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Course: Climate Change: Social Consequences and Responses
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Background information on the course: There has been much research on the nature, physical causes, and physical consequences of climate change, with a moderate amount of research on the economic consequences and on the politics of the climate change debate. There has not been much research on the social consequences of climate change, however. Further, most of the research that has been done is not well suited for undergraduates: it is overly technical and dry. This poses a problem for my planned course, but I think I can turn this problem into an advantage by offering the course as a senior seminar for sociology majors. I will ask the students to contribute to the literature by applying their previous coursework and sociological skills to the analysis of climate change. The first part of the course will summarize the literature on the nature, physical causes, and physical consequences of climate change; providing a foundation for subsequent work. The second part will ask the students to discuss the possible consequences of climate change for several areas of social life, such as gender relations, family life, and the nature of stratification within and across societies. I will begin this section by providing a model for how the students might proceed; discussing the possible impact of climate change on crime- my own area of research. The final section will briefly examine the social causes of and responses to climate change. While the focus is on social consequences, I do not want to end the course on a negative note-so students will be asked to draw on their sociological knowledge to suggest ways to respond to climate change (e.g., strategies for convincing the public and policy makers to take necessary actions).

Climate Change: Social Consequences and Responses
Sociology 4xx

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“Sociologists have been slow to engage the topic of climate change in their research. This is despite the fact that the reports of several governmental agencies in the United States and around the world cite human activity as one of, if not the primary driver of global climate change” (Workshop on Sociological Perspectives on Global Climate Change, National Science Foundation, 2009).

Climate change will likely involve a rise in average temperature, a rise in sea level, a change in rainfall patterns (drier in some places, wetter in others), and an increase in extreme weather events (e.g., heat waves, droughts, hurricanes). Certain of the consequences of these changes have received significant attention, including species extinction, scarcity of fresh water, reduced food production in many areas, the spread of certain diseases, and threats to coastlines and coastal cities. But with certain exceptions, little attention has been paid to the social consequences of climate change. For example, how might climate change affect gender relations, crime and social conflict, and those processes associated with globalization? There has been some speculation here, certain of it quite dire. For example, some claim that climate change will lead to massive migrations and a dramatic increase in conflict within and between societies. But there has been little good research in the area. This neglect of social consequences is unfortunate; more research in the area might motivate efforts to mitigate climate change and aid in the adaptation to such change.

This senior seminar is designed to help remedy this neglect and, in the process, cultivate your ability to apply your sociological knowledge and skills to new areas. After an overview of the literature on climate change, I will ask you to draw on your prior work in sociology to describe how climate change might affect social life in various areas. You will do this as part of small working group-with each group focusing on one major area of social life (e.g., gender relations, race and ethnic relations, education, politics, globalization). I will provide an example of how to proceed by discussing the possible impact on climate change on crime-my own area of research. Each working group will give a class presentation and produce a written report, and class members will read the reports of all working groups. We will end the course by briefly discussing the social causes of climate change, such as hyper-consumerism and land-use patterns. And, based on this examination, will suggest social responses to climate change; that is, ways to alter those behaviors that contribute to climate change and encourage responsible adaptation to such change.

Grading: There are two essay exams, each worth 20% of your grade; three brief group presentations/reports, each worth 5% of your grade; and a major group project, involving a written report and class presentation, worth the remaining 45% of your grade (further information is below, with additional info to be provided in class). All work will be graded on a scale from 0 to 100; 93+ =A, 90-92 =A-; 88-89 =B+; 83-87 =B, etc.

Group Projects: Based on a class survey administered the first day of class, I will form four working groups, each with three-four students. Ideally, the members of each group will share a strong interest in a major area of sociology, such as race and ethnic relations, globalization, stratification, or culture. Each group will make three brief presentations in class, with a different group member giving each presentation and taking primary responsibility for writing a two-page report associated with the presentation (further info to be provided in class).

Each group will also complete a major project focusing on the impact of climate change on one area of social life, related to your previous coursework in sociology. The project

will involve a class presentation and written report, and should contain at least four parts: 1) An overview of the *relevant* sociological research on your area on social life (e.g., race and ethnic relations, culture, education, family life). 2) A description of the physical effects of climate change most relevant to your area of social life. 3) A discussion of the ways in which climate change may impact your area of social life, justifying the arguments you make (e.g., citing relevant research, making logical arguments drawing on the relevant sociological literature); And 4) a description of how these impacts may vary across regions/societies and groups within societies, as a consequence of differences in effects of climate change and/or the ability to adapt to such change. Each group will create a division of labor, with one person assuming primary responsibility for a particular section (s) of the report. However, group members are expected to help one another write their sections, providing suggestions and feedback. And group members should regularly share work, since the sections are closely related and the overall report should form a coherent whole. Your grade on the group project will be based on the section(s) you have primary responsibility for (75%) and the grade for the overall report (25%). For example, if your section(s) receives a grade of 90 and the overall report receives a grade of 80; your grade for the project will be 87.5 (.75 X 90 + .25 X 80). (Further information will be provided in class and in a separate handout.)

Readings

The Climate Crisis: An Introductory Guide to Climate Change, by David Archer and Stefan Rahmstorf. 2010. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Summarizes and provides perspective on the *Fourth Assessment Report* of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the definitive study on the nature, causes, consequences, and possible responses to climate change. The IPCC *Report* represents a three year effort involving hundreds of scientists-with the IPCC earning a Nobel Peace Prize for its work. The three volumes of the *Report*, however, are over 2,500 pages and are often difficult for the non-scientist to read).

Readings on Reserves Direct (RD) and Course Website (CW). I've put together a set of readings dealing with the possible social consequences of climate change and, to a lesser extent, with the social causes of and responses to climate change. Among other things, these readings describe impacts of climate change that you should consider in your group projects and, more generally, they function as models for your work. In addition, each working group will suggest 2-4 readings for the rest of the class, related to their group project. These readings will be posted on the Course Website or Reserves Direct. Finally, I will post each group report on the Course Website. Please note that you will be tested on all of these readings, including the group reports.

Class Schedule

Week 1: *The Physics of Climate Change*: A brief overview of how climate change occurs and the various types of evidence regarding climate change. Readings: *The Climate Crisis*, Chapters 1-2.

Week 2: ***The Nature and Physical Consequences of Climate Change***: An overview of the nature of climate change, including rising temperatures, rising sea level, changing patterns of rainfall, and extreme weather events. Readings: *The Climate Crisis*, Chapters 3-7.

Week 3: ***The Economic and Social Consequences of Climate Change***: An examination of certain of the limited research on the possible social consequences of climate change. Note that such research usually takes account of societal/regional differences in the physical consequences of climate change and in the ability to adapt to such change. Readings: *The Climate Crisis*, Chapter 8; RD: Willis, "Climate Change and Medical Sociology;" Barnett and Adger, "Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict;" Hardoy and Pandiella, "Urban Poverty and Vulnerability to Climate Change in Latin America;" Bartlett, "Climate Change and Urban Children...;"

Week 4: ***Critiques of the Climate Change Research***. The evidence on climate change has been challenged by some. Each working group will describe and evaluate one major critique of the climate change research, presenting their results in class and turning in a 2-3 page report. Reading: RD: McWright and Dunlap, "Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem."

Week 5: ***Sociological Approaches to Climate Change and Exam #1***. The major group project will be discussed in detail, including the nature of the project, grading, how to organize group work, and information sources. Exam #1 will focus on the readings and class discussions for weeks 1-5. Reading: CW: National Science Foundation, Executive Summary and Part II of *Workshop on Sociological Perspectives on Global Climate Change*.

Weeks 6-7: ***The Social Consequences of Climate Change: Crime***. I will provide a model for the group projects by discussing the possible effects of climate change on crime. I will provide an overview of relevant criminological research, describe those aspects of climate change most likely to impact crime, discuss the possible impacts of climate change on crime, and argue that the impact will be especially severe on certain societies/regions and groups within societies.

Week 8: ***Preliminary Group Reports***. Each group will provide an overview of their work to date, noting any problems encountered and useful information sources. Also, each group will provide a brief overview of the two most relevant a) research articles and b) mass media reports that they have found (please email electronic copies to me and turn in a 2 page report explaining why you selected these readings). I will post these on the Course Website (and they are required reading for Exam #2).

Weeks 9-12: ***Group Reports***. Each group will be responsible for a full class period, with group members presenting their research reports during the first 45-60 minutes of class and responding to questions during the remainder of the class. An electronic copy of the written report should be sent to me at the end of week 12 (note: do not turn in the report

until after your class presentation; you may receive feedback that should be incorporated into the report). All reports will be posted on the Course Web Site and are required reading for Exam #2.

Week 13: ***The Social Causes of Climate Change***. We will briefly discuss research on why individuals and groups engage in those activities that promote climate change, as well as fail to take necessary action to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Readings: *The Climate Crisis*, Chapters 9 and 10; RD: Freund and Martin, "Hyperconsumption and Its Health and Environmental Consequences;" Frantz and Mayer, "The Emergency of Climate Change: Why Are We Failing to Take Action?"

Week 14: ***The Social Responses to Climate Change***. We will discuss the elements of a sustainable lifestyle and ways to persuade individuals, groups, and policy makers to better work toward the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Each working group will briefly describe an organization attempting to address climate change, why they like it, and what more it might do (and turn in a 2 page report in this area). Readings: RD: Orr, "Four Challenges of Sustainability;" Smith, "The Wisdom of Crowds;" Giddens, selection from *The Politics of Climate Change*; Ecological Footprint, "Ecological Footprint Quiz."

Exam #2 (Final Exam Date): The second exam will focus on the readings and class presentations from weeks 6-14.