

The Psychology of the Climate Crisis

Module Coordinator	Prof Clare Kelly, School of Psychology and School of Medicine
What will you learn from this Elective?	<p>Climate change is the biggest challenge facing our planet and its inhabitants. It has been directly caused by us. Yet, it is a challenge that humans are struggling to address in any meaningful way. This module leverages multidisciplinary perspectives on <i>human psychology</i> to answer three big-picture questions about the Climate Crisis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How did we get here?</i> What is it about human thought and behaviour and the structures and systems we have created that has led to the current crisis? • <i>What are the effects?</i> How is the Climate Crisis affecting human health, behaviour, and well-being, and how will it affect us in the future? In what way are these effects unevenly distributed across the world and what are the implications of this inequity? • <i>What can we do?</i> How we can leverage our understanding of human thought and behaviour to address the crisis at multiple levels of our society, using both conventional and more radical approaches? <p>In doing so, the module will expose students to a spectrum of new domains of knowledge, methods of enquiry, and epistemologies</p>
Student Workload	<p>125 hours in total.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 face-to-face lectures (45 mins) • 2 x 2hr Seminars (The I-frame and the S-frame; Discourses of Delay) • 2 x 2hr Workshops Health, climate, and tools for change; Radical Hope) • Directed Reading 45 hours • Group project: Public Communication: 25 hours • Individual assignment (Policy Brief): topic research, reading, and assignment completion: 30hrs
Assessment Components	<p>(1) Group Project: Tailoring and disseminating psychologically informed climate communications to the public via social media (<i>40% of final mark</i>) Students will work in groups of 3-4 (assigned) to compose <i>Tweet/X threads</i> OR Mastodon OR <i>Instagram posts</i> OR <i>TikTok videos</i> aimed at changing public understanding of and action on climate change. Each of two communications will be supported by a 350-word <u>individually prepared</u>, fully referenced summary of the evidence base for the message (50% of assignment mark).</p> <p>(2) Policy Brief (60% of final mark). Working alone, students will produce and submit a policy brief (<1500 words) that aims to provide an identified decision maker(s) (e.g., political group, business, public body, etc.) with a brief, neutral overview of the evidence on a specific climate-related issue and to outline solutions in the form of actionable recommendations for policy change.</p>

Indicative Reading List

Readings and links to other media (e.g. recorded talks, podcasts, etc.) for each session will be made available through blackboard. Example readings are:

- Aron AR (2022) [The Climate Crisis: Science, Impacts, Policy, Psychology, Justice, Social Movements](#).
- Van der Linden S, Maibach E, & Leiserowitz A. 2015. Improving public engagement with climate change: Five “best practice” insights from psychological science. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(6), 758-763.
- Ellis N & Cunsolo A. 2018. Hope and Mourning in the Anthropocene: Understanding Ecological Grief. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/hope-and-mourning-in-the-anthropocene-understanding-ecological-grief-88630>
- Heglar MA. 2018. The big lie we’re told about climate change is that it’s our own fault. *Vox*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/10/11/17963772/climate-change-global-warming-natural-disasters>

Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, students will be able to:

- Evaluate how human thought and behaviour, and our *inventions* - the structures and systems we have created - have led to the current crises;
- Explain how the climate crisis and biodiversity loss affect human health, behaviour, and well-being, and explain the need for climate justice and a just transition;
- Critically evaluate information and information sources from the perspective of human cognition and explain how human thought, emotion, and behaviour can be manipulated for better and for worse;
- Apply an understanding of human thought and behaviour in outward-facing communications aimed at changing public understanding and action on climate change;
- Apply an understanding of human thought and behaviour to make policy recommendations to effect climate-related behaviour change.