

U.N. Climate Change Negotiations Practicum
ENVIRON 592 / PUBPOL 592

Fall 2025 | Mon/Wed 8:30 – 9:45 AM | Gross Hall 100C

Faculty:

Jackson Ewing (jackson.ewing@duke.edu)

Teaching Assistants:

Gabriela Nagle Alverio (gabriela.nagle@duke.edu)

Sadie Tetreault (sadie.tetreault@duke.edu)

Course Description

The *U.N. Climate Change Negotiations Practicum* examines the creation of international climate change agreements under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the UNFCCC has been the primary forum for the negotiation of international agreements concerning climate change. Over time, UNFCCC negotiations have grown in mandate and sophistication, and participation by actors across the policy landscape have amplified the scale of climate change response efforts. The Conference of the Parties (COP) held in Paris in 2015 (COP21) signaled the beginning of a new, more bottom-up approach to combating climate change. COP30 in Belem, Brazil, will seek to further expand governments' commitments to climate action toward Paris Agreement goals, and provide a forum for civil society, intergovernmental communities, and the private sector to advance climate priorities. By analyzing these negotiations, their underlying foundations, and the stakeholders driving climate action, this course will provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental issues, negotiations processes, and societal and political dynamics surrounding the UNFCCC.

This course aims to develop students' analytical thinking and experiential learning at the international level – including the opportunity to attend COP30 in Belem, Brazil. By the conclusion of this course, students should have developed proficiency in the following topics and skills:

- Understand the history and context of the UNFCCC, and apply that knowledge to their participation at COP;
- Comprehend and observe the roles and activities of private sector and civil society actors in advancing climate change progress;
- Describe and explain the nuance of climate negotiations to a non-specialist audience, particularly as it relates to their chosen area of expertise;
- Identify, analyze, and observe in real-time the negotiating positions held by major countries and alliance blocs;
- Articulate different viewpoints on the roles of influence, law, and power in international affairs, as exemplified by climate change diplomacy;
- Construct a policy position on a chosen issue area for the upcoming negotiations;
- Demonstrate the ability to participate as a professional member of an observer delegation.

Course Structure

This course is structured through weekly class sessions, with a practical component focused around COP30. It is worth 3.0 credits in the graduate credit system and 1.0 in the undergraduate system.

Students will be asked to submit an application that discusses their interest in the course and previous academic and professional experiences that will contribute to their success in its completion. Because slots to attend the international events (see below) are very limited, only selected students will be invited to enroll in the course.

The course will meet twice a week. The class format will include short lectures, seminar-style group discussions of readings and issues, guest speakers, interactive exercises, student-led interventions on focus issues, and a model climate negotiation. We will also take an optional trip to Duke in DC to meet in person with climate practitioners. Each student will select a topic or issue of relevance to the UNFCCC negotiations and will focus on the deliverables and potential client work on that topic throughout the semester.

Working with Clients

Students are encouraged to identify potential client organizations or country delegations that are actively working on their selected issue. With guidance from the instructors and advisors, students will approach the applicable organizations to develop relationships and offer to support their efforts throughout the semester and during the negotiations. If challenges arise which prevent such a relationship, students can conduct an issue-oriented case study as a replacement activity.

Students working with a stakeholder group or country delegation are expected to provide support and research help throughout the semester and during the COP while maintaining a professional relationship with the client and representing Duke University appropriately.

In addition to working with clients, students will have the opportunity to learn how various state and non-state actors engage with the COP and the UNFCCC through guest lectures with experts and practitioners.

Attending the Negotiations

Every effort will be made to provide all students with the opportunity to attend COP30. However, accredited badges for the 'Blue Zone' – which includes where negotiations take place alongside myriad other activities – are limited and beyond the control of Duke University. Students are thus responsible for securing their own badges for the Blue Zone. Where Blue Zone access is constrained, students will create strategies for participating in COP-related activities on the sidelines of the negotiations, including through participation in the more accessible Green Zone and Innovation Zone. More details will be provided as they become available throughout the semester.

Note that the dates of the COP30 are Nov 10–Nov 21, 2025. Under existing planning, half of the class will attend the first week, and the other will attend the second week. It is the responsibility of each student who wants to attend the COP to IMMEDIATELY begin discussions with their course instructors about any course conflicts. Missing/rescheduling course assignments is entirely at the discretion of your instructors and may determine whether you can attend COP30.

Expectations, Evaluation, and Assignments

All students are expected to complete required readings prior to class and actively participate in class discussions. This will be a largely electronics-free classroom experience. Laptops and phones will not be allowed other than in select circumstances, and tablets will be allowed only when using a stylus for notetaking. More information on this policy will be provided in class.

Students will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Class Participation and Attendance (20%)

Student participation in class discussions and activities is extremely important. Students are expected to read materials and actively participate in the class discussion each week. If you are unable to attend a class, please notify the course leaders (write to the TAs and cc the instructor) in advance to receive an excused absence. Unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. The participation grade will derive from a series of 4 assessments that will take place unannounced during classes across the semester calendar. These assessments will cover a combination of assigned reading material, issue summaries, guest speaker interviews and debriefs, and debate-based analysis for that week. Pairs of students will be assigned to interview guest speakers and will prepare accordingly and submit a set of questions in advance as one of their four participation assessments.

Mock Negotiation (30%) -- During class on Weeks 9 and 10

Ahead of COP30, students will participate in an in-class mock negotiation. Students will assume the roles of the parties to the convention and advocate for their proposed policy positions. Topics discussed at the mock negotiation will be key topics at COP30.

To prepare for the negotiation, students will write a 2-page memo addressed to the lead negotiator from their party that incorporates a summary of the importance of addressing the topic, guidance on how the topic has been included in negotiations and agreements thus far, and a proposal for how the party should try to influence the negotiations based on their interests.

Outside of the classroom during negotiation weeks, students will engage in text development, debate, editing, and negotiation on the issue(s) under focus. This process will seek to mirror the development of treaty text in the UNFCCC process. More details on the structure and expectations for the negotiations and memo development will be provided.

Final Project (25%) -- Submitted during finals week

Students will prepare and deliver a presentable product on their COP experience and selected issue(s) of focus. This product should not be a conventional PowerPoint presentation, but rather take a creative approach to capturing and analyzing the complexity of the issue(s) at hand. Products will be submitted electronically during finals week and be presented (with student consent) at a public event in January 2026. More details on the structure and expectations for the assessment will be provided in class.

Writing Assignments and (25%) -- Leading up to and during COP

Blog Assignments (3): Students are required to write three 500-word blog posts for the course website on their COP experiences. You may refer to previous cohorts' blog posts for examples. Due dates are assigned based on the week you attend the COP:

Week 1 Delegation

- Blog 1: November 10 at 11:59 PM EST
- Blog 2: November 14 at 11:59 PM EST
- Blog 3: November 25 at 10:30 PM EST

Week 2 Delegation

- Blog 1: November 16 at 11:59 PM EST
- Blog 2: November 19 at 11:59 PM EST
- Blog 3: November 25 at 10:30 PM EST

Summary Submissions: Submit products or summaries of what you provide to your clients or—in the absence of a client relationship—the issue(s) that you focused on. Further details on this assessment will be provided in class.

Note: Students are expected to submit assignments on time. If extenuating circumstances arise, students are expected to contact the TAs immediately and request an extension. Due dates for other classes, job interviews, and extracurricular activities are not viable causes for extensions.

Honor Code

Duke University is a community dedicated to scholarship, leadership, and service and to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect, and accountability. Citizens of this community commit to reflect upon and uphold these principles in all academic and non-academic endeavors and to protect and promote a culture of integrity. To uphold the Duke Community Standard:

- I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors;
- I will conduct myself responsibly in all my endeavors; and
- I will act if the Standard is compromised.

Overview of Course Schedule and Readings

Please note that this is a general outline, and we may amend readings to Canvas in advance of each class. This may include readings from guest speakers, who will be inserted into the schedule based on their availability and relevance to course content.

| Week | Date | Topic |
|------|------|--|
| 1 | 8/25 | Surveying the Climate Diplomacy Landscape |
| | 8/27 | Course Logistics Discussion |
| 2 | 9/1 | No class |
| | 9/3 | The Evolution of the UNFCCC Process |
| 3 | 9/8 | Interactive exercise on COP experience |
| | 9/10 | Guest Speaker: The COP30 Agenda |
| 4 | 9/15 | Guest Speaker: Adaptation, Loss & Damage and Mobility |
| | 9/17 | Interactive Exercise: Adaptation, Loss & Damage and Mobility |
| 5 | 9/22 | Guest Speaker: Climate Justice & Indigenous Rights |
| | 9/24 | Interactive Exercise: Climate Justice & Indigenous Rights |
| 6 | 9/29 | Guest Speaker: Carbon Markets and Paris Agreement Article 6 |

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| | 10/1 | Interactive Exercise: CarbonSim (prospective) |
| 7 | 10/6 | Guest Speaker: Biodiversity, Water and Nature-based solutions |
| | 10/8 | Interactive Exercise: Biodiversity, Water and Nature-based solutions |
| <i>Fall Break</i> | <i>10/13-10/14</i> | <i>Optional Session: Trip to Duke in DC</i> |
| 8 | 10/15 | No Class for DC Attendees; Debrief Session for Non-Attendees |
| 9 | 10/20 | Model Negotiations |
| | 10/22 | Model Negotiations |
| 10 | 10/27 | Model Negotiations |
| | 10/29 | Model Negotiations |
| 11 | 11/3 | Course Material Debrief |
| | 11/5 | Final COP Preparations |
| <i>COP30</i> | <i>11/10-11/21</i> | <i>*No further classes*</i> |

Discussion Questions and Readings

Week 2: The Evolution of the UNFCCC

Guiding Questions

- What do all these acronyms mean and how many do I have to know about?!?
- What is the history and characteristics of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement?
- Why is international cooperation important to address climate change?
- Why does the UNFCCC function the way that it does?
- How do we see the broad UNFCCC results track record thus far?
- What happened at COP29 and where do things stand now?
- What is the purpose of negotiating groups in the UNFCCC?
- What do the main groups tend to advocate for?
- What is the “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities” principle and how has it played out in the UNFCCC so far? What is its future?

Readings

Introduction

- UNFCCC. “Climate: Get the Big Picture,” at:
<https://webarchive.unfccc.int/20220413133608/http://unfccc.int/resource/bigpicture/>

Framework of UNFCCC/ History

- Mark A. Maslin, John Lang, and Fiona Harvey (2023), “A short history of the successes and failures of the international climate change negotiations”, UCL Open Environment.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10354701/pdf/ucloe-05-059.pdf>
- United Nations General Assembly, “United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,” New York: United Nations, General Assembly (1992) at
<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004->

Party Groupings

- **Skim:** UNFCCC, “Party Groupings,” UNFCCC (n.d.), at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties/party-groupings>
- Federica Genovese, Richard J. McAlexander & Johannes Urpelainen (2022), “Institutional roots of international alliances: Party groupings and position similarity at global climate negotiations”, *The Review of International Organizations*, 329-359. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11558-022-09470-4>

Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) Principle

- Lavanya Rajamani, Louise Jeffery, Niklas Höhne, Frederic Hans, Alyssa Glass, Gaurav Ganti & Andreas Geiges (2021) National ‘fair shares’ in reducing greenhouse gas emissions within the principled framework of international environmental law, *Climate Policy*, 21:8, 983-1004, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14693062.2021.1970504>

Additional Resources

Perspectives on Climate Policy

- William Nordhaus, “Why Climate Policy Has Failed and How Governments Can Do Better,” in Foreign Affairs (2021) at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/why-climate-policy-has-failed>

Week 3: The COP Experience + The COP30 Agenda

Guiding Questions (The COP Experience)

- What is the COP experience like including negotiations, side events, pavilions, closed-door meetings, the green zone, and advocacy, activism, and protest?
- What are your personal goals for COP, and which clients and approaches to the events at COP will help you achieve them?

Readings

- Choose three [COP29 blogs](#) from students in the practicum last year to read
- UNFCCC (2022), “A day in the life of an observer at COP,” in UNFCCC at: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Observer%20handbook%20for%20COP27.pdf>
 - Slides 8-9, 12-15, 19-20, 28-32
- Hickmann, T., Widerberg, O., Lederer, M., & Pattberg, P. (2021). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat as an orchestrator in global climate policymaking. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 87(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852319840425>
- Kate Yoder (2022), “It’s not just Coca-Cola: Corporations have co-opted the UN climate talks,” in Grist at: <https://grist.org/cop27/corporations-have-co-opted-the-un-climate-talks-coca-col/>

Guiding Questions (The COP30 Agenda)

- Where did COP29 leave off?
- What are the Brazilian Presidency’s priorities?
- What will be major points of debate at COP30?
- What are the stakes?

Readings

- Carbon Brief (2024), “COP29: Key outcomes agreed at the UN climate talks in Baku”, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/cop29-key-outcomes-agreed-at-the-un-climate-talks-in-baku/>
- Schneider et al (2025), “COP30 without the US: Climate negotiations in Brazil under pressure”, <https://www.boell.de/en/2025/08/08/cop30-without-us-climate-negotiations->

brazil-under-pressure

- Fiona Harvey (2025), “Wreckers, money woes and mutirão: 10 things we learned about Cop30 from Bonn climate talks”, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/27/cop30-10-things-we-learned-from-bonn-climate-talks>
- IISD (2025), “Brazil Shares Priorities for COP 30”, <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/brazil-shares-priorities-for-cop-30/>
- André Aranha Corrêa do Lago COP30 President-Designate, Letter to Parties (2025), https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/10.03.25_final_vision_cop_30.pdf

Additional Resources

- Video: Informal meeting of the plenary (79th session) on the priorities and preparations for the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30): <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1a/k1ap3cgx5>

Week 4: Adaptation, Loss & Damage and Mobility

Guiding Questions

- How should we think about the intersection of global and local forces on adaptation?
- What is the nature of the responsibility for high-emitting countries (past, present and future) to support adaptation elsewhere?
- How does mobility represent an adaptation strategy?
- How have negotiations evolved from the foundation of adaptation to recent movement on loss and damage?
- What are major different approaches to and trade-offs with addressing loss and damage?
- What are some ethical considerations of funding climate adaptation and loss and damage top-down?

Readings

- Kiyomi de Zoysa et al. (2022), “[Can the Global Goal on Adaptation Be Locally Led?](#)” in *World Resources Institute*.
- Task Force on Displacement, Summary Report of Outputs of Activity II.3: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/TFD%20Output%20activity%20II.3.pdf>
- Preety Bhandari et al. (2022), “What Is “Loss and Damage” from Climate Change? 8 Key Questions, Answered,” in *World Resources Institute* at: <https://www.wri.org/insights/loss-damage-climate-change>
- Blocher (2025), “Role of Human Mobility in Global Climate Policy: Belém and Beyond”, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/role-human-mobility-global-climate-policy-belem-and-beyond>.
- TWN (2025), “Developed countries hinder progress on adaptation”, <https://twn.my/title2/climate/info.service/2025/cc250616.htm>
- *Survey official UNFCCC documents on Loss and Damage and choose one to read: <https://unfccc.int/topics/resilience/resources/documents-on-loss-and-damage>
- Schalatek (2025), “What to expect for the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage in 2025”, <https://us.boell.org/en/2025/03/27/what-expect-frld-2025>.

Week 5: Climate Justice and Indigenous Rights

Guiding Questions

- What does ‘climate justice’ mean to you?
- What are the challenges of representation at COP for marginalized communities?
- Will indigenous rights be prioritized in both rhetoric and practice at COP30?

Readings

- Perez (2024), “Disappointed by this year’s climate talks, Indigenous advocates look to Brazil

- in 2025”, <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/27/nx-s1-5193317/disappointed-cop29-indigenous-advocates-brazil-2025-climate-summit>
- Wisdom Keepers (2024), “Wisdom Keepers Statement on COP29”, <https://www.awisdomkeepersdelegation.org/homepage/cop29statement>
- Henneberger (2025), “From Bonn to London, Indigenous voices raise expectations for COP30 in Belem”, <https://blogs.edf.org/climate411/2025/07/03/from-bonn-to-london-indigenous-voices-raise-expectations-for-cop30-belem/>
- Lefstad, L., & Paavola, J. (2023). The evolution of climate justice claims in global climate change negotiations under the UNFCCC. *Critical Policy Studies*, 18(3), 363–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2023.2235405>
- NRDC (2023), “The Environmental Justice Movement”, Explainer, at: <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement>

Week 6: Carbon Markets and Paris Agreement Article 6

Guiding Questions

- Do we need international carbon markets?
- What is Article 6 and why is it proving difficult to implement?
- What is the status and future of the voluntary carbon market??
- Which is more true: the VCM an effective climate response mechanism or the VCM is mostly ‘hot air’?

Readings

- World Bank (2022), [What You Need to Know About Article 6 of the Paris Agreement](#).
- The Nature Conservancy, “Key Takeaways on Article 6 at COP29”, <https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/COP29-Article-6-Key-Outcomes.pdf>
- Hucke (2025), “Why the COP29 Article 6 decision strengthens high-integrity carbon markets”, <https://www.c2es.org/2025/02/why-the-cop29-article-6-decision-strengthens-high-integrity-carbon-markets/>
- Diab (2024), “COP29: Complex Article 6 rules pave way to unruly carbon markets”, <https://carbonmarketwatch.org/2024/11/23/cop29-complex-article-6-rules-pave-way-to-unruly-carbon-markets/>
- Mulder (2025), “First wave of Article 6 carbon credits misfire spectacularly”, <https://carbonmarketwatch.org/2025/04/10/first-wave-of-article-6-carbon-credits-misfire-spectacularly/>
- UNFCCC, “What are market and non-market mechanisms”, UNFCCC (n.d.), <https://unfccc.int/topics/what-are-market-and-non-market-mechanisms>
- South Pole (2023), “The Voluntary Carbon Market | 2022–2023”, <https://www.southpole.com/publications/the-voluntary-carbon-market-report-2022-2023>
- Patrick Greenfield (2023), “Revealed: more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by biggest certifier are worthless, analysis shows”, *The Guardian*, January 18. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoe>

Week 7: Biodiversity, Water and Nature-based solutions

Guiding Questions

- How do the biodiversity and climate COPs relate to each other?
- Are market-based approaches to valuing biodiversity fit for purpose? Are they just?
- What role does and should freshwater play in COP processes?

Readings

- Patrick (2022), “To Prevent the Collapse of Biodiversity, the World Needs a New Planetary Politics”, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/11/to-prevent-the-collapse-of-biodiversity-the-world-needs-a-new-planetary-politics?lang=en>
- IPCC 2022, “Cross-Chapter Paper 1: Biodiversity Hotspots”, in: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_CCP1.pdf
- da Silva Bezerra, D. Nature-based solutions to climate change. *Sci Rep* 15, 22095 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-05678-7>

Fall Break Duke in DC Sessions

Guiding Questions (Great Power Competition)

- What is the historical importance and future trajectory of US-China climate relations?
- How does US retreat from international climate diplomacy affect China? The EU? LMICs? COP30 possibilities?

Readings

US-China Climate Relations

- Jackson Ewing (2015), “Why China and the US have found common purpose on climate change”, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/why-china-and-the-us-have-found-common-purpose-on-climate-change-51798>
- Kelly Sims Gallagher (2023) “The Right Way for America and China to Cooperate on Climate: How the Two Powers Can Jointly Aid Poorer Countries”, *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/right-way-america-and-china-cooperate-climate>
- Thom Woodroffe (2023), “China Must Pay a Price for Climate Inaction: Preventing catastrophe is now as much about sticks as it is about carrots.” *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/18/china-climate-xi-jinping-dual-carbon-goals/>
- Jackson Ewing (2023), “US-China Friction and the Competition for Global Climate Leadership”, *Azure Forum*. <https://www.azureforum.org/u-s-china-friction-and-the-competition-for-global-climate-leadership/>

Guiding Questions (Climate Finance)

- What is this NCQG I keep hearing about and where did it come from?
- What are the primary debates on climate finance within and beyond the UNFCCC?
- What are productive pathways for meeting the climate finance needs of low- and middle-income countries?
- How should the development priorities of LMICs be squared with global climate goals from an equity and justice perspective and what does this mean for the provision of finance?

Readings

- Jonathan Phillips, Jackson Ewing, Abhay Rao, Liilnna Teji, Victoria Plutshack, Marc Jeuland (2022), *Climate Finance for Just Transitions*, New Frontiers in Climate Finance. https://energyaccess.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Climate_Finance_for_Just_Transitions-2.pdf
- Baysa Naran, Jake Connolly, Paul Rosane, Dharshan Wignarajah, Githungo Wakaba and Barbara Buchner (2023), “Global Landscape of Climate Finance: A Decade of Data”, Climate Policy Initiative. <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/publication/global-landscape-of-climate-finance-a-decade-of-data/>
- Zainab Usman (2022), “As Financial Pledges Trickle In, Did COP27 Meet Its Goal of Implementation?” CEIP Commentary. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/11/21/as-financial-pledges-trickle-in-did-cop27-meet-its-goal-of-implementation-pub-88452>
- WEF (2024), “The NCQG: What is it and why does it matter?”, at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/07/new-collective-quantified-goal-what-is-it-and-why-does-it->

[matter/#:~:text=The%20NCQG%20is%20currently%20under,the%20context%20of%20climate%20change.](#)

- IEA, *Financing Clean Energy Transitions in Emerging and Developing Economies* (Paris: International Energy Agency, 2021). *Read [Executive Summary](#).