Global warming is, by many accounts, the gravest danger facing human life on the planet at the present moment. Unlike other potentially catastrophic crises, however, climate change lacks clear divisions between people or nations or apocalyptic symbols. Climate change does not split the globe into a Free World and an Evil Empire, or a sacred Motherland and a nation of Capitalist Running Dogs. As the author Per Espen Stoknes writes, “There is no clear enemy with climate change. We’re all participating in the climate crisis — if there is an enemy, it’s us. And it’s hard to go to war against ourselves.” Furthermore, the transformations associated with climate change do not appear as sudden explosions or even exist as perceptible on a daily fashion. Instead, they exist as graphs that climb ever upward, as never before heard of glacial shelves cracking, and droughts, fires, and storms “correlated to but not caused by” disruptions in climatic patterns. Its changes are long term, it poses collective action problems, and its agents are generalized and often indistinct.

Climate change, in short, poses narrative problems.

This seminar will examine six separate, but interrelated, disciplinary means of narrating climate change. The emphasis will be not, primarily, on what narratives “work” but on investigation of the commonalities and differences in which climate change is explained and put in time according to different fields and disciplines. The course will examine scientific writing, historical narratives, journalism, political explanations, personal memoir, and fiction. Texts will include scientific and historical articles, films, novels, graphic non-fiction, intergovernmental reports, museum exhibits, speeches, and visual media. Students will explore the differing ways that disciplines attempt to convey knowledge, learn how to recognize and understand different narrative forms, and determine for themselves what makes for effective narration.

Books for Purchase:
Omar el Akkad, American War: A Novel (2017)  
Philippe Squarzoni, Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science (2014)

Films:
Snowpiercer (2011)  
There are two main forms of written assignments for the class.

1. A series of four (1000 word) essays due in the 4th, 8th, and 12th weeks of the semester and on the scheduled date of the final. Topics will be distributed one week in advance of the essay’s due date.
   a. In order to offer students the opportunity to respond to critiques of their essays, essays may be revised in light of the instructor’s comments. Revisions are due one week following return of the essay.

Students will also be required to make one class presentation of 10 minutes in length. For this presentation, they will choose a piece of storytelling (a newspaper or magazine article, documentary, podcast, film, short story, etc.) related to the topic of the day’s class, summarize its narrative and evaluate that narrative’s effectiveness vis a vis the effectiveness of the week’s main reading.

**Grading rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance and participation:</th>
<th>10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class presentation:</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1:</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of paper 1:</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2:</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revision of paper 2:</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 3:</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of paper 3:</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper:</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course Organization**

Sept. 5
Introduction

Sept. 12
The Problem: How Should We Tell the Story of Climate Change?


Unit 1: Scientific Stories

Sept. 19 The Internal Narratives of Climate Science


Sept. 26 Making Science Public

Philippe Squarzoni, Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science

Film: An Inconvenient Truth

***First Paper Due Friday, Sept. 28***

Unit 2: Historical Stories

Oct. 3 Putting Climate in History

“Forum: Environmental History and Climate Change,” Environmental History 19 (April 2014), pp. 281–324


Oct. 10 Case Study: The Little Ice Age

Fagan, The Little Ice Age, parts I-III

Oct. 17 Fossil Fuel Histories

Fagan, The Little Ice Age, part IV


***Paper 2 Due Friday, Oct 19***

**Unit 3: Political Stories**

Oct. 24 The Challenges of Climate Journalism

Readings TBA.
Listen to most recent episode of “Hot and Bothered” podcast
Class visitor: Kate Aranoff, journalist for The Intercept, In These Times, and host of the podcast “Hot and Bothered.”

Oct. 31 Narratives of Climate Change Denial

Readings TBA

***Paper #3 Due Friday, Nov. 2***

**Unit 4: Personal Stories**

Nov. 7 Climate Memoir


Selections from Elizabeth Colbert, Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate (2015)

Nov. 14 Climate Fiction

Selections from I’m With the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet (2014)

Nov. 21 No Class
Read first half of El-Akkad

Nov. 28 Imagining Dystopia

Omar El-Akkad, American War

Dec. 5 Envisioning Geoengineering

Snowpiercer (2011)
***** Final Paper Due Day of Scheduled Final ****