

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA – LINCOLN | Department of Political Science
POL332: Climate Politics & Policy | Spring 2026**

[MWF] 09:30-10:20am | Classroom: Burnett 203

Rachel Urban

CONTACT INFO

Office: Oldfather 1013 | **Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30am/appointment.

Email: rachelurban@huskers.unl.edu → I check my email once per weekday and aim to respond within 24 hours (no promises on weekends)! I will let you know if there will be specific blocks of time where I may not be available (e.g., OOO)/able to respond.

COURSE INTENT

What is the difference between domestic and international climate politics *and* policy? Is climate change a national security issue? What are other approaches necessary to understand how to inform sustainable policy goals?

We will study answers to these questions in different contexts across the world! This will, however, require challenging assumptions about what we think we know about representation in politics and policy change.

In this class, we will aim to:

- Better understand contemporary interdisciplinary approaches to climate and environmental politics and policy at different levels of analysis and/or government.
- Sustainable policy goals (e.g., net zero emissions) and what makes *effective* policy.
- Use various medias + scholarly work to encourage creative critical thinking.
- Respectfully engage in class discussions & challenge our assumptions.
- Build academic/professional and policy writing – and presentation – skills.

Explicit objectives/Module questions:

- 1. Module 1:** Intro to Climate's Role in Science, Politics, & Policy
 - a. Do you think international policy (top-down), considering the politics, science, and policy, can solve the 'collective action problem'? Why/not?
- 2. Module 2:** National or Human Security? (Domestic & International Approaches)
 - a. How might Green Politics (e.g., agenda-setting, lobbying, etc.) [positively/negatively] & current institutions influence climate policy outcomes? Might this 'new era of politics' solve the 'collective action' security problem? Why/not?

3. **Module 3: IDR & Psychological Considerations**
 - a. Which psychological consideration (or combination) should policymakers and consultants (e.g., social scientists) prioritize when writing new policy?
4. **Module 4: Indigenous Approaches to:**
 - a. Covers: Knowledge, Decolonization, & Sustainable Resource Management
 - b. Will Indigenous approaches influence future politics and have more policy success than current colonized understandings of the policy process? Why/not?
5. **Module 5: Wrapping up – *The Way of Water* – Bonus lectures!!**
 - a. What is the likelihood of water-related – or drought-related – conflict to rise?
 - b. What can fiction communicate to us about colonization, resource conflicts, and intersectionality?

COURSE MATERIALS

There are no required books for this class. ALL the *required* readings and materials will be posted in the Modules. Canvas and this syllabus (available on Canvas) will be your best friends! As an asynchronous class, you will need reliable access to an electronic tool (e.g., computer/laptop, tablet, etc.) and a stable internet connection to meet the requirements to complete this class. If you do NOT have access to a trustworthy electronic tool, contact HuskerTech (linked [here](#)) about how to obtain one for the course (e.g., borrow a wireless modem). (Keep in mind this may be trickier if you are traveling.) If Husker Tech cannot help or your internet is unstable, contact me so we can figure out a solution!

I do **HIGHLY RECOMMEND** Strunk, W. & White, E. B. (1918). *Elements of Style*. [4th Ed.] Pearson. I am NOT making this a required book because every point they make is available online. However, you are all held to the same standard of English writing. If you are interested, Kindle versions are about \$1; hardcovers and Paperbacks on Amazon range from \$6-11.

A course material that is **NOT recommended is ChatGPT/Gemini/AI platforms.** Instructors know if you have used it; **any assignments determined to have used it will not receive any points.** See the *Academic Honesty* policy at the end of the syllabus.

Estimates suppose that every 5 to 50 Chat prompts require about 1 average-sized bottle of water (~50 milliliters)!

****Compare to how much it takes to grow & process a bushel of corn!***

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Materials and Class Discussion: I've elected to have a mix of materials: reading (usually an academic paper or book chapter), documentaries, podcasts, guest speakers, and riddles to encourage critical thinking. I will usually have a corresponding lecture (15-20 minutes) and a following class discussion. I may also include supplementary (i.e., optional) news articles or short videos, and suggest additional readings.

These discussions may be generally insightful thoughts about the topic itself, critiques about the policy and/or academic methodological approach, real-world applications of the research, and – ultimately – policy implications. If you make any critiques, you must also (try to) suggest solutions! The point of this class is to, yes, acknowledge failings, but then be *productive* about it! Finally, debates are welcome, but remember to be respectful and professional.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (but not required) books are listed here:

[A textbook]: Carter, Neil (2018). *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. [3rd Edition].

- I've seen used ones on Amazon for about \$15.

[An introductory mini-handbook]: Maslin, M. (2022). *Climate change: A very short introduction*. [4th ed]. Oxford University Press. 1-156.

- I've also seen used ones on Amazon for about \$7-\$12. Also available as an Audible audiobook (but might not be worth buying)! The pages are very short!

[AGAIN → For ALL writing]:

Strunk, W. & White, E. B. (1918). *Elements of Style*. [4th Ed.] Pearson.

Reading Assignments: To prepare for class discussions, **1-paragraph (5 full sentences at minimum) reflections on the assigned reading** will be **due before** each **class** by **8:00 am** on Canvas. **You must complete 13 out of 16 opportunities**. These are very structured (see below) to help you learn the critical skills of finding information in academic texts! I encourage paraphrasing the answers! This helps you and me know that you understood what you read – or not! However, sometimes the authors do a *really* good job of writing and presenting the information in a single sentence. In these cases, just include those sentences. It's not that deep. *Please note what these reflections are worth in the course overall in the "Grading Breakdown" section.*

Use this format for each, though depending on the assignment, each section may not be applicable:

1. Research Puzzle OR Policy Problem (i.e., **CONTEXT**)

2. Research Question (if applicable), including:
 - Dependent variable
 - Independent variable
3. Argument
4. Results:
 - What did they find?
 - How did they find it?? (Method)
 - Is there a solution to the specified problem that the author(s) imply or clearly state? What is it?
5. Additional questions to consider (ONE required):
 - What might be some consequences of the proposed solution?
 - What questions about the problem were un/answered or irrelevant?
 - What did you learn?

Case Reports: To get more practice in identifying policy components and practice policy writing before the bigger assignments, we'll also complete two case reports. These will be *no more than* 400 words ($\pm 10\%$). Word count totals outside of this range will receive **a letter-grade deduction**. These, like all of the other writing assignments, are short because quality is *never* guaranteed with quantity! Writing is hard and this is part of the challenge.

Tentative Topic (Oral) Brief: Part of your grade is discussing your chosen policy topic with the class. This ~1-paragraph, 5-minute talk will serve as a way for me to know you have thought about your subject and for you to start thinking through the problem with everyone.

Brief Draft: Before the final, rather than do an exam or a boring research paper around Midterm, you will be researching a climate-related policy area you have grown to care about. This draft will serve as the basis for your final (choose the format below). It must be a specific problem (not an *issue*) related to climate change, because we unfortunately cannot solve climate change in this class! Aim to identify:

- **Focus:** What is the policy problem? WHY is it the problem?
- **Scope:** Who does it involve (e.g., victims, stakeholders) and where (e.g., geographic location)?
- **Recommendation:** What tools, budget, and monitoring strategy would you recommend? (i.e., a policy recommendation)?
- **Anticipated Challenges:** What challenges do you anticipate in the policy process (to your best estimate)?

FINAL: You will have a choice on the final format to submit your policy analysis: **a paper or a presentation**. Regardless of the format, *you MUST SUBMIT A FINAL BRIEF*. This brief should follow the same specifications as the Brief Draft. Choose from the following:

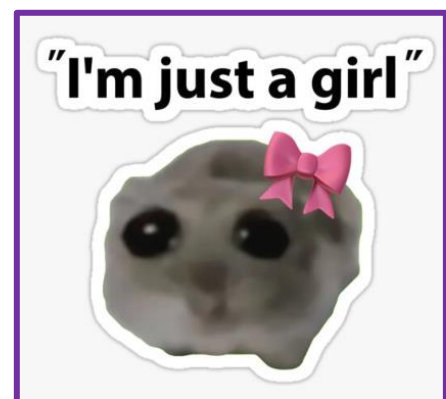
- **Paper:** This option must be a polished **2,000-2,500-word** ($\pm 10\%$) **policy analysis and recommendation** for the problem using what you learned in class. Word count totals outside of this range will receive **a letter-grade deduction**.
 - o There is no citation maximum as topics vary; however, you must have at least ten formal citations. Note that if there is a well-established area of research and your analysis is under-cited, that is precedent for point deductions.
- **Presentation:** This option must be a polished **15-minute presentation and recommendation** for the problem using what you learned in class. This must be a professional presentation.
 - o You may NOT read from your slides.
 - o Slides overloaded with text, crammed information, and/or images may receive point deductions.
 - o There is no citation maximum as topics vary; however, you must have at least ten formal citations. Note that if there is a well-established area of research and your analysis is under-cited, that is precedent for point deductions.

Don't worry if you have not done any policy writing! Most Fridays will be our "writing" days, set aside for learning to write for a policy audience, talking through policy examples and ideas, and writing your assignments.

The Final is due on (F) 1 MAY at 11:59PM.

Attendance/Participation: Participation in this class is tracked through our class discussions; thus, this requires your attendance. Zoom & online discussions will only be used as our first line of defense in cases of my absence, illness, and severe weather (perhaps other unforeseen circumstances), but I tend to follow UNL policy. What can I say... → [see meme.]

We will talk more on this (Zoom-ing and I'm sure sarcasm) in class!



Grading Scale:

A+	97.00%+	B+	87.00%	C+	77.00%	D+	67.00%	F	<60.00%
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%		
A-	90.00%	B-	80.00%	C-	70.00%	D-	60.00%		

Grading Breakdown:	Points	% Scale
Syllabus Quiz:	10	5
Engagement	100	20
Reading Assignments (15):	105 (7 per assignment)	25
Case Reports:	30 (15 per assignment)	10
Tentative "Paper" Topic Brief:	10	5
Draft Brief:	20	15
Final (Paper or Presentation):	25	20
<i>Total:</i>	<i>300</i>	<i>100%</i>

If you are concerned about your grade or deadlines, talk to me sooner rather than later!! We can make a plan to get you through this class!

ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES:

Schedule: Our current schedule is not set in stone and may be subject to change. I want to curate the best learning experience for you!

Illness: If you are ill, please communicate with me (I don't require details) so we can create a plan for you to finish this class. I don't want you to fall behind! It can happen quickly in a summer class.

Accessibility & Accommodations: Please contact me regarding any accommodations you may need to help you get through this class to curate your learning experience (for example, any mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions). I am here to support you in any way that you need! To establish reasonable accommodations in your unique situations, you may need to register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in 117 Louise Pound Hall and can be contacted at 402-472-3787 and by email (ssd@unl.edu). (Linked [here](#).)

Late Work: Deadlines should be respected and officially late work will receive full letter-grade deductions for each day late, unless you have previously spoken to me. Again, I really don't want anyone to fall behind!

Recording of Class Materials: All class materials will be recorded and available on Canvas. Any work and/or communication that you are privy to as a member of this course should be treated as the intellectual property of the speaker/creator and is not to be shared outside the context of this course. Students may not make or distribute screen captures, audio/video recordings of, or livestream, any class-related activity, including lectures and presentations, without express prior written consent from me or an approved accommodation from Services for Students with Disabilities. If you have (or think you may have) a disability such that you need to record or tape class-related activities, you should contact Services for Students with Disabilities. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Failure to follow this policy on recording or distributing class-related activities may subject you to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct (linked [here](#)).

Academic Honesty/Integrity: I have a zero-tolerance academic dishonesty policy. Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action, including but not limited to receiving a zero on the assignment or fail the course, and are granted due process and the right to appeal any decision. Please refer to the Student Handbook, the University's Code of Conduct and the Office of Undergraduate Studies' documents on academic integrity and for the University's policies on plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty. If you have any questions on citations and sourcing in your assignments, I am happy to answer them. If you have any additional questions (about how to include proper and complete citations, how to use your own words to discuss an author's work, etc.) I encourage you to talk with me rather than risk the penalty associated with failing to maintain academic honesty.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion: I am going to work hard to create a comfortable yet professional space here to discuss our sensitive topics. I do not tolerate hate speech, discursive, or insensitive language.

Stressed or Overwhelmed??: UNL offers a variety of options for students to aid them in dealing with stress and adversity. **Counseling and Psychological & Services (CAPS)** is a multidisciplinary team of psychologists and counselors that works collaboratively with Nebraska students to help them explore their feelings and thoughts and learn helpful ways to improve their mental, psychological, and emotional well-being when issues arise. CAPS can be reached by calling 402-472-7450 or their website <https://caps.unl.edu>. **Big Red Resistance & Well-Being (BRRWB)** provides one-on-one well-being coaching to any student who wants to enhance their well-being. Trained well-being coaches help

students create and be grateful for positive experiences, practice resilience and self-compassion, and find support as they need it. BRRWB can be reached by calling 402-472-8770 or going on their website <https://resilience.unl.edu/big-red-resilience-well-being>.

All other UNL course policies: All other policies can be found on the [UNL Registrars webpage](#). If you cannot find something, you may use this [search engine](#), or I try can help you find them!