

Climate Change (C003320)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 4.0

Study time 120 h

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2024-2025

A (semester 2)

English

Gent

seminar

lecture

group work

Lecturers in academic year 2024-2025

Verschuren, Dirk

WE11

lecturer-in-charge

Boeckx, Pascal

LA24

co-lecturer

Bonte, Dries

WE11

co-lecturer

Miralles, Diego

LA20

co-lecturer

Neukermans, Griet

WE11

co-lecturer

Steppe, Kathy

LA21

co-lecturer

Verbeeck, Hans

LA20

co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2024-2025

[Master of Science in Teaching in Science and Technology\(main subject Biology\)](#)

4

A

[Master of Science in Sustainable Land Management\(main subject Land and Groundwater Management\)](#)

4

A

[International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change \(main subject Physical Land Resources and Global Change\)](#)

4

A

[International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change \(main subject Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change\)](#)

4

A

[Master of Science in Sustainable Land Management\(main subject Urban Land Engineering \)](#)

4

A

[Master of Science in Biology](#)

4

A

[Exchange Programme in Biology \(master's level\)](#)

4

A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Climate change, greenhouse effect, CO₂ emissions, biosphere impacts, carbon cycle, climate prognosis, IPCC, adaptation, mitigation, sustainable development

Position of the course

This course provides a broad multi-disciplinary overview of the topic of anthropogenic climate change with emphasis on the processes of climate change itself and of its impacts on carbon cycling, the abiotic environment, the biosphere and the human environment. Biosphere impacts are treated at all levels of plant/animal biology: physiology, populations and species, structure and functioning of ecosystems. Attention is given to the various methods of climate-change research and the associated uncertainty in climate-change prognoses, and to strategies of adaptation and mitigation. By being presented with the complete picture in a single course, students learn to judge the relative importance of different processes at different spatial and temporal scales, develop appreciation for the different perspectives of different stakeholder groups, and become more comfortable with the uncertainties linked to particular positions.

Contents

1 Aspects of general climatology relevant to climate change; temperature structure of the

- atmosphere, atmospheric circulation, diverse feedbacks.
- 2 The greenhouse effect: physics and chemistry of natural and anthropogenic greenhouse gases, and their historical trends.
 - 3 The carbon cycle: main carbon reservoirs and fluxes, fossil fuels and energy, human perturbation of the carbon cycle.
 - 4 Air pollution and global dimming.
 - 5 Predicting 21st-century climate: long-term historical perspective, forcing attribution, IPCC prognoses and emission scenarios, sources of uncertainty in long-term climate prediction.
 - 6 Impacts of global warming on the cryosphere.
 - 7 Hydrological processes relevant to climate change, and impacts of global warming on the hydrological cycle.
 - 8 Plant ecophysiology and climate-change effects on C3/C4 competition.
 - 9 Role of ecosystems/vegetation in the global carbon cycle.
 - 10 Earth system models (IPCC-GCMs) and land-surface models (DGVMs), with application to climate change impacts on tropical rainforests.
 - 11 Impacts of global warming on the biosphere: species distributions, phenology, habitat loss, exotic/invasive species and diseases, evolutionary aspects.
 - 12 Climate change and biological conservation.
 - 13 Sources, sinks, anthropogenic emissions and mitigation of non-CO₂ greenhouse gases: N₂O, CH₄, O₃.
 - 14 Impacts on the human environment with emphasis on global food security, differentiating between western and developing countries. Practical exercises involving computer exercises exploring the effects of various climate-change related scenarios; and student presentations and discussion on topics of current or past controversy in climate change.

Initial competences

Having successfully completed an introductory course in ecology, e.g. Ba1 Ecologie in Biology or equivalent; or having acquired the relevant knowledge by personal study or other means.

Final competences

- 1 Demonstrate advanced knowledge of the causes of recent (natural and anthropogenic) climate change in relation to long-term climate history, of all relevant aspects of the carbon cycle, and of the anthropogenic climate change on the abiotic earth environment, the biosphere (physiology, species distributions, ecosystems) and the human environment.
- 2 Demonstrate basic knowledge of the potential and limitations of diverse observational and paleoclimatological methods of climate study, and of the climate models used in prognoses over the 21st century.
- 3 Display a science-based critical attitude towards new data, interpretations, theories and models of anthropogenic climate change and the historical interaction between humans, climate and nature.
- 4 Demonstrate ability to process, combine, evaluate, and synthesize in a structured manner complex information from the primary scientific literature of multiple relevant sub-disciplines.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Group work, Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

Lectures: recorded PPT presentations with text and figures, made available beforehand on Ufora

Guided practical exercises: one afternoon of interactive computer class on climate-change modeling, with report

Teamwork: group assignments involving a literature study on topics of debate in the field of global change, synthesized in a PPT presentation.

Independent work: homework around myths on climate change, with written report.

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: 'Global warming: understanding the forecast' (2nd edition, 2012)
Indicative price: € 90
Optional: yes
Language : English
Author : David Archer
ISBN : 978-0-47094-341-0
Number of Pages : 203
Alternative : 'Global warming: understanding the forecast' (1st edition, 2007)
Oldest Usable Edition : 'Global warming: understanding the forecast' (1st edition, 2007)
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : regularly
Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : one-time
Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : occasionally

Type: Slides

Name: 15 Powerpoint presentations for 16 lectures
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Number of Slides : 496
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No

References

David Archer (2007). 'Global warming: understanding the forecast' (Blackwell)
IPCC (2021). 6th Assessment Report on Climate Change: summary for policymakers.

Course content-related study coaching

Interactive discussion on homework and group assignment. Personal contact with teaching staff by appointment.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Oral assessment, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

PE: On-campus exam with questions testing both knowledge of and insight in the material presented in lectures and in the presentations of fellow students. Examination in the 2nd examination period is possible.

On-line exam is exceptionally possible with valid reason.

NPE: Evaluation of the group presentation and discussion abilities of the student regarding both the personal and group assignments. Students who miss the non-periodical evaluation cannot pass for the course. A 2nd chance for evaluation is offered in modified form between the 1st and 2nd examination period.

Calculation of the examination mark

Period-bound theory exam 60%. Not period-bound evaluations (report and discussion homework, report climate-modelling exercises; presentation and discussion of group assignment) 40%

Facilities for Working Students

1. Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance
2. Possible rescheduling of the exam to a different time in the same academic year