

Psychology and/of Climate Change

ENVI/PSYC 273 // Fall 2026

Tuesday & Thursday 9:40 – 11:10 pm // OLRI 243

Prof. Christie Manning

Contact: cmanning@macalester.edu // campus phone: 651-696-6164

Office hours in OLRI 247: Thursdays 3:15-4:00 (open office hour – just stop by), or

Wednesdays 1:30-3:00 ([make an appointment here](#)). Other times available, too!

Course preceptor: Kyle Riffner

Contact: Email or text, (email preferred) kriffner@macalester.edu

(224) 864-0789

Office hours: By appointment

Course description

Why are we (individually and collectively) continuing to accept “business as usual” fossil fuel use, despite the accelerating, global threat it poses to human well-being? Climate change is here and now, and quickly getting worse, and though more than half of people polled across 10 countries are “alarmed” about global warming. Yet, few are taking significant personal action in response, and only a small minority are involved in civic or collective action to address the issue.

This course will explore psychological theories and studies that help explain why people respond to the climate crisis in the ways they do, and what psychological research tells us about how to shift that response.

Course content goals

This class will survey current psychological research relevant to the issue of global climate change. Goals include:

- Encounter psychological perspectives on climate change
- Examine original research through journal articles and book chapters
- Connect psychological research to the real world through in-class activities, conversations with visitors, and a small group project
- Enhance analytical skills through critical reading and discussion

Goals of the First Year Course Experience

As a First Year Course (FYC), this course also aims to:

- Introduce you to critical inquiry at the intersection of Environmental Studies and Psychology
- Familiarize you to library research skills
- Hone your writing skills through writing instruction, feedback from me, our preceptor, and your peers, and opportunities to revise your work
- Introduce you to Macalester’s academic expectations
- Provide you with an advisor who can support you through your first year and beyond

Meet your Professor: Dr. Christie Manning

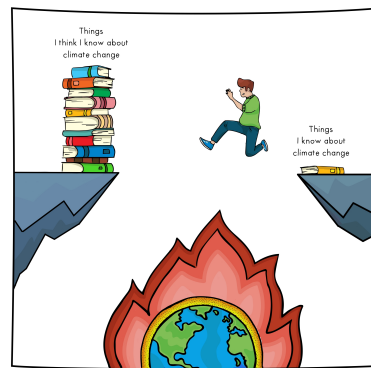
I have a PhD in cognitive and biological psychology and I have been teaching in the Environmental Studies Department since 2008. My research focuses on how people respond to climate change and climate injustice, and I am particularly interested in the psychological circumstances that motivate collective action. In my personal life, I am the parent to two young adults, Maeve and Clara (ages 21 and 26), and partner to Frank, who grew up in Germany. I speak decent/not great German. When not working, I love walking with Frank and our dog (Biene), listening to books on the Libby app, taking long-distance bike rides, putting in the garden, and exploring Minnesota state parks.

Note: **Please call me Christie! (she/her)**



Meet our Preceptor: Kyle Riffner

Hi! I'm Kyle, and I am so excited to be your FYC preceptor in the fall. I am a rising junior who is majoring in both neuroscience and environmental studies (with the psych emphasis), and I am originally from Illinois. On campus, I also work at the Kofi Annan Institute for Global Citizenship, I am a tutor at the Writing Center, and last semester I joined MacShare, a student organization focusing on food access.



Overconfidence in lay climate change knowledge — associated with the need — www.environmentalpsychology.com — CC-BY-NC-ND

Our hopes/expectations of you

- Attend every class.
- Be present and engaged. Listen. Ask questions. Offer your perspective.
- Leave your technology in your backpack.
- Help us create a community in this classroom.
- Appreciate the diversity of perspectives available from your peers in this class.
- Come to our office hours to ask questions or just to chat.
- Communicate with us. Early. Often. Especially if you are struggling with any aspect of the course.
- Take advantage of the many academic resources available to all students at Macalester, such as the Writing Center, the Science and Quantitative Center, and Academic Coaching - all in the library.

Course Details

Grading philosophy and specifications grading

In most learning situations in life outside of school, you are not assigned a grade. In academic settings, they are the norm. Yet conventional grading structures are often counterproductive. They may lead students to think more about their grades than about their writing or learning, or to focus on impressing (or fooling) a teacher rather than engaging wholeheartedly with the material, or to fear failure and thus be reluctant to take risks with writing or ideas. Many decades of psychological research in education suggests that grades, in the way they are traditionally given/used, can actually harm learning.

Thus, I have chosen to use an alternative system called “Specifications Grading” (“specs” for short) to determine final grades for this class. I have chosen specs because I believe it will encourage engaged learning, reward good effort, and acknowledge excellent work, while also being flexible and responsive to the ups and downs of normal life in college.

How it works:

1. You have the flexibility to opt out of a certain number of assignments, depending on the final grade you would like to earn in the class.
2. Everything that normally receives a grade (class participation, reading responses, project reports, presentations, the final portfolio) will be evaluated on a credit/no credit basis. “Credit” is given for work that fulfills all of the specifications for an assignment according to a clear rubric (available on Moodle). The specifications for all assignments are set at B+ quality work. If you do B+ quality work or higher, you will get credit. You will not receive credit for work that does not earn at least a B+.
3. Every time you earn credit for a graded course component by meeting its specifications, you will earn a point in the appropriate category. Your final grade will be determined by how many points you earn across each of the five categories of the course. (See the table on the next page.)
4. I will give you feedback on the final versions of your formal written assignments (reflection papers) and if they are not B+ quality work, you may turn in a revision one week after you receive my feedback.

Flexibility tokens

Because lots of life happens during the semester, it isn’t always possible to complete everything we intend to do, or to complete things on the schedule we hoped to follow. Tokens are designed to recognize this reality and give you some additional flexibility to meet the goals you set for yourself for this class. Everyone in the class will begin the semester with five tokens. You can use these in whatever combination you’d like at the following ‘rates of exchange’.

- 1 token = A 48-hour extension on a reading response or reflection paper
- 2 tokens = 1 participation point; OR 1 week extension on a formal writing assignment; OR a missed draft; OR an EnviroThursday presentation
- 4 tokens = not being part of a group presentation (you must make me and your group members aware of this well in advance); OR an extension on the in-class presentation; OR a missed reading response

Please note: If you fall behind and don’t feel like you can catch up, even with the help of tokens, PLEASE talk to me. I will work with you to get back on track.

Assignments

Full assignment descriptions will be posted on Moodle.

- Attendance and participation in class (26 possible points)
- Reading responses (10 possible points)
- In-class quizzes (9 possible points – you can drop one quiz)
- Reflection papers (3 possible points)
- In-class presentation (3 possible points)
- Climate resilience proposal (4 possible points: draft, final, presentation, brief reflection)
- Attendance at 3 EnviroThursdays (3 possible points)
- Final paper (1 possible point)

Specs

Attendance & Participation	Reading Responses	In-class quizzes	Reflection papers	In-class presentation	Climate resilience proposal	EnviroThursdays	Final paper	Course grade
24	10	8	3	3 (written notes, presentation, reflection)	4 (draft, final, presentation, reflection)	3	2	A
23	10	7	3	3	4	3	1	A-
22	9	7	3	3	3	2	0	B+
21	9	6	2	2	3	2	0	B
20	8	6	2	2	2	1	0	B-
19	8	5	2	1	2	0	0	C+
18	7	5	2	1	2	0	0	C/C-
18	7	4	1	1	1	0	0	D



Attribution: Clay Bennett

Well-Being and Other Policies

Health and well-being

First and foremost, this class is a community of human beings. Let us be kind to ourselves and one another as we learn together and navigate this era of national and global political uncertainty, violence in many parts of the world, growing climate change impacts, AI, and many other issues outside of this class that may be on your mind. I strongly encourage you to make your well-being a priority. Reach out to me if you are struggling.

We are fortunate to have on our campus the [Laurie Hamre Center for Health and Wellness](#), where you can access many health and wellness services. I highly recommend visiting their website or visiting them in person (in the Leonard Center) to learn more about their resources.

Accommodations

I am committed to supporting all students in my class. If course design ever poses barriers to your ability to access or to demonstrate understanding of course content, please let me know. I will make reasonable academic accommodations in such cases. If you have a known disability and think that you may need formal accommodations, email disabilityresources@macalester.edu, call the office at 651-696-6275, or use their [online scheduler](#). Given these post(?) pandemic times, you may find yourself needing things that you normally would not. In those cases, please let me know what is going on. I may be able to make reasonable accommodations that will help.

Tutoring @ Mac

Macalester has many resources to support students academically. For example, the Writing Center (WC) provides one-on-one peer tutoring for writing at any stage of a project or paper; the Science and Quantitative Center (SciQ) supports group tutoring for many math, science, and econ courses; and Academic Coaching provides one-on-one support for study skills, time management, reading, note taking, and effective learning strategies. Seeking help is a sign of strength and maturity, and everyone is encouraged to take advantage of the (free) resources available. Check out the [Academic Success page](#) for more information about our services. Note that students who regularly use these resources are often the most academically successful.

Title IX

Macalester is committed to providing a safe and open learning and living environment for all students. If you (or someone you know) has experienced any form of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please know that you are not alone, and that help and support are available.

Please be aware that as a faculty member, I am a **non-confidential resource**. This means that if I become aware of incidents or allegations of sexual misconduct, I am **required** to report the matter to the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Title IX Coordinators. This College policy is intended to ensure that you receive the resources and support you may need. For more information, [please see the Title IX page of the Macalester website](#).

If you would like to speak with a **confidential resource** (someone who is not required to share what they are told with the Title IX Coordinator), the following people and organizations are available to you on or off campus:

- [Macalester College Center for Religious and Spiritual Life](#) All of the chaplains in the CRSL are confidential resources.
- [Macalester College Hamre Center for Health & Wellness](#) counselors, physicians, registered nurses, or nurse practitioners, 651-696-6275.
- [SOS Sexual Violence Services of Ramsey County](#) Trained advocates offer information, referrals, legal advocacy, support groups, one-on-one counseling off-campus, and a 24-hour confidential hotline at 651-266-1000.

Academic integrity

Academic dishonesty erodes the basic foundations of higher education: exchange, debate, and the thoughtful consideration of what we know, how we know it, and why it matters. It has no place at Macalester or in this course. Find Macalester's academic integrity policy [here](#). For help avoiding plagiarism, visit the Library's Academic Integrity materials [here](#). Note that using AI without acknowledging it may be considered plagiarism.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy

AI tools (such as Gemini, Claude, or ChatGPT) are now prevalent, and we need reasonable guidelines for their use in our classroom. In this course, I am willing to allow *some* use of AI *as long as you are transparent and acknowledge your use*. I have many concerns with AI (environmental, labor, intellectual property, social justice, etc.) with AI. Specific to this class: the assignments are meant to challenge you to think critically and creatively, and be innovative problem solvers. Using AI circumvents these goals.

At the same time, I recognize that AI tools can be helpful to start the idea generation process, or to overcome the paralysis of the blank page. If you use AI in this class (or in any other context), you should be aware not only that use of AI causes tangible harm, but also that the material generated may be inaccurate, incomplete, or problematic in other ways.

If you choose to use AI in this class, here are my minimum expectations. We will talk in class about more specific guidelines for each assignment.

- *Always* provide an acknowledgement that you have used AI: Include a statement at the end of any assignment (including reading responses) for which you used AI, and state how you used it (e.g., to help you get started, to rephrase an idea, to generate full sentences, to generate full paragraphs, etc.)
- Double check any response you get from AI. It is often inaccurate. If it gives you a number or fact, assume it is wrong unless you either know the answer or can verify with another source.
- If you provide minimum effort prompts, you will get low quality results. You will need to refine your prompts in order to get good outcomes. This will take work.
- Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Don't use it if it isn't appropriate for the case or circumstance, or if it will detract from your learning.

Religious Observance

Students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this semester. If you have a religious observance or practice that conflicts with your participation in the course, please contact me ASAP to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Schedule

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Readings	Notes and deadlines
0		9/1/2026	Welcome		
1	1T	9/8/2026	Course introduction		
	2R	9/10/2026	What is climate change?	RR#1	
2	3T	9/15/2026	Psychological framework	RR#2	Paper 1 assigned
	4R	9/17/2026	Conversation day: Macalester College and the liberal arts framework		Health & wellness visit
3	5T	9/22/2026	Seeing: Scientific evidence and personal experience	RR#3	
	6R	9/24/2026	Library visit		
4	7T	9/29/2026	Interpreting: Social influence	RR#4	
	8R	10/1/2026	Writing workshop		Paper 1 draft
5	9T	10/6/2026	Politicization	RR#5	
	10R	10/8/2026	Misinformation	RR#6	
6	11T	10/13/2026	Climate jeopardy		Paper 1 final, paper 2 assigned
		10/15/2026	No class - fall break		
7	12T	10/20/2026	Feeling responsible: Climate justice	RR#7	
	13R	10/22/2026	Conversation day		
8	14T	10/27/2026	Storytelling workshop I		Paper 2 final, paper 3 assigned
	15R	10/29/2026	Knowing what to do: Solutions	RR#8	
9	16T	11/3/2026	Conversation day: Planning next semester and beyond		Group project assigned
	17R	11/5/2026	Storytelling workshop II		Paper 3 final (with revision options)
10	18T	11/10/2026	In-class project work day		
	19R	11/12/2026	Career exploration		
	21R	11/19/2026	TBD		
12	22T	11/24/2026	Choosing to act	RR#9	
	-	11/26/2026	T-Day break		
13	23T	12/1/2026	Collective action	RR#10	Final paper assigned
	24R	12/3/2026	TBD		
14	25T	12/8/2026	Project presentations		Group project due
	26R	12/10/2026	Closing discussion		
Finals		12/16/2026			Final paper due at 10:30 a.m.