

PSYC185: Psychology of the climate crisis, Spring 2022

Overview: Without substantial cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, global heating will have increasingly devastating impacts on the biosphere and is likely to disrupt organized human existence in our lifetimes. This class focuses on how global heating arose and the effects it has, why there is so little action by decision-makers, why so many people are still skeptical about the scientific facts and the need to respond, and the kinds of actions that are now needed.

Part I is background. It includes an historical examination of the causes and discovery of global heating and the development of the scientific consensus that it is human-caused and can be curtailed only by cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and it describes how those developments nonetheless failed to lead to emissions cuts. It also covers the key facts of climate science related to global heating, and describes current and predicted climate impacts. It then examines the role played by contemporary capitalism in both massively escalating emissions and creating structural, ideological, and psychological barriers to efforts to cut them.

Part II addresses how to change climate change skepticism into belief so as to engender a higher level of support for curbing emissions than currently exists in most countries. It discusses major causes of skepticism, including misinformation and worldviews and values, and offers some possible strategies for countering these influences. It also discusses ways in which scientists, activists, journalists, policy makers, and others concerned about global heating can most persuasively communicate climate science findings to the general public. It then explores ways in which people's perceptions of the actual risks posed by climate change can be elevated to motivate them to engage in individual and collective action to counteract it.

Part III then examines how to move believers to take actions that will be effective in combating global heating. It starts out by showing that any such program can be effective only if it adopts a justice lens and rejects proposed technical and market fixes that threaten to perpetuate the same inequities, corporate agendas, and extractivist mentality that created the climate and ecological crisis in the first place. It then addresses the kinds of steps that must be taken to make a renewable energy transition feasible from a technical, political, and social point of view. But this won't happen unless decision-makers are impelled by a large social mobilization. To evaluate the prospects for such mobilization the class turns to the sociology of social movements, the psychology of collective action, and the histories and tactics of prominent grassroots groups.

Instructor: Prof Adam Aron, UCSD Psychology Dept, adamaron@ucsd.edu, <https://aronlab.org>, Office Hours: 3 to 4.50pm TUESDAY Afternoon, 5342 McGill Hall. Please write to me through CANVAS

TA: Hayden Schill, grad student UCSD Psychology Dept, hschill@ucsd.edu, Office Hours: 11 to 12 Fridays: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/2288562902>

Meets: Tuesday/Thursday 5 to 6.20pm, Solis Hall 104

Attendance Rules: You are required to attend this class. The material of the class is much better grasped in discussion with us and your classmates, so please attend in person. A few students have medical reasons to not attend and they can watch recordings in media gallery.

Course Materials: <https://canvas.ucsd.edu>

Course Reader/Textbook: Please buy The Climate Crisis: Science, Impacts, Psychology, Social Movements and Justice by Adam R Aron, in press at Cambridge University Press from the UCSD bookstore. It costs \$17.50, which covers UCSD's printing costs. <https://www.ucsandiegobookstore.com/adoption-search-results?ccid=15471&itemid=29831>

Midterms: There are two midterms. There is NO FINAL. The midterms are short answer questions that you will enter into CANVAS on your computer in class (unless you have special permission to do the class remotely). If you miss the midterm and can't provide a doctor's note, you'll lose 4 points, and if you don't turn up for the make-up

midterm at the time arranged by the instructors you will get 0. It is strongly recommended that you do not miss midterms.

CANVAS evaluation: For the first 15 classes (not counting midterm 1) a question, or questions, will be posed that you must respond to with one long written paragraph. You will be in a group of 10 students for most of the quarter. Instructions for this exercise vary and will be posted each time, see an example: [here](#). For Tuesday class, assignment is due Thursday at 11.59pm. For Thursday class, assignment is due Saturday at 11.59pm.

Group Presentation: In week 10 you will be part of a presentation team. There are likely 6 groups of about 10 in each group on the Tuesday, and another 6 on the Thursday. Each group presents for 10 mins tightly. You can each present for a minute or choose a leader or more than one leader to present for you. Your score (out of 4 points) is tied to your group performance. One class is dedicated to choosing topics and explaining criteria for a good presentation.

Evaluation:

Practice short answer questions (take home) = 6 points

15 x 2 points each CANVAS discussion = 30 points

Group presentation = 4 points

Midterm 1 = 30 points

Midterm 2 = 30 points

100 points

Extra Credit (4 pts):

Extra credit requires a field trip to one or other climate activist organization. You should plan on attending an event for about 3 hours (including travel, if needed) and allocating 1 hour to a one page write up of your experience [but some events are shorter such as the Earth Day Rally and the Chula Vista event]. *The write-up must be single line spacing, 11 font arial, in word document, at least ONE page, uploaded to CANVAS.* Your write up must cover a) the key features and goals of the organization whose event you joined, b) the details of the event you attended and how you contributed, c) your appraisal of how impactful the group is being in getting climate policy action, and how it could grow to be stronger.

The available events are these:

- Join San Diego 350, in person, April 21st, delivering the Youth vs. Oil Petition to councilmember LaCava, see [here](#).
- Join the Earth Day Rally (April 22nd) of the Green New Deal at UCSD, see [here](#) for updates.
- Join the San Diego 350 Chula Vista Mayoral Virtual Forum on April 27, see [here](#)
- Join a Green New Deal at UCSD team to achieve something concrete: Stefanie Holden scholden@ucsd.edu for working on a newsletter, Maxwell Lyons mclyons@ucsd.edu if you want to be trained to deliver a fossil free in the UC presentation to a class, and Adam Cooper awcooper@ucsd.edu if you want to be involved in protest.

Overall Grade (based on 100 points, plus 4 points extra credit):

The class will be curved. Typically about one third of students get an A. An approximate grade will be provided to you after midterm 1 to give you a sense of your likely trajectory.

Specific Classes:

Class	Date	Topic	Reading
PART I: BACKGROUND			
1	Tue 03/29	The history of human-caused global heating	Aron, Intro + Chapter 1
2	Thur 03/31	Climate science	Aron Chapter 2
3	Tue 04/05	Climate impacts	Aron Chapter 3
4	Thur 04/07	Capitalism and the climate crisis	Aron Chapter 4
Practice midterm (take home, posted 04/06): 2 questions, 3 points each = 6 points, due Friday 04/08 11.59pm			
PART II: FROM SKEPTICISM TO BELIEF			
5	Tue 04/12	Skepticism, misinformation and motivated cognition	Aron Chapter 5
6	Thur 04/14	Science communication: countering skepticism	Aron Chapter 6
7	Tue 04/19	Elevating risk perceptions about global heating	a. Chapter 7 b. Kim Stanley Robinson Chapter 1
8	Thur 04/21	Climate Café for the class. How do you feel? Dealing with eco-anxiety. (outside speaker)	a. Unseen Toll – New York Times b. ‘Ok Doomer’ – New York Times c. Hickman et al. 2022, Lancet Planetary Health
9	Tue 04/26	Social science empirical articles on part II	a. Jenkins Smith et al. 2020 b. Van der Linden 2014
10	Thur 04/28	Midterm 1: TAKE HOME Open-Book Short Answer Questions, 5pm for 1 hour 20 = 30 points	
PART III: FROM BELIEF TO ACTION			
11	Tue 05/05	Principles for just and effective action	Aron Chapter 8
12	Thur 05/07	Documentary showing – “Coming Clean – A Demand for a Fossil Free UC”	a. UCSD Academic Senate Task Force on the Climate Crisis, 2020 b. Gere and Aron, Sacramento Bee, 2021.
13	Tue 05/12	A technical and social framework to guide climate action	Aron Chapter 9
14	Thur 05/14	Building and taking collective action	Aron Chapter 10 + conclusion
15	Tue 05/17	Social science empirical articles on part III	Rees et al. 2014, European Journal of Social Psychology
16	Thur 05/19	Choosing group presentation topics, how to make a good presentation, instructions for the presentation exercise.	
17	Tue 05/24	Policy landscape in California (outside speaker, Norman Rogers, Steelworker)	a. Rogers – LA Times b. Huber – Jacobin c. The Summary of the Pollin Report
18	Thur 05/26	Midterm 2: TAKE HOME Open-Book Short Answer Questions, 5pm for 1 hour 20 = 30 points	
19	Tue 05/31	Student Presentations, Groups 1,3,5,7,9,11, 4 points	
20	Thur 06/02	Student Presentations, Groups 2,4,6,8,10,12, 4 points	

Extra Credit assignment must be uploaded by Friday 06/03 at 11.59pm

References:

- Aron, A. R. *The Climate Crisis: Science, Impacts, Policy, Justice, Psychology and Social Movements*. Cambridge University Press, In press.
- Aron, A. R., K Pezzoli, A. Baird, A Kehler, K Oegema, J Teranes, and M Corr. "Task Force on the Climate Crisis - UCSD Academic Senate Endorsed." UC San Diego, 2020.
- Buckley, C. "'Ok Doomer' and the Climate Advocates Who Say It's Not Too Late." *New York Times*, 2022.
- Gere, C, and A.R Aron. "Uc Says It'll Meet 2025 Carbon Neutral Goal, yet Remains a Massive California Polluter." *Sacramento Bee*, 2021.
- Hickman, Caroline, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, Eric R Lewandowski, Elouise E Mayall, Britt Wray, Catriona Mellor, and Lise van Susteren. "Young People's Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon." *Lancet* (2022).
- Huber, Matt. "Why the Green New Deal Has Failed—So Far." *Jacobin* (2021).
- Jenkins-Smith, Hank C, Joseph T Ripberger, Carol L Silva, Deven E Carlson, Kuhika Gupta, Nina Carlson, Ani Ter-Mkrtchyan, and Riley E Dunlap. "Partisan Asymmetry in Temporal Stability of Climate Change Beliefs." *Nature Climate Change* 10, no. 4 (2020): 322-28.
- Pollin, Robert, Jeannette Wicks-Lim, Shouvik Chakraborty, Caitlin Kline, and Gregor Semieniuk. "A Program for Economic Recovery and Clean Energy Transition in California." (2021).
- Rees, Jonas H, and Sebastian Bamberg. "Climate Protection Needs Societal Change: Determinants of Intention to Participate in Collective Climate Action." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 44, no. 5 (2014): 466-73.
- Robinson, K.S. *The Ministry for the Future*. Orbit Books, 2020 Chapter 1.
- Rogers, N. "Op-Ed: If Our Oil Jobs Are Ending, We Need Safety Nets and Good Replacement Work." *LA Times*, 2022.
- Van der Linden, Sander. "The Social-Psychological Determinants of Climate Change Risk Perceptions: Towards a Comprehensive Model." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 41 (2015): 112-24.