

POL384W: Global Environmental Governance from the Ground Up
Professor Kate Neville
Winter 2026, Thursdays 9-11am

Prof: Dr. Kate Neville

TA: Marc Calabretta

Prof's office hours: tbd

Course Description: With a focus on citizens, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and grassroots collectives, this course uses analytic tools from international relations and comparative politics to understand patterns of environmental protest and resistance over time. The course also considers the rise of private environmental governance (by companies and other for-profit organizations). Through scholarly and popular readings, students will examine the ways in which individuals and communities are inspired or provoked to act, strategies they use to voice concern, and divisions within and across social groups. Drawing on case studies of protests and social movements from around the world, this course allows students to move beyond borders and nation-states in understanding global environmental governance.

Learning objectives: The goals of this course are three-fold: 1) to understand core concepts of the course and demonstrate this knowledge (*content*); 2) to develop critical analysis skills by reading academic papers and book chapters and reflecting on these articles and arguments (*reading and analysis*); and 3) to improve abilities in research and writing (*communication*).

Course format, assignments, & website: The course is offered in person, although in exceptional circumstances could be held online through Zoom (e.g., in cases of instructor illness or inclement weather) – please monitor Quercus. The format involves readings, assignments, and 12 two-hour classes (note: no class during the winter Reading Week). Readings are available online through Quercus/the library. Assignments are designed to incentivize your attendance at and engagement with lectures, and to help you develop skills in critical reading, research, and analytic writing; further details will be provided for each.

Note: assignments might be revised—check syllabus in January for confirmation

1. In-class engagement

5%

This assignment has two parts: regular in-class low-stakes writing, and sharing of class notes.

- a. 4% for written in-class participation assignments – choose your own weeks**
- Submit responses for 4 weeks of in-class questions through the term – these are a chance for you to reflect on the course material and practice writing. These must be submitted on Quercus, by email, or on paper by the end of the class session
 - If you anticipate course attendance and in-class writing may be difficult for you and/or you need accommodations, you can opt to have this 4% added to the weight of your final essay. You do not need to be registered for accommodations to have this alternate option.

b. 1% for shared lecture notes – choose your own weeks

- Post class notes on Quercus for two weeks of your choice during term (0.5% for each set); these must be submitted by the end of day on Friday following the class on Thursday
- If you cannot take notes during classes or share your notes with classmates, please let me know that you need accommodations by week 3 of term – you do not need to be registered for accommodations to have an alternate option; the alternate option is described below.
- This assignment is designed to ensure everyone has course notes for all/ most of the classes through the term. If you can participate, please do!
- Notes can be in many styles; in addition to notes from the class session, all submissions must include at least one question you had coming into class that day (e.g., from the readings) and at least one reflection or observation or question that you had arising from the class that day
- The alternate option is to post a 1-page critical reading reflection on the shared Discussion Board for two weeks of your choice during term —this must be posted by the end of the day on Friday following the class on Thursday, and should reflect on all the assigned readings for that week. Your reflections can include: finding points of alignment/agreement or divergence/disagreement between readings; identifying questions that the readings provoke; considering how the week’s readings relate to ideas discussed in previous weeks of the term; and/or assessing the arguments, methods, or evidence used in the readings.

2. Mapping the structure of a review article – (due week 3)**15%**

- For this assignment, you will identify a peer-reviewed review article that is not assigned on our syllabus on a theme related to one of the first three weeks of term
- In a short response paper, following guidelines that will be provided, you will map out and summarize the article structure along with the key arguments and evidence the author(s) use. This includes identifying: the topic of the review, the main argument or arguments made by the author(s), the sub-arguments developed in the article, and how the authors address divergent or conflicting perspectives, arguments, and evidence.
- This assignment will help you practice reading academic articles, identifying arguments and evidence, and synthesizing complex information; it will also help prepare you for structuring and writing your own argumentative review essay for your final paper.

3. Expanding the syllabus – reading analysis essay (midterm) – (due week 6) 35%

- Find a relevant peer-reviewed article published within the last 6 years (2020 or later) to add to one of the first six weeks of term; in 800-1000 words, plus a reference list, summarize the new reading and explain the theoretical connections between it and the assigned readings of that week, making an argument for what it brings to that week’s themes and knowledge. This should be written in an essay format (paragraphs with transitions, not just disconnected summary and analysis sections).
- This assignment will strengthen the skills you have in identifying peer reviewed publications, summarizing scholarly articles, and making connections across readings.

4. Final paper – (due week 12)**45%**

- 2500-3000-word final research/review paper
- In this paper, you will summarize and critically assess the literature on a topic of your choosing that is linked to this course (on global environmental governance and non-state actors). The aim of this paper is for you to identify a topic and question where there are debates in the scholarly literature, assess what other scholars have to say about that key question in the field, and identify the main ideas, approaches, and arguments from those other scholars.
- This is an argumentative review paper: you will summarize and describe the work of others, and then you will analyze how that work helps you answer your central question. You will make an argument about how the reviewed literature answers that question. This involves comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing the ideas of others.
- For this assignment, you are expected to practice the skills of research, synthesis, writing, and revising. To demonstrate your revision process, when you submit your final paper, you must also submit one of your earlier drafts of your paper and a short (1/2-1-page) explanation of your writing and revision process.

Grade and assignment flexibility: In case of unexpected challenges (student illness, caretaking emergencies, other contingencies), grading policies may be changed: deadlines may be moved (as a class or individually; extensions are possible within UofT limits and rules) and alternate assignments can be arranged to address accommodation needs (even if accommodations are not formally documented), including having grades redistributed.

Course outline by week (may be amended):

Week 1: Jan 8: From the ground up? Non-state environmental governance?

Week 2: Jan 15: Is it up to us? Individuals and environmental responsibility

Week 3: Jan 22: Power in numbers? Collective action and environmental protest

Week 4: Jan 29: How to build coalitions? Activism across/beyond borders

Week 5: Feb 5: What provokes protest? Questions of environmental (in)justice

Week 6: Feb 12: How are environmental challenges defined? Science and knowledge systems

READING WEEK: Feb 20: no class

Week 7: Feb 26: Not in my backyard? Environmental racism and site fights

Week 8: March 5: What role for law? Legal action and law-breaking

Week 9: March 12: Likes or strikes? Non-state governance in an online world

Week 10: March 19: Private actors and market strategies: Corporations, investors, and finance

Week 11: March 26: Backlash against environmental action?

Week 12: April 2: Challenging economic systems and imagining other futures?

Readings: The readings are central to this course. They offer you multiple perspectives on environmental governance, and they provide both theoretical richness and empirical examples. There are generally 2-3 assigned readings for each class, and these are often challenging. Readings are required and should be completed before class.

Assignment submission & late policies: Please submit assignments electronically through Quercus (or by email, if there are technological glitches with the system) before midnight (Eastern time zone) on the day they are due. Please submit your assignments in Word if possible.

Deadlines are set to help you plan out your term work, and, most importantly, to help our teaching team manage the grading workload. Rather than seeing these deadlines and late penalties as punitive, I hope you'll see them as providing guidance (and incentives) to meet these timelines. In general, late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 2% per day (including weekends).

Late submissions will not be accepted for the written in-class participation assignments (end of day on the day of class) or for lecture notes or alternate reading reflections (end of day on the day after class). You can choose which weeks to submit these assignments. If you are ill in any given week, please choose a different week to complete these assignments.

For the other papers (week 3 article mapping assignment, week 6 midterm assignment, week 12 final paper), some students may find themselves with valid conflicts and challenges. If you can't meet the deadlines, please speak with me and/or your TA in advance, as best you can, about alternate arrangements and accommodations. Please be in touch as early as possible, as this allows us all to plan more clearly.

Additional policies and expectations

In general: In this course, you can expect that I will strive to be fair, respectful, prepared, responsive, and enthusiastic. In return, I anticipate you will be respectful of your classmates and of me, be prepared and on time for classes, and meet deadlines for assignments. I hope that together we can foster a safe and engaging space for thinking about big questions, and I will be relying on all of you to help create that space.

I expect that everyone will attend and participate actively in class. Active participation includes both contributing your ideas (questions, comments, analyses, insights) and listening to the contributions of others (without distraction). I anticipate that while in class, you'll turn silence your text/social media/email notifications, avoid scrolling on other websites, limit activities unrelated to the course as much as possible, and do your best to be present and attentive. If you need to step out of class for any reason, please leave and return quietly.

If you have to miss class: Since lecture notes for most weeks will be posted by your peers, you should be able to catch up on missed material by consulting these notes. You will still be expected to do the course readings. I am also happy to discuss lecture material and readings during my office hours.

Backups and rough drafts: You are strongly advised to keep rough drafts and backup copies of all assignments and essays you submit for this class (and note for the final paper you must submit a draft along with your final essay). Also, please take a minute at the start of the term to set yourself a backup strategy. Whether it's a backup external hard drive, a web-based cloud service, or some other option, it's important that you have multiple copies of your work in the case of a hard drive failure or computer problem.

Names: If the name on the official course registration list does not, for any reason, match the name by which you would like to be addressed, please let me know. I am not able to change official course lists, but I can certainly call you by your preferred name. Please let me know the pronouns you use (mine are she/her).

Professional titles are a sign of respect in the academic world, but there are varying degrees of formality among scholars. I encourage you to start by calling all your professors by

"Prof" or "Dr." [Last Name]; they can indicate if they'd be open to more informal exchanges. Some students like a more informal exchange, while others feel most comfortable with a formal distinction between their course instructors and their peers and friends. I tend to be open to a less formal environment, but also want to make sure all students feel comfortable. For our course, please use a formal title (Dr. or Prof) for me – e.g., "Prof. Neville," or "Prof. Kate," whichever suits you best.

Email and communication: I'll do my best to respond quickly, but please note that I may only check email once a day and may not check on weekends.

I will hold weekly office/student hours, and I will be very glad to meet with you during those times, or to set up appointments when needed. When you reach out by email, please:

- include the course code (POL384) in the email subject heading;
- write from your University of Toronto email account;
- treat emails as a professional form of communication—I anticipate you'll use proper grammar, sentences, and professional greetings and sign-offs, and you can expect the same from me.

Writing and Research Support: Research and written communication are core aspects of this course. As third-year students, I anticipate you have had experience in writing analytical research papers and engaging in scholarly research; that said, we can all benefit from ongoing work to improve our skills in these areas. I encourage you to make use of the resources available in these areas, for instance, at the Writing Centres: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres>.

Exceptions and Assistance: The University has many resources to help students who need assistance, including: Accessibility Services, Students for Barrier-free Access, the Hart House Accessibility Fund, financial assistance, library resources, academic resources, health and counseling services, and peer mentoring systems. The University also is committed to providing allowances for religious observances. If you anticipate needing help with your coursework for academic and/or personal reasons, or you encounter unexpected challenges or crises during the term, please seek the support you need. This may include challenges with physical and mental health, securing food or housing, dealing with loss and grief, parenting or other care-giving, and more. If you do not know the options, do not hesitate to ask. If you find yourself in a difficult situation, even if you have not yet gone through all the official channels, it is best to let me know right away that you are seeking assistance and may need accommodations (you do not need to disclose the details of your situation to me).

I know that these services are usually overtaxed. I also recognize it can be difficult to secure support, especially when you are facing acute or chronic crisis conditions. If there are ways we can amend course requirements to help you learn and succeed in this course, I am open to discussions (without requiring specific details of your situation)—please try to contact me in advance to let me know you require or would benefit from accommodations, and we can see what might be possible.

A few helpful resources:

- Accessibility Services: <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>
- Health & Wellness: <http://healthandwellness.utoronto.ca/>
- Writing centres: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres>
- Religious accommodations: <http://uoft.me/religiousaccommodation>
- Positive space (LGBTQ+ resources): <http://positivespace.utoronto.ca>

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously, seeing these as serious academic offenses.

The seriousness of academic integrity really cannot be stressed enough. When you use ideas, evidence, or direct words from another scholar, you must cite that scholar. This is about giving credit where it is due, and also about helping readers of our work find out how our ideas were developed and where we found evidence to support our claims.

If you use someone else's words, these must be in quotation marks, with the page number indicated. If you use someone else's data, the citation must also include the page number for that information. If you use someone else's ideas, summarized or paraphrased in your own words, you must cite that source. Changing a few words, or substituting synonyms is not the same as paraphrasing: you must substantially change the way in which an idea is expressed. Please consult the library resources and seek help from the librarians and/or writing centres when working on your assignments and papers.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources.

- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>
- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources>
- <http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/>

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Using someone else's words without using quotation marks
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor (please note that this includes not only full assignments, but also copying sections from an assignment handed in for another course)
- Making up sources or facts
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University

A note on language learning models, generative artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies: Please note that I expect all work you submit for this course will be developed and written entirely by you. Part of the aim of this class is for you to develop critical thinking, creative analysis, and writing skills, which include identifying research topics, generating research questions, creating essay outlines, drafting essays and other text, and revising your writing with consideration of style, tone, and content. While there are advanced large language models that can generate outlines, text, citation lists, reading summaries, and other materials, these tools are *not* permitted in this course for creating or drafting your assignments (outlines, arguments, or text).

Part of our work together in thinking about non-state actors' participation in environmental governance will involve a look at new and emerging technologies. These tools are powerful, changing rapidly, and have consequences we don't yet fully understand. There are challenging questions about intellectual property, implicit biases, skewed data and misinformation, corporate ownership and control, and extensive environmental consequences. I expect you will not use these tools in this class, but that you will instead use our class content and materials to help you form your own critical assessments of these systems and their governance, so you can choose how to engage with various forms of technology in the future.

Course Schedule

Week 1. From the ground up? Non-state environmental governance? – Jan 8

In this introductory week, we consider definitions that will underpin discussions and analyses throughout the course, with a focus on non-state environmental governance and transformation. We interrogate the central (and contested) concepts of the state, civil society, and governance.

Readings

- Whetung, Madeline. 2019. (En)gendering shoreline law: Nishnaabeg relational politics along the Trent Severn Waterway. *Global Environmental Politics*, 19(3): 16-32.
- Hale, Thomas. 2020. Transnational actors and transnational governance in global environmental politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23: 203-220.

Week 2. Is it up to us? Individuals and environmental responsibility – Jan 15

Is addressing environmental damage and the climate crisis an individual responsibility? Is the focus on individual responsibility a distraction from collective responses? This week, we investigate individual and collective action in global environmental governance.

Readings

- Anantharaman, Manisha. 2018. Critical sustainable consumption: A research agenda. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 8: 553–561.
- Maniates, Michael F. 2001. Individualization: Plant a tree, buy a bike, save the world? *Global Environmental Politics*, 1(3): 31-52.

Week 3. Power in numbers? Collective action and environmental protest – Jan 22

This week builds on last week's discussions of collective action, drawing on political science and political sociology to gain a theoretical foundation for understanding these processes. Here, we examine the characteristics of contestation to better grasp how groups mobilize, voice claims, respond to challenge and change, and sustain movements over time.

Readings

- Méndez, Michael. 2020. Chapter 1, pp. 1-32 in *Climate change from the streets: How conflict and collaboration strengthen the environmental justice movement*. Yale University Press.
- Meyer, David S. 2025. How to save the world: Learning from citizen engagement on nuclear weapons. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642251331689>
- Fisher, Dana R., & Nasrin, Sohana. 2020. Climate activism and its effects. *WIREs Climate Change*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.683>

Week 4. How to build coalitions? Activism across/beyond borders – Jan 29

This week focuses on intersections of the local and global politics of protest, and at multiple scales of environmental governance. We will look at the ways in which networks and alliances can diffuse information and norms, amplify local voices, mobilize resources, and transcend domestic interests—but also prove challenging.

Readings

- Keck, Margaret E., & Sikkink, Kathryn. 1998. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-38) in *Activists beyond*

borders: Advocacy networks in international politics, Cornell University Press.

- Fuentes-George, Kemi. 2016. Introduction (pp.ix-xl) in *Between preservation and exploitation: Transnational advocacy networks and conservation in developing countries*, MIT Press.
- Hall, Nina, et al. 2025. Challenges and opportunities for transnational advocacy. *International Studies Review*, 1-6, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaf015>

Week 5. What provokes protest? Questions of environmental (in)justice – Feb 5

This week, we focus on the catalysts of social action on environmental issues and consider economically and socially marginalized communities. Questions of long-standing grievances will be addressed, along with the ways in which environmental harm is often enacted in slow, cumulative, distant, and/or invisible ways, and the challenges this creates for mobilization.

Readings

- Nixon, Rob. 2011. Introduction (pp. 1-44) in *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*, Harvard University Press.
- Witter, Rebecca, and Satterfield, Terre. 2019. Rhino poaching and the “slow violence” of conservation-related resettlement in Mozambique’s Limpopo National Park. *Geoforum*, 101: 275-284.
- Khullar, Dhruv. 2022 (Aug 1). Living through India’s next-level heat wave. *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/08/01/living-through-indias-next-level-heat-wave>

Week 6. How are environmental challenges defined? Science & knowledge – Feb 12.

In this week, we examine the role of science and other knowledge systems in environmental governance, and the ways in which environmental debates are framed and defined. We look at information as a tool in environmental controversies, and consider how it can be co-opted and contested, as well as the ways in which science is used/seen as a neutral arbiter or a politicized element of decision-making.

Readings:

- Wylie, Sara, Nicholas Shapiro, and Max Liboiron. 2017. Making and doing politics through grassroots scientific research on the energy and petrochemical industries. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 3: 393-425, DOI:10.17351/ests2017.134
- Ureta, Sebastian, Javiera Barandiaran, Maite Salazar, and Camila Torralbo. 2023. Strength out of weakness: Rethinking scientific engagement with the ecological crisis as strategic action. *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene*, 11(1), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.2023.00072>.

READING WEEK – NO CLASS – Feb 19

Week 7. Not in my backyard? Environmental racism and site fights – Feb 26

This week, we continue our investigation of environmental justice, turning specifically to issues of environmental racism. We also turn back to questions of collective action, with a critical lens on race, environmental movements, and place-based resistance and conflict.

Readings:

- Taylor, Dorceta. 2011. Introduction: The evolution of environmental justice activism,

research, and scholarship. *Environmental Practice*, 13(4): 280-301, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1466046611000329>

- Temper, Leah, Sofia Avila, Daniela Del Bene, Jennifer Gobby, Nicolas Kosoy, Philippe Le Billon, Joan Martinez-Alier, Patricia Perkins, Brototi Roy, Arnim Scheidel, and Mariana Walter. 2020. Movements shaping climate futures: A systematic mapping of protests against fossil fuel and low-carbon energy projects. *Environmental Research Letters*, 15: 123004.

Week 8. What role for law? Legal action and law-breaking – March 5

Law plays a complex role in environmental governance, as both a tool of the state and a tool to challenge the state. This week, our guest speaker will discuss environmental law reform and standard-setting, and we will consider law, advocacy, and activism in environmental governance. As there are sometimes blurry lines between these categories, we will also examine the strategies of law-making and law-breaking by those making environmental claims.

Readings –

- Pineda, Erin R. 2021. Civil disobedience, and what else? Making space for uncivil forms of resistance. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 20(1): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885119845063>
- Berglund, Oscar. 2023. Disruptive protest, civil disobedience & direct action. *Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957231176999>

Week 9. – Likes or strikes? Non-state governance in an online world – March 12

In this week of our course, we turn our attention to how the virtual technologies influence non-state environmental governance. We consider the rise of information and communication technologies in shaping information flows, production and consumption, and social mobilization, as well as the challenges with virtual organizing of collective action. We also consider

Readings

- Dahlberg-Grundberg, Michael, and Johan Örestig. 2017. Extending the local: Activist types and forms of social media use in the case of an anti-mining struggle. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(3): 309–322, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1268955>
- Van der Ven, Hamish, Diego Corry, Rawie Elnur, Viola Jasmine Provost, and Muh Syukron. 2024. Forum: Generative AI and social media may exacerbate the climate crisis. *Global Environmental Politics*, 24(2): 9-18.

Week 10. – Private actors and market-based strategies: Corporations, investors, and finance – March 19

This week we turn from grassroots action—including communities, NGOs, and sub-state actors—to the private sector as an actor in global environmental governance. We investigate the roles of ownership and finance in shaping supply chains and environmental outcomes.

Readings

- Clapp, Jennifer. 2019. The rise of financial investment and common ownership in global agrifood firms. *Review of International Political Economy*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1597755>
- LeBaron, Genevieve, and Jane Lister. 2022. The hidden costs of global supply chain solutions. *Review of International Political Economy*, 29(3): 669-695.

- Campling, Liam, and Elizabeth Havice. 2018. The global environmental politics and political economy of seafood systems. *Global Environmental Politics*, 18(2): 72-92.

Week 11. Backlash against environmental action? – March 26

This week, we consider resistance to environmental action, and the rise of protests that are characterized by some as anti-environmental—this includes efforts to block climate action, and also efforts to challenge extractive and industrial projects that are justified through environmental narratives. We consider what these dynamics mean for building inclusive climate and environmental movements.

Readings

- Patterson, James. 2023. Backlash to climate policy. *Global Environmental Politics*, 23(1): 68-90.
- Kramarz, Teresa, Park, Susan, & Johnson, Craig. 2021. Governing the dark side of renewable energy: A typology of global displacements. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 74: 101902.

Week 12. Challenging economic systems and imagining other futures? – April 2

In this final week, we consider questions of systems of political economy and their relationships with environmental justice, along with imaginative possibilities for the future.

Readings

- Rodríguez-Labajosa, Beatriz, Yáñez, Ivonne, Bond, Patrick, Greyl, Lucie, Munguti, Serah, Ojo, Godwin Uyi, and Overbeek, Winfridus. 2019. Not so natural an alliance? Degrowth and environmental justice movements in the Global South. *Ecological Economics*, 157: 175-184.
- Shaw, Karena. 2021. Chapter 15: Flashpoints of possibility: What resistance reveals about pathways toward energy transition, in *Regimes of Obstruction*, ed. William Carroll, AU Press.