

Analysis of International Relations (PS 1599)

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Important links

This syllabus is a live document (ie, it can be updated). This version of the syllabus is from: 2023-01-30. Click [here](#) for the latest version.

This syllabus and other material for the class are available here: <https://michaelaklin.github.io/ps1599>.

Teaching assistant

The teaching assistant for this course is Chuang Chen (chen.chuang@pitt.edu). He will be in charge of helping students complete their *research report* (see “Assignments”).

Note that all questions regarding the substance of this course or its organization should be addressed to me instead (aklin@pitt.edu).

Course Objectives

This course has two objectives. First, it has a *substantive* objective. It is to help students understand the politics behind sustainable development and technology. Technology has been the driver of unprecedented improvements in welfare over the last 2-3 centuries. Yet technological innovation is also connected to many challenges that our societies face, such as climate change. Not addressing them properly creates major risks for our future welfare.

Second, this course has also an *analytical* objective. Students will be asked to do applied research with an eye on developing their problem-solving skills to address real issues.

Requirements

Assignments.

- Midterm: 30%. See schedule.
- Research report: 40%. Due on 21/4.

- Policy report: 30%. Due on 21/4.

More details about these assignments will be provided in class. The Research report and the Policy report must be submitted on Canvas.

Grade scale: 0 < 60: F, 60 < 64: D-, 64 < 67: D, 67 < 70: D+, 70 < 73: C-, 74 < 77: C, 77 < 80: C+, 80 < 84: B-, 84 < 87: B, 87 < 90: B+, 90 < 94: A-, 93 or more: A. "Y < X" means: "from Y up to, but not including X." Grades are not rounded up.

Late submissions are penalized by a loss of 2 percentage points per day. If you have issues that prevent you from submitting an assignment on time, then please let me know immediately. If you inform me *after* a deadline has passed, I will need to be provided justification (e.g. doctor's note) to cancel the late submission penalty.

Important note: you can discuss ideas with your fellow students, but you must do your assignments individually. For pedagogical reasons, it is essential that you must try to understand the material on your own.

Readings

There is no required textbook for this course. The readings are available online for free (via Pitt's library) or on the course's webpage if necessary.

Class Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. Check the course's homepage regularly.

PART I: WELFARE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Week 01, 01/09 and 01/11. Introduction + Welfare

What should the goal of our societies be?

Required reading:

- Chapter 1: Bueno de Mesquita E (2016). *Political Economy for Public Policy*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Suggested reading:

- Sen A (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Knopf.
- Easterlin RA (2003). "Explaining happiness." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100(19), 11176-11183.

Week 02, 01/16 and 01/18. Welfare and technology

In the long-term, welfare depends almost entirely on innovations and their deployment.

Note: no class on Monday (MLK Day).

Required reading:

- Jones C (2016). "Chapter 1 - The Facts of Economic Growth." In Taylor JB, Uhlig H (eds.), *Handbook of Macroeconomics*, volume 2, 3-69. Elsevier.

Suggested reading:

- Brynjolfsson E, McAfee A (2016). *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. W. W. Norton.

Week 03, 01/23 and 01/25. Technology and sustainability

Technology has also a darker side and creates considerable negative side effects.

Required reading:

- Solow RM (1991). "Sustainability: An Economist's Perspective." 18th J. Seward Johnson Lecture at Woods Hole.

Suggested reading:

- Kramer GJ, Haigh M (2009). "No quick switch to low-carbon energy." *Nature*, 462(7273), 568-569.
- Ostrom E (2009). "A general framework for analyzing sustainability of social-ecological systems." *Science*, 325(5939), 419-422.

- Tucker JA, Guess A, Barberá P, Vaccari C, Siegel A, Sanovich S, Stukal D, Nyhan B (2018). "Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature." Hewlett Foundation.

PART II: POLITICS AND TECHNOLOGY

Week 04, 01/30 and 02/01. Supply-side failures: innovations as public goods

New technology needs to be developed. But who wants to pay for research?

Required reading:

- Chapter 1: Foster R (1986). *Innovation*. Summit Books.
- Martin S, Scott JT (2000). "The nature of innovation market failure and the design of public support for private innovation." *Research Policy*, 29(4), 437-447.

Suggested reading:

- Chapter 4: Foster R (1986). *Innovation*. Summit Books.
- Christensen CM (2013). *The innovator's dilemma: when new technologies cause great firms to fail*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Week 05, 02/06 and 02/08. Supply-side failures: non-market competition

One reason for the challenges faced by new technologies is tough political competition from incumbents.

Required reading:

- Unruh GC (2000). "Understanding Carbon Lock-In." *Energy Policy*, 28(12), 817-830.
- Breetz H, Mildenberger M, Stokes L (2018). "The political logics of clean energy transitions." *Business and Politics*, 20(4), 492-522.

Suggested reading:

- Olson M (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Aklin M, Urpelainen J (2018). *Renewables: The Politics of a Global Energy Transition*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Stokes LC (2020). *Short circuiting policy: Interest groups and the battle over clean energy and climate policy in the American States*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Week 06, 02/13 and 02/15. Demand failure: individuals and households

Even if new technologies exist, we sometimes individually fail to ask for them. Why?

Required reading:

- Brown SA (2008). "Household technology adoption, use, and impacts: Past, present, and future." *Information Systems Frontiers*, 10(4), 397-402.

Suggested reading:

- Aklin M, Bayer P, Harish S, Urpelainen J (2018). “Economics of Household Technology Adoption in Developing Countries: Evidence from Solar Technology Adoption in Rural India.” *Energy Economics*, 72, 35-46.

Week 07, 02/20 and 02/22: Research workshop

Suggested reading:

- Tufte ER (2001). *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, 2nd edition. Graphic Press.

Week 08, 02/27 and 03/01: Research workshop

Week 09, 03/06 and 03/08: Spring break

Spring recess, no class.

Week 10, 03/13 and 03/15: Midterm

Monday: optional recitation.

Wednesday: midterm.

Week 11, 03/20 and 03/22. Policy workshop

Suggested reading:

- Chapter 1, 3: Peters BG (2016). *American Public Policy*. Sage.

Week 12, 03/27 and 03/29. Demand failures – social dynamics

There is a range of social dynamics that slow down the uptake of technologies.

Required reading:

- Wüstenhagen R, Wolsink M, Bürer MJ (2007). “Social Acceptance of Renewable Energy Innovation: An Introduction to the Concept.” *Energy Policy*, 35, 2683-2691.

Suggested reading:

- Chapter 10: Page SE (2018). *The model thinker: What you need to know to make data work for you*. Basic Books.
- Mildemberger M, Howe PD, Miljanich C (2019). “Households with solar installations are ideologically diverse and more politically active than their neighbours.” *Nature Energy*, 4(12), 1033-1039.

Week 13, 04/03 and 04/05. Demand failures – coordination problems

Societies are complicated. In some cases, coordination is needed to help push through new technologies. Is *industrial policy* the solution?

Required reading:

- Rapson DS, Muehlegger E (2021). “The economics of electric vehicles.” NBER Working Paper 29093.

Suggested reading:

- Schelling T (1960). *Strategy of Conflict*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Chapter 1: Nahm J (2021). *Collaborative Advantage: Forging Green Industries in the New Global Economy*. Oxford University Press.

PART III: BIG PICTURE

Week 14, 04/10 and 04/12. Labor markets

Sustainable technology will require dramatic changes in the ways in which our societies work.

Required reading:

- Notes by Aklin

Suggested reading:

- Rodrik D (2004). “Industrial policy for the twenty-first century.” CEPR Discussion Paper 4767.
- Brynjolfsson E, McAfee A (2016). *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. W. W. Norton.

Week 15, 04/17 and 04/19. Conclusion

What could a sustainable society look like?

Required reading:

- Geissdoerfer M, Savaget P, Bocken NM, Hultink EJ (2017). “The Circular Economy-A New Sustainability Paradigm?” *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 143, 757-768.

Suggested reading:

- Boulding KE (1966). “The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth.” In Jarrett H (ed.), *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy*.

Course policies

Pandemic/COVID

During this pandemic, it is extremely important that you abide by the public health regulations, the University of Pittsburgh's health standards and guidelines, and Pitt's Health Rules. These rules have been developed to protect the health and safety of all of us. Universal face covering is required in all classrooms and in every building on campus, without exceptions, regardless of vaccination status. This means you must wear a face covering that properly covers your nose and mouth when you are in the classroom. If you do not comply, you will be asked to leave class. It is your responsibility have the required face covering when entering a university building or classroom. For the most up-to-date information and guidance, please visit <https://coronavirus.pitt.edu> and check your Pitt email for updates before each class.

If you are required to isolate or quarantine, become sick, or are unable to come to class, contact me as soon as possible to discuss arrangements.

Disability Resource Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890, as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Academic Integrity Policy

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz, exam or paper will be imposed. (For the full Academic Integrity policy, go to www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html.)

E-mail Communication Policy

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to <http://accounts.pitt.edu>, log into your account, click on Edit Forwarding Addresses, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html.)

Diversity and Inclusion

The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital

status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, see: <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/about>. I ask that everyone in the class strive to help ensure that other members of this class can learn in a supportive and respectful environment. If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu. Reports can also be filed online: <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/civil-rights-title-ix-compliance/make-report>.