Sustainable Energy as a Social Problem
Spring 2016

Professor: Elisabeth Graffy
Meetings: Tues 6-9 PM – SFIS conference room (Interd B366E), 3/22, 4/5, 4/26
Contact information: egraffy@asu.edu
Office hours: Immediately before/after each in-person class or by appointment

**Aims:** This course is designed to (a) present a systematic introduction to key social theory, concepts and tools to situate the investigation of energy systems, change and discourse into a larger “social problem” framework, and (b) promote a structured, collaborative environment for students to explore social, cultural, and political dimensions of energy.

The class components are designed to help students develop their capacity to think critically about a complex and often messy issue that is evolving in real time -- an important capacity for academics and practicing professionals alike. We will probe what is unique about energy issues as well as how they intersect with or even share similar characteristics with other issues, like water and health. The skills developed in this course apply to a U.S. setting and are transferable to other geographical, political, and socio-cultural settings. As such, we are considering the matter of energy as a social problem with local to global dimensions.

**Overview:** Concerns about the social dimensions of energy systems are rapidly rising, but there is little consensus around theoretical or methodological (practice) conventions for investigating or managing them. Historically, energy issues have been regarded as the province of technical experts, with social dimensions characterized as barriers to development or diffusion, irrational influences that distort technologically feasible solutions, or targets for behavioral change research. This course challenges these and other simplistic assumptions.

The argument for recognizing social dimensions of energy as richer, more nuanced and even catalytic factors reflects an appreciation for energy as a system of multiple institutional dynamics, not only a system of technologies. Conceptualizing and working with energy as a social problem requires a strong grasp of policy and social deliberation processes as the meta (larger) context within which choices about sustainable energy systems occur. This raises questions, which we will explore throughout the semester, about the roles of expert and public actors, the meaning of system change or transition, risk and innovation, and critical intersections among concepts of sustainability, communication, ethics, public participation, and democracy in theory and practice.

**Learning Objectives (what you will get):**

During this course, you should develop mastery at a graduate level in several broad thematic areas that are required to engage with the ongoing challenge of creating sustainable energy future:

- understand policy processes as crucial social systems for supporting deliberation, negotiation, and collective decision-making about energy system futures;
- recognize and critique energy debates in a variety of formats such as political discourse, literature, technical assessments, film, and social media;
- integrate several disciplinary perspectives about governance of complex socio-technical systems that help explain issues of organizational change, participatory democracy, and tradeoffs between stability and transition;
• grapple with concepts of energy and sustainability in a manner that avoids both the fallacies of assuming technological determinism and that socio-political factors are primarily barriers to be overcome;
• actively apply course content to unpacking current issues in the news.

Class Requirements (what you will give):

Each week, we’ll read deeply about key concepts and work to engage them with what is happening in the world around us. The 7.5 week session hybrid format is fast-paced, intense and immersive. We will use that to our advantage, which involves everyone.

1. **Active weekly participation, in and out of class, is mandatory.** The brevity of the session and the hybrid format make timely, thoughtful participation and assignments critical, and grading takes that into account.
2. **Discussion board assignments should be posted no later than midnight each Sunday.** This gives everyone an opportunity to read and digest your ideas. You may, of course, post before Sunday.
4. **If you face extenuating circumstances that prevent class attendance or completion of any assignment,** email me immediately (egraffy@asu.edu). Late assignments may lose either partial or full credit, depending on the assignment.
5. **If you know in advance of a time conflict** during a week of class, plan ahead. Consider turning in your assignment early instead of asking to turn it in late. That way, you meet the deadline and can have your work contribute to class discussion even though you are gone. This is a unique flexibility of the hybrid format.

Some extra guidance on class components and how things will work:

**Time:** Please block out your schedule on in-person days to meet from 6-9 pm. I find that students tend to like that extra buffer with hybrids, so we will plan for it.

**Readings and materials:** This class does not use a textbook. Readings draw from a variety of books, newspapers, websites, magazines and journals and will be posted on BlackBoard. Due to the fluid nature of the issues, especially during an election year, I may periodically replace or add a reading from time to time. If that happens, I will send out an announcement. **Note:** You will need access to a Netflix account for this class.

**Class project:** This required experiential component allows you to experiment with ideas about participatory engagement. We will decide upon a project at the first in-person meeting. You will collaborate to plan the project on your own time, coordinating with each other and using me as a consultant as needed. You will develop a 1-page debrief to discuss (online and/or in person) the final week of class.

**Midterm:** The midterm is an in-class workshopping session (the 2nd in-person meeting) on a 2-5 page draft of your final paper. **You must post your draft by the Sunday prior to class and bring a laptop and your draft with you to class** for full credit.
Final paper: The final paper can be on any topic of your choice, as long as it relates to the class and is a 10-15 page, high-quality research paper. Develop presentations as though for a workshop or professional conference (approx. 20 min.).

Assignments and Grading Scheme

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly postings to class FB page</td>
<td>7 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly 1-page writing assignments</td>
<td>28 pts</td>
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<td>Overall weekly participation</td>
<td>20 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm (rough draft of your final paper)</td>
<td>10 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class project</td>
<td>15 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual final paper and presentation</td>
<td>20 pts</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100 pts</strong></td>
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Final grades will be determined along the traditional point scale: A (100-91); B (90-81); C (80-71); D (70-61); E (60 and below).

Class Schedule

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<tr>
<th>MEETING DATE</th>
<th>MEETING LOCATION</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 1 – MARCH 15</td>
<td>discussion board</td>
<td>Overview of sustainable energy as a social problem</td>
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<td>Frames for knowledge and social meaning: <em>Credibility, truth and perspective</em></td>
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<td>WEEK 2 – MARCH 22</td>
<td>INT B (SFIS) 6-9 pm</td>
<td>Policy processes as systems of social choice: <em>Negotiating risk and brokering multiple rationalities</em></td>
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<td>WEEK 3 – MARCH 29</td>
<td>discussion board</td>
<td>Technology assessment as social narrative</td>
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<td>WEEK 4 – APRIL 5</td>
<td>INT B (SFIS) 6-9 pm</td>
<td>Midterm: Workshop final papers</td>
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<td>Final paper draft (2-5 pp) due</td>
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<td>WEEK 5 – APRIL 12</td>
<td>discussion board</td>
<td>Innovation in policy, markets, and law: <em>redefining the domain?</em></td>
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<td>WEEK 6 – APRIL 19</td>
<td>discussion board</td>
<td>Public engagement: <em>democratizing energy governance?</em></td>
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<td>WEEK 7 – APRIL 26</td>
<td>INT B (SFIS) 6-9 pm</td>
<td>Sustainable energy transitions and revolutions: <em>what does that mean?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class project debrief due</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEEK 7.5 – APRIL 28</td>
<td>discussion board</td>
<td>Submit Final Paper and PPT</td>
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**Week 1 -- Frames for knowledge and social meaning: Credibility, truth and perspective**

**To Read:**
- News clippings


**To Do:** Watch Gasland (*Gasland* (DVD - 2010) -- available on Netflix [http://www.netflix.com/WiMovie/70129353?strkid=1086429122_0_0&trkid=222336&movieid=70129353]). Using concepts and terminology from the readings, explain why this film is so influential?

**Week 2 – Policy as systems of social choice: Negotiating risk and brokering multiple rationalities**

**To Read:**
- News clippings


**To Do:** Investigate the energy positions of two current presidential candidates. Using the Althaus and Lockhart typologies, how would you characterize their energy positions?

**Week 3 – Technical assessment as social narrative**

**To Read:**
- News clippings


To Do/To Write: see BlackBoard

Week 4 – MIDTERM -- Workshop final paper drafts

Week 5 – Innovation in policy, markets, and law: redefining the domain?

To Read:
- News clippings

To Do/To Write: see BlackBoard

Week 6 – Public engagement: democratizing energy governance?

To Read:
- News clippings

**To Do/To Write**: see BlackBoard

**Week 7 -- Sustainable energy transitions and revolutions: what does that mean?**

**To Read:**
- News clippings


**To Do/To Write**: see BlackBoard

**Week 7.5 -- Final papers and presentations**