



## Course information 2025-26

# DV2166 Global Environmental Problems and Politics

### General information

MODULE LEVEL: 5

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

### Summary

This course provides analytical frameworks for understanding global environmental problems such as climate change and declining biodiversity. The course will provide insights from International Relations and Political Science to show two key themes: how environmental regimes, or shared rules for addressing problems, emerge formally through treaties or other coordinated action; and the challenges and politics of implementing these regimes. The course will review debates within environmental politics, and illustrate these themes especially in relation to climate change and conservation of biodiversity, with additional information about stratospheric ozone depletion, deforestation, and new initiatives concerning agricultural commodities, plastics and waste, and oceans and with attention to dilemmas faced by developing countries. Students will attain an understanding of how social sciences analyze and advance understandings of environmental policies as well as information about the problems themselves.

**Please note: this course was originally DV3166 Global Environmental Problems and Politics. It is proposed to relaunch this course as Level 2 to appeal to a wider number of courses. Also, we could rename the course more simply as “Global Environmental Politics” or “Global Environmental Governance.” All comments are welcome.**

### Conditions

Prerequisite: no other courses are proposed as a prerequisite for this course. (Chapter 2 of the proposed course outlines some basic ideas in International Relations about regime theory: everything else is specific to this course).

## **Aims and objectives**

The aim of the course is to:

- Introduce students to the core environmental challenges discussed within global politics
- Develop students' analytical skills for understanding environmental regimes and their challenges
- Promote critical engagement with debates about environmentalism to show tensions between different actors, richer and poorer nations and societies, and the relationships between defining environmental problems and proposed solutions to them.
- To display this engagement by development students' ability to present, substantiate and defend complex arguments with reference to diverse examples.

## **Learning outcomes**

By the end of the course, and having completed the essential reading and activities, students should be able to demonstrate:

- An ability to apply theories and concepts from global and national environmental politics to relevant empirical examples
- A critical understanding of the issues involved in making and implementing global environmental regimes
- An awareness of the contexts, tension, and constraints that characterize global environmental problems relating to complex biophysical changes simultaneously with diverse social and political interests and exposures from diverse social groups.

## **Employability outcomes**

By the end of the course, and having completed the essential reading and activities, students should have developed the following skills:

- Communication skills: developing excellent written communication skills through note-taking and essay writing.
- Decision-making and evaluation: interpreting different texts and arguments from diverse sources (including, for example, academic texts, and publicity from governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)), and using this interpretation to draw evidence-based conclusions or recommendations.
- Complex problem-solving: seeking solutions to entrenched political divisions or diverse and sometimes incommensurate objectives, expressing an awareness of the complexity of problems and likely solutions.
- Environmental knowledge and governance: students will also gain useful empirical and analytical knowledge about global environmental problems and policies that can prepare them for employment in the field of environmental policy and international development.

## **Essential reading**

This course does not have one single textbook is recommended as the core reading for the subject as a whole. The reason for this is that the course covers a wide range of environmental problems, and no one textbook covers them all. Each chapter of the study guide lists readings that are useful and accessible for student.

In addition, it is strongly advised to keep abreast of recent developments by reading newspapers and online sources for this course.

## Assessment

This course is assessed by a 3 hour written examination.

## Syllabus

### A. Background

1. What are “global” environmental problems?  
—systemic vs cumulative problems, implications for sovereignty and responses
2. Environmental regimes and global governance  
—the usual three frameworks (realist, institutionalist, knowledge), challenges for identifying actors (i.e. state, business, society, etc.), the movement away from “treaties” to behavior, the challenges of knowledge as certainty, regime complexes, brief summary of actors
3. Early regimes: Atmospheric Ozone, Transboundary Air Pollution  
—brief summary of the 1980s success stories that shaped 1990s’ thinking, the debate between rational Ozone treaty (Ozone Hole), and the political shaping of certainty
4. International trade and environment  
—product vs process, the 1980s dolphin/tuna, implications for sovereignty, labelling

### B. Climate change

5. Climate change, the UNFCCC, and the Kyoto Protocol  
—the emergence of the climate regime 1992, Kyoto Protocol 1997, flexible mechanisms, opposition from Global Climate Coalition (discussed more below), review of principles of emissions trading
6. The Paris Agreement and beyond  
—events since 1997, USA withdrawal, Bali road map, Copenhagen, review of Paris Agreement
7. Adaptation, resilience, and Loss and Damage  
—how have ideas changed, what are the issues here
8. Carbon-offset forestry and REDD+  
—emergence of REDD+ as PES, challenges, lessons, AFOLU, Landscape Approaches
9. Technological change and climate change  
—the challenge of technology transfer, how UNFCCC and Agenda 21 have dealt with technology, Technology Mechanism, CDM, phasing out coal, oil?

10. International Finance Institutions and funding environmental policy

—history of World Bank in 1980s, GEF, CIFs, access to funds

11. International business and environment

—Global Climate coalition, lobbying, what role for informal self-regulation, what positive steps

**C. Biodiversity**

12. Biodiversity and the CBD

—the differences with climate change, the cancellation of the forest convention in 1991, the objectives and divisions over biodiversity as international policy, biopiracy, access and benefits sharing, the Nagoya Protocol

13. Environmental conservation and in-situ biodiversity

—the challenges of conservation, initial programmes in 1980s, CITES, habitats, ILK

14. International policy and forests / deforestation / haze

—forests as distinct from biodiversity, ITTO/ITTA, some campaign examples (Sarawak, Amazon), haze, indigenous knowledge and groups

15. Agricultural commodities and certification: soya, palm oil

—the problem of agriculture and beef, certification as a proposed solution, environmental vs human rights on plantations, Round Tables as examples of governance

16. Biosafety and genetically modified organisms

—GMOs, sound science, public worries, labelling, Cartagena Protocol

**D. Emerging themes**

17. Chemicals, plastics, and waste

—new science policy panel on chemicals, plastics, waste all as examples of diverse users and producers, what kind of regime

18. Oceans

—problems of regulation, new initiatives, undersea mining, governance gaps

19. Governing environmental expertise: IPCC and IPBES

—expert organizations as sites of trust and governance, ClimateGate, participation, co-production (ILK), expertise as contested

20. Public environmentalism and justice

—the trend to citizen action, business opposition, ways of managing certainty, the problems of defining justice, a challenge for students today.