

STUDENT-LED CLIMATE EDUCATION

In many universities, climate education is demanded and led by the student population. In both the University of Oxford and the University of Glasgow, students have mobilised to harness the expertise within University departments to provide grassroots climate education to students and people outside of the University.

Although there has been increasing demand for climate education among students at higher education institutes, administrations have not always had the capacity or will to deliver comprehensive climate education to students regardless of their degree programmes. This case study reviews two student initiatives at the University of Oxford and the University of Glasgow to create climate courses that cover the most relevant science, policy challenges, and potential solutions.

For both sets of students, the main motivation behind establishing climate courses was to broaden the offering of climate education to beyond those who are directly studying climate change within their degree programmes. Creating an extracurricular course (credit-bearing, in the case of Glasgow) allowed students studying degrees such as English Literature, Medicine and History to learn about the climate crisis. In Oxford's case, the programme was designed and run by the Oxford Climate Society, a student group on campus, while Glasgow's programme was designed and run by two undergraduate students passionate about climate action.

Once the programmes had been designed, academics within the relevant departments were recruited to deliver 1–2-hour lectures. In Oxford's case, PhD students were also invited to participate in teaching. The courses ran over 8 to 10 weeks, two to three times a year.

At Oxford, the programme initially took a classroom-based approach with a wide range of students across disciplines. During Covid-19, the programme moved to a digital approach, with online lectures and a capstone exercise for which 5–6 students worked on a collaborative presentation. At Glasgow, the programme took a classroom-based approach with a mix of content delivery (one hour) and then discussion (one hour).

The main barriers faced in both cases were funding and academic capacity. Neither student initiative received any University funding, and in Oxford's case, ran for several years on goodwill from academics. Upon receiving corporate funding for the course, Oxford Climate Society was able to offer financial compensation to academics for their lectures. In addition, pulling

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

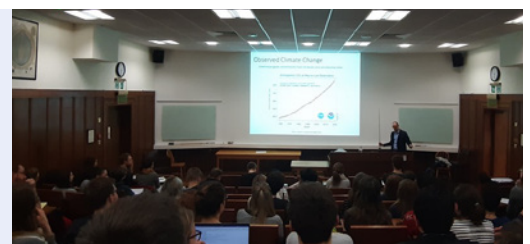
- **Offer** climate education to those with “non-relevant” degree programmes
- **Train** PhDs, or other junior researchers, to engage with non-specialists when explaining their research
- **Provide** institutional backing to student groups filling a gap in the provision of climate education

from the same pool of academics each time the course ran meant that burnout was high.

For both student groups, the main metrics of success were the number of students who went through the course. In Oxford's case, the course was opened to non-Oxford students during Covid-19 and the participants soared from 150 to 1500 participants within a few months, more than half of which were from the Global South. This demonstrated the importance of institutions looking outwards to share research and insights to the wider world in an accessible way.



At the University of Oxford climate programme, the creation of a capstone exercise, where students were randomly paired with 5–6 other participants to work on a group project, helped to reinforce the learnings in the classroom and sparked further collaboration between participants on the course.



The Oxford School of Climate Change, January 2020.
Attribution: Oxford Climate Society

Authors: Alexis McGivern, University of Oxford, Yvonne Chart, University of Oxford, Vidya Nanthakumar, University of Glasgow and Samuel Marot, University of Glasgow.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

Institution name	University of Oxford and University of Glasgow
Location	Oxford and Glasgow, UK
Number of students (total for institution)	Oxford: 24,000. Glasgow: 33,000
Number of staff (total for institution)	Oxford: 14,667 staff Glasgow: 5690 academic staff, 4000 administrative staff
Campus type	Oxford: split location throughout a small city Glasgow: three main campuses

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE CASE STUDY

University or department led:	Student-led, in both cases.
Number of staff engaged:	Oxford: approximately 8 staff members a term, over three years. Glasgow: approximately 10 staff members a term, over one year.
Number of students engaged:	Oxford: when in-person (pre-Covid-19), approx. 200 a year, exclusively students. When opened online, up to 2000 a year, half of which were non-University of Oxford affiliated. Glasgow: 50 students a year
Credit-bearing:	Oxford: not credit-bearing. Glasgow: credit-bearing.
Mandatory or optional:	Optional, in both cases.
External partners:	Oxford: Oxford Climate Society, the largest student group on-campus and Greencoat Capital, specialist manager focused on renewable energy infrastructure (corporate sponsor).
Engagement approach used:	Oxford: pre-Covid-19, a classroom-based approach. During Covid-19, moved to a digital approach, delivering lectures online and a group presentation exercise. Glasgow: classroom-based approach with a mix of content delivery (one hour) and then discussion (one hour).

Project team:

Oxford: Alexis McGivern and Yvonne Chart

Glasgow: Vidya Nanthakumar and Samuel Marot

HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER

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