

The Planet is Fed. Why Aren't We Doing Something About It?**

Understanding Politicians (Dis)incentives to Protect The Environment

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I would like to use the CTL fellowship to explore and develop innovative and effective pedagogical activities for my new course Global Environmental Politics.

Contemporary societies face a seemingly insurmountable challenge: how to continue developing without destroying the planet. The signs are clear: if we continue with our current unsustainable model of economic development, the Earth will become inhabitable in a few decades. It is also clear what we need to do to avoid catastrophic climate change (e.g., cutting down Greenhouse Gas emissions, stopping deforestation, and water source contamination). Then, why aren't we doing it?

During the Fall 2021, I will be teaching a new class: Global Environmental Politics. This class has two main learning objectives: that students (i) understand the incentives politicians face when dealing with environmental problems, and (ii) reflect on what citizens can do, both individually and collectively, to force governments to protect the environment. I believe these pedagogical goals are crucial in developing a curriculum that addresses the Climate Emergency resolution that the faculty passed in December 2019. Trinity students have the opportunity of learning about the historical and ecological aspects of the current climate crisis in a handful of courses taught at other departments such as Environmental Sciences and History. My class will introduce them to the political causes and consequences of planetary degradation.

In order to accomplish the course's important learning objectives, I need to develop engaging and effective classroom activities and assignments that allow students to comprehend why stopping environmental depletion is so complicated politically. I would like students to understand environmental issues like deforestation, water contamination, and air pollution as the product of distributive struggles resulting in government (in)action. Students will analyze and compare different policy initiatives as well as instances of citizen mobilization to stop environmental degradation in their own communities and around the world. In each case, I would like them to identify the main stakeholders, their interests, and the resources and mechanisms of political influence available to each of these actors. A potential activity could be to divide students in groups for in-depth studies of successful and failed attempts to limit highly lucrative activities that harm the environment such as fracking. One group could analyze the case of New York State, which banned fracking in 2014, while another group would work on California

where similar initiatives have failed. Groups will present their analyses to the class and then we will all discuss why the ban was implemented in one state but not in the other. Who would have benefited from banning fracking in each case? Who would the ban have hurt? What political resources were available to each group? Why were environmentalists stronger in New York? A different assignment could be for students to design a policy to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions in Argentina, a developing country with nuclear capabilities and economically dependent on agriculture. Should the country revamp its efforts at taming deforestation (one of the highest in the world) which it is at odds with expanding its main economic activity? Should the country invest in increasing nuclear energy production, a cleaner but much riskier source of electricity? Should the government try to pass a carbon tax, which will be highly unpopular with the general public and the fossil fuel industry? Each group will present its policy proposal to the class. Then, we will all debate the different alternatives and vote to choose the best one, both in terms of its likelihood of being implemented and its impact on lowering GHG emissions.

In my Global Inequalities class, I have implemented similar assignments, where I ask students to devise a policy to lower poverty or inequality in their hometown. They seem to have enjoyed this type of activity. Asking students to persuade others their policy solution is better than the alternatives is something I have not done before. I believe the skills these proposed pedagogical activities seek to develop (e.g., pondering the tradeoffs inherent to specific policy choices, identifying actors' incentives to behave in a certain way, evaluating actors' strategic choices and their effectiveness) will serve students in understanding multiple political problems beyond environmental issues in other courses and in the real world.

Being a CTL fellow will allow me to discuss with colleagues how to design the proposed (or similar) activities in a way that both (a) maximizes their pedagogical value to students and (b) allows me to effectively and fairly assess students' performance in the class. I realize that I will be teaching this class in the fall semester, during the beginning of the fellowship, which may not leave much room to incorporate my colleagues' suggestions on how to improve the course this time around. However, I plan to teach this class for many years to come. The first time teaching a course is always an opportunity to experiment with what works and what does not. Being a CTL fellow will allow me to make a better use of this trial phase by first discussing potential assignments and then sharing with other fellows how the activities went, how students reacted and performed, and which aspects worked better. I could incorporate my colleagues' feedback on how to make classroom activities and assignments more engaging and effective for the next time I teach the class. Moreover, these suggestions will be something I could incorporate to the other courses I teach as well.

I am very excited to offer this new course on Environmental Politics. I believe it can make an important contribution to the college curricular effort in addressing the current climate crisis. I have no doubts that being a CTL fellow will help me design a better, more effective course. As a junior faculty member, I would greatly benefit from this opportunity for interdisciplinary pedagogical exchange.