

Proposal for a Minor in Climate Change, Policy and Action Michael R. Edelstein, Convenor

Program Proposal

The Climate Crisis has emerged as perhaps the major global crisis affecting current and future life on earth. Every institution of higher education should be addressing this crisis. But an interdisciplinary institution such as Ramapo should be taking the lead in doing so.

Toward this end, a five-course minor in Climate Change, Policy and Action is proposed. Climate Change has emerged as an existential threat to the health and habitability of the earth, affecting humans and all life on our planet. The resulting Climate Crises can no longer be classified as a future threat---it is very much upon us. With only a decade to address the crisis, we must try to mitigate it to slow it down by reducing the release of greenhouse gasses. But adaptation and resilience are also demanded. There is a fast-emerging interdisciplinary field addressing these challenges that unites the sciences, social sciences and human services with business and diplomacy. And there is a need for graduates with a knowledge of both problem and response to fill emerging positions in business, government and the non-profit-sector and to become thought leaders regarding policy formation and public education. Ramapo College has engaged with this issue for decades, running major conferences and offering courses in multiple programs. It is well positioned to offer a minor program in Climate Change open to students in all majors that will rest on existing courses and primarily on existing sections and faculty.

Program Impact

The proposed minor will benefit Environmental Studies, Sustainability and Environmental Science by creating a larger audience for existing courses. It will place no additional burdens on any program. It may offer the additional benefit of uniting programs around a common interest.

Need and Student Opportunity

The proposed minor is both liberal arts and professional in nature. On one hand, a growing number of advanced degrees have emerged that relate to Climate Change---both at the masters and Ph.D. level. The Climate Crisis is a cross-cutting interdisciplinary topic that has implications for virtually every discipline and field. On the other, the climate crisis has emerged as a necessary applied issue for business, governments and communities to address. There will be a growing need for people with a climate background who have other linked areas of expertise to fill emergent niches in all fields.

Strategic Plan

The proposed minor is very much in line with the innovative, timely and unique curriculum desired under the Strategic Plan. It is a mission-central program in that it is interdisciplinary, global in focus and has experiential components.

Competing Programs

I am unaware of any similar programs within Ramapo’s region. We are uniquely prepared to offer such a program given our interdisciplinary blend of science, social science, policy and action.

Anticipated Enrollment

It is anticipated that the minor will attract a dozen students in its first 3 years and then build toward a maximum of forty students. The following analysis supports the feasibility of this projection, drawing on course enrollments, event attendance and student club development:

a. Attendance in the course ENST 240 Climate Change and Society:

Since its introduction in Fall 2019, the demand for the course has forced us to repeatedly discuss whether to add a second section.

Semester	Seats Available	Enrollment
Fall 2019	35	25
Spring 20	35	35
Fall 20	35	35
Spring 21	35	36
Fall 21	35	32 (as of 4 days of registration)

b. Enrollment was also strong in the First Year Seminar on the Youth Climate Movement

Semester	Seats Available	Enrollment
Fall 2019	25	25
Fall 2020	25	24

c. The Environmental Program, Institute for Environmental Studies and Ramapo Green ran a number of well attended programs on the Climate Crisis where the preponderance of attendees were students. Here are approximate attendance figures for several example events:

Date:	Event:	Attendance:
September 20, 2019	Climate Strike Event	50
November 20, 2019	Confronting the Climate Crisis: Ramapo’s Reckoning with Reality	300
April 7, 2020	Solving Climate by 2030	150
September 18, 2020	Climate Strike Event	75
October 21, 2020	Reaching the Turning Point: The Youth Climate Movement and the November Election	220
April 7, 2021	Solving Climate by 2030	170

- d. A new Chapter of the youth climate organization Sunrise Movement was proposed by Ramapo students in Fall 2020 and received their approval as an organization on April 7. There are already 27 student members.

Additional Resources

As noted, the program relies on existing courses and requires no additional resources to offer with the exception of two topics sections (ENST 390) to be added over time (Topics sections are added periodically in any case). No formal program partnerships are required for this major. Only two courses are listed from outside the Environmental Studies major, and these are not required. Potentially involved or interested faculty have been involved in discussion on the minor and support this application.

Revised as of 4/15/21:

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MINOR –5 COURSES

Two Foundation Courses:

ENST 209 World Sustainability

ENST 240 Climate Change and Society

One Policy course: (select one from the following) *

ENST 317 Environmental Policy and Regulation

ENST 326 Environmental Law

ENST 390 Environmental Activism

LAWS 328 Comparative Environmental Law**

One course in Science/Mitigation/Adaption

ENSC 305 Climate Change Science**

ENST 390 Topics: Climate Adaptation and Resilience

ENST 390 Topics: The Renewable Energy Transition

ENST: 338 Sustainable Communities

Psych 343: Environmental Psychology**

One Climate Crisis related field experience

Either ENST 331 Environmental Internship, or a comparable COOP, study abroad course or independent study offering a field experience related to the Climate Crisis approved by the convener. As part of this experiential package, students are encouraged to complete the Climate Reality Leadership Training program in conjunction with the minor.*

*Note: Because of the limit on double counting between a major and minor, Environmental Studies students will take a second field experience and two other courses not counted for the major itself.

**Upon request to the instructor, prerequisites will be waived for minors in this program.