

Climate Change Education Within the School of Public Policy

Namita Gupta, Shruti Ratnaparkhi

See this project presented by the researchers: <https://youtu.be/w-axlffDYiU?t=559>

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Research Question

As the effects of climate change take hold along social and economic dimensions, the need for seasoned public policy practitioners who can address these issues from an interdisciplinary lens is becoming especially pronounced. As students within the School of Public Policy (SPP), the authors undertook a research project aimed at gauging public policy students' interest in gaining a deeper understanding of climate change issues and whether opportunities provided by the school meet student demand for climate change education.

Methodology

The research relied on a holistic approach to understand the climate change education landscape within the SPP, the LSE overall, and peer schools based globally. Research methods employed consisted of secondary research and literature review of course curriculum and initiatives aimed at imparting climate education at peer schools and at LSE itself. The authors also conducted a student survey, as well as interviews with academics and professionals in the field of climate education.

Student Survey: The survey aimed to gauge student demand for climate change education within the SPP and was shared with all students of the 2-year Master of Public Administration (MPA) as well as the 1-year Master of Public Policy (MPP). The survey was shared via SPP correspondence and informal messaging platforms. In total, the survey received 32 responses, with 26 respondents belonging to the MPA and 6 pursuing the MPP. Of the MPA respondents, 22 were in their first year while 4 were completing their second year.

Questions focused on students' previous experiences working on climate change issues, current interest in receiving additional education, and opinions on opportunities provided by the SPP. Questions also sought to gauge how important students deemed climate education and the best methods through which they would prefer to be taught.

Interviews: We conducted interviews with SPP faculty, researchers in LSE initiatives focusing on climate change education, and external academics involved in building climate change-oriented curricula.

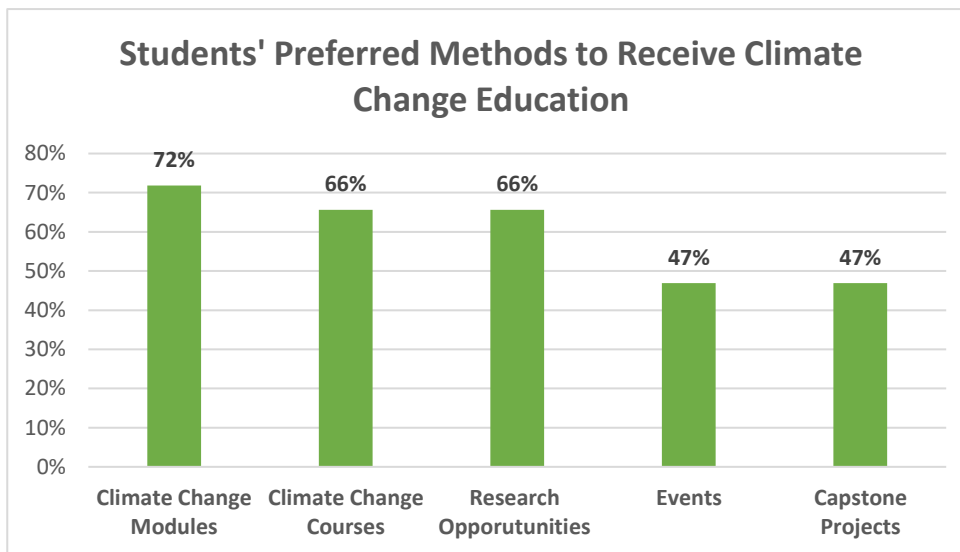
Key Findings

Student Experience: 44% of students reported having previously worked on climate change issues. Specific fields which students previously worked in included ESG and sustainable finance, SDG promotion, renewable energy policy, and carbon emissions reduction.

Interest in Climate Change Education: When asked to what extent they agreed with the statement “It is important for the SPP to have a climate change lens within its curriculum”, 69% of respondents strongly agreed, indicating that students think discussing climate change in SPP courses is imperative. In addition, 87% of respondents expressed an interest in learning more about climate change issues.

SPP Opportunities: However, when examining the SPP’s offerings, the results indicate a gap between student demand and existing opportunities to engage with climate change issues. At the time of the survey, 12% of respondents had taken the SPP’s climate change course titled “The Practice of Effective Climate Change Policy.” Among respondents that had not taken the course, only 14% planned to take it in the future. When asked whether SPP provides sufficient opportunities for students to learn about climate change, 78% of students surveyed responded in the negative.

Best Methods: As illustrated in **Figure 1** below, survey respondents would like to see a climate change lens incorporated through several different ways. Most respondents indicated that they would prefer to learn in a more formal academic setting through coursework and research opportunities rather than external engagements such as events or capstone projects.



Overall the results indicate that students have an interest in examining policy issues through a climate change lens; however, they are generally dissatisfied with the current offerings from the SPP and would like to see issues explored within academics.

Additional Secondary Research

Phelan U.S. Centre: The Phelan Centre at LSE is creating a ‘Syllabus Hub on Climate Change and Sustainability’ by compiling existing global literature and course reading lists on the subject, to act as a resource for academics to better deliver climate education.

Eden Centre: The Eden Centre project invites faculty members to open up their curriculum for review by students of their department. SPP students are currently undertaking this with the Academic Director for the core courses offered on the MPA programme.

Peer schools: SPP is part of a larger network of policy schools under the Global Public Policy Network. These schools all offer more comprehensive, specialized and inter-disciplinary courses on climate change. Closer to home, University College, London offers a similar portfolio of courses to its students, and also provides training to its faculty members for curriculum design with a climate sustainability lens.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings and insights from the interviews, we propose the following steps for the School of Public Policy to better meet the demand from students:

1. Curriculum Review

The SPP could formally invite professors to review and redesign their respective curricula. More importantly, the department could provide support and training to professors who are willing to review their curricula, by equipping them with the right tools to do so, in the form of:

- Encouraging professors to make use of the Phelan Centre repository of climate curricula as a reference point to evaluate their own curricula
- Encouraging professors to work with students to review their courses as part of the Eden Centre project
- Learning from GPPN school faculty on their approach to incorporating sustainability and facilitating appropriate knowledge transfer sessions with relevant counterparts from other schools

2. Research Opportunities

The SPP could consider establishing research opportunities for students to work directly with professors and support them in their ongoing research. This could be particularly implemented for the LSE Public Policy Research publication.

3. Climate Policy Specialism

The SPP could consider adding a climate policy specialism to the existing portfolio of specialisms. More importantly, it could work with other departments, such as the Department of Geography, to reserve some spaces for SPP students on their climate policy courses, and allow these cross-departmental courses to be eligible for the specialism. This would allow students to make their degree more targeted and launch into a climate career, which is becoming increasingly specialized and niche.

Limitations

The authors acknowledge that the study possibly suffers from the following limitations:

- Sample selection bias: The survey respondents are probably more interested in climate policy than other students, and could skew the results and findings.
- Limited interviews: Due to logistical constraints, the authors were unable to conduct more interviews with professors and SPP authorities to understand the constraints of redesigning curricula with a sustainability lens.

These limitations could be overcome by undertaking a more systematic and detailed approach with the support of the SPP authorities.