

# GEOG 607: The Science/Policy Interface

## A graduate seminar in human geography + STS

Fall term 2017

Fridays 9:00-11:50am

Condon 207

Course website on Canvas

Taught by:

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 4-5pm

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## Overview

Why does science often fail to influence policy? What accounts for policy divergence in the face of sound, consensus-driven climate science? To what extent is environmental knowledge truly apolitical or value-free? How are environmental policy decisions ultimately crafted and achieved? Drawing on the conceptual tools of Political Ecology (PE) and Science and Technology Studies (STS)—an interdisciplinary field that investigates the institutions, practices, meanings, and outcomes of science and technology and its entanglements with social order—this course will explore the ‘epistemic geographies’ of the science-policy interface. We will learn social theories that explain processes of knowledge coproduction, circulation, and mobilization; the relationship between scientific knowledge, political power, and modern development regimes; why rifts are created between science and societal actors; how science is embedded in institutions, regimes, and discourses; and the future role of science in democratic societies around the world.

This course argues that a critical approach to the epistemic geographies of climate and environmental knowledge is essential, particularly as scientific knowledge still circulates unevenly in a world marked by persistent inequality and dominance. Some see the science-policy ‘gap’ as something to hurdle, erase, or fix; others characterize the interface as fundamental and unavoidable meeting point(s) of diverse institutions, scientists, and societal actors. Many scholars overlook the science-policy interface as a fundamentally *human* and cultural entanglement, even though all seem to agree that getting it ‘right’ is urgently important.

The course seeks to bring geography into conversation with STS. As geographers, we know that social order and *context*—including its sociospatial and geographic dimensions—is key to understanding rifts between science and policy. The course starts with the assumption that science is not automatically coherent or ‘right’, and that policy is not inherently efficient or designed to be responsive to society. By reading critical theory and empirical studies, we hope to gain conceptual and methodological tools to render the ‘science/policy interface’ as an empirical object to be explored, probed, and ultimately transformed.

The course is aimed at graduate students—regardless of academic specialty or background—who are motivated to think more critically about what we mean by scientific discovery and policy innovation, what counts as scientific knowledge and why, and how science and technology intervene in the wider world. Welcome!

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Characterize key concepts, influential thinkers, and major trends and paradigms in critical thinking about the science-policy interface.

- Critically read and analyze a topical field or body of works—applying theoretical vocabulary and key concepts learned in the course—in the form of the ‘empathetic critique’.
- Synthesize insights about the science-policy interface and propose new research directions, through a class-based collaborative writing project.
- Self-evaluate a writing portfolio, and in the process produce new and unexpected connections across the literature.

## Expectations and Course Format

Three tenets guide our professional conduct and learning climate in this course:

1. Critique should be *productive*, not destructive. While there are many ways to do critique (or research, or teaching, or anything else in life), in this course we will learn how to craft the **empathetic critique**, my term for a mode of critical expression that carefully assesses the nuances of an argument, outlines its limits, and builds on useful components to advance the field as a whole. Best practices might include panning for ‘gold’ in a muddled argument or paper you disagree with; quoting directly from the text, and not inserting claims into an author’s mouth; evaluating different conceptual pathways to your final destination. We encourage quoting directly from the text. Please always bring assigned readings (in paper or digital format) to class.
2. Treat course members (and their viewpoints) with respect, civility, and professional decorum. We adhere to the principles and policies of the UO Student Conduct Code.
3. Writing is a muscle—it takes exercise and training to reach fitness. “All good writing begins with terrible first efforts,” notes novelist Anne Lamott, in an essay appropriately called ‘Shitty First Drafts’. Good writing takes labor: being creative and vulnerable, ruthless editing, eliminating excess or flabby prose, fine-tuning for flow, tightening the nuts and bolts of evidence and argument, silencing the internal voice of self-doubt (what Natalie Goldberg calls ‘monkey mind’). Patience is key. Major course assignments involve a writing portfolio and group-authored essay.

The course meets on Friday mornings. Students are expected to actively contribute to seminar discussion, based on the weekly readings. ‘Contribution’ is understood in several ways. First, students will write a short reaction paper based on the readings, utilizing the method of the empathetic critique. Students must upload their papers to Canvas no later than 12noon Thursday (the day prior to class). This deadline allows the instructor to respond directly to these papers, returning them in class with written feedback.

Second, all seminar participants are expected to actively contribute to class discussion, in the form of thoughtful commentary, provocative questions, empirical/anecdotal stories, and respectful debate.

Finally, each week a student (or pair of students, depending on enrollment) will be responsible for leading class discussion. Leadership involves presenting a brief—no more than 10 minute—summary of the readings (including the identification of the main themes as well as some critical commentary) and the strategic deployment of questions designed to open up group discussion and participation. Leaders are required to meet with Katie during her office hours (Tuesday, 4-5pm) before their designated class, and explain their ‘game plan’ and strategies for leading discussion.

## Assignments and Evaluation

Student performance will be assessed on the following components:

- Participation and Seminar Leadership
- Reaction Papers
- The Group Writing Project
- The Portfolio

## The Schedule

Week	Date	Topic
1	September 29	Calls to Action / Introduction to STS
2	October 6	Science in Action
3	October 13	Deconstructing the Linear Model
4	October 20	Water at the Science-Policy Interface Guest speaker: Dr. Kiza Gates
5	October 27	Science and its Publics
6	November 3	Writing Workshop I (in-class)
7	November 10	Beyond the Global North
8	November 17	Transdisciplinarity
9	No Class -- Thanksgiving	
10	December 1	Global Warming and The Politics of Climate Change Knowledge
Finals Week	December 5, 10:15am-12:15pm	Writing Workshop II
	<i>Writing Portfolios due (upload to Canvas) by 5:00pm on Friday, December 8</i>	

### Featuring readings by:

- Sheila Jasanoff, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Myanna Lahsen, Jason Chilvers, Raoni Rajão, Ulrike Felt, David Demeritt, Maria Carmen Lemos, Martin Mahony and Mike Hulme, the Fulbright NEXUS collaboration, and more authors

Join the course and find the full syllabus on Canvas. Welcome!