



Course Information

Prefix & number	Title
583B	Higher Education Confronting Climate Change
Instructor	Prerequisites or restrictions (if any)
Sharon Stein	There are no prerequisites, but this course is best suited for those who have some experience with the complexities of higher education and who have begun to identify the limits of existing problem-solving strategies in the context of climate-related education, research, and policy.

Focus or Content

This advanced seminar will examine how higher education institutions are addressing the climate and nature emergency (CNE), treating the CNE as a “wicked problem.” Wicked problems are problems that: are hyper-complex and multi-dimensional; can only be addressed through imperfect solutions that can create new problems; and affect multiple communities in different ways. While higher education institutions have been framed as uniquely positioned to address the CNE, they have also been increasingly critiqued as contributing to the CNE in the first place. This paradox is the starting point of the course.

While there are many different ways to address the CNE, this course focuses on identifying its systemic socio-historical root causes and drivers. Without addressing these root causes and drivers, theories and practices for responding to the CNE tend to reproduce: simplistic solutions; unequal and paternalistic relationships between dominant and marginalized populations; and ethnocentric imaginaries of justice, accountability, and change.

This course will address heavy and potentially overwhelming themes related to ecological unsustainability, its relationship to systemic colonial violence, and our complicity in both of these. Instead of offering quick fixes or solutions, the course frames the work of confronting the CNE as an ongoing educational inquiry. Students will be supported to develop intellectual, affective, and relational capacities to navigate the complexities and possibilities of addressing the CNE in more relevant, reflexive, and socially and ecologically responsible ways. However, the course cannot offer one-on-one emotional support. With this in mind, students should consider whether this is the right course for them at this time.

Goals, Objectives or Learning Outcomes

This course will support students to:

1. Deepen their understanding of different perspectives on the CNE, and of higher education’s role in both creating and responding to the CNE
2. Trace and problematize socio-historical patterns of *unsustainability* in higher education, including in relation to their own professional contexts

3. Understand the challenge and the importance of learning how to support ethical dialogues between multiple knowledge systems in responses to climate change
4. Develop reflexivity about the difficulties, complexities, and possibilities of institutional and social change in response to the CNE
5. Practice stepping back from their own socio-cultural assumptions and experiences in order to be more intellectually and relationally rigorous in their scholarship and practice
6. Discern opportunities to intervene and collaborate in response to the CNE in higher education contexts.
7. Be more comfortable with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, and discomfort.
8. Identify the limits of their existing knowledge and experiences, so as to be more open to possibilities that might be viable but unimaginable from existing frames of reference

Assignments or Assessment Process

Students will be expected to watch lectures, participate in synchronous Zoom discussions, engage in land-based practices, watch documentaries, and complete course readings.

Written assignments will include weekly student reflections, and a final reflexive project.

Notes/Other

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