagery, representations which shape public and policy discourse around climate change. In recent years, the creative arts have engaged the idea of climate change through the imagination – in film, fiction, sculpture and performance – and some of this work will be introduced and evaluated. The module is taught through a combination of lectures and seminars. Students will be required to read a considerable amount of material both in preparation for the seminars and the coursework essays. The topics to be covered in the lectures and seminars include:

- Worldviews, knowledge and climate expertise
- Risk cultures and climate change
- Public perceptions of climate change
- Media reporting of climate change

- The metaphors and languages of climate change
- Climate change and creative arts: films, novels, visual
- Engineering global climate
- Science controversies and climate contrarianism

Key recommended texts

Hulme, M. (2009) *Why we disagree about climate change: understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 392pp.

In this influential book I examine the various dimensions of climate change – economics, religion, science, risk, communication, governance, development – and shows how different human worldviews, beliefs and values lead to different interpretations of the causes and consequences of climate change, and to different responses.

Hulme, M. (2013) *Exploring climate change through science and in society: an anthology of Mike Hulme's essays, interviews and speeches* Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 323pp.

This collection of my writings and speeches since the late 1980s reveals the changes in scientific and public understandings of climate change that have occurred during this period. The collection shows the many different ways in which it is necessary to approach the idea of climate change to interpret, and make sense of, the divergent and discordant voices proclaiming it in the public sphere.

Boykoff, M. (2011) *Who speaks for the climate? Making sense of mass media reporting on climate change* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 228pp.

Max Boykoff has been a prolific analyst over many years of media reporting of climate change. This book brings together much of his work, and that of others, to show the roles that are played by the media, especially newspapers, in different countries and cultures.

Doyle, J. (2011) *Mediating climate change* Ashgate Press, Farnham, UK, 182pp.

An ex-Greenpeace campaigner, Julie Doyle explores how the practices of mediation and visualisation shape how we think about, address and act upon climate change. She draws upon science, media, politics and culture to identify the problems of representation that climate change poses for public and political debate.

Machin, A. (2013) *Negotiating climate change: radical democracy and the illusion of consensus* Zed Books, London, 170pp.

Machin is a political scientist and in this book she argues that democracy requires more political disagreement about climate change, not less. She shows why a scientific consensus should not translate into a political census.

Dryzek, J. S., Schlossberg, D. and Norgaard, R. B. (eds.) (2011) *Oxford handbook of climate change and society* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 736pp.

The 47 short chapters in this book provide overviews of a variety of important themes in the study of climate change and society – e.g. climate economics, vulnerability, social movements, corporate responses, climate change and human security. They are written by different authors representing different viewpoints and disciplines. You should use these as a starting point, not as an end point.

WIRES *Climate Change* - An inter-disciplinary review journal available online at:

<http://wires.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WiresJournal/wisId-WCC.html>. Many of the review articles published in this journal will be relevant for the course.