



### 3. **EDUCATION: Academia unleashes blizzard of papers in climate debate** (05/04/2009)

**Christa Marshall, E&E reporter**

University of Houston law professor Victor Flatt is **warning** that potential changes to major climate legislation in the House threaten the "integrity" of parts of the bill.

A sociology professor at Columbia University writes in a new **paper** that Congress is unlikely to pass a cap on greenhouse gases unless the needs of coal-state members are addressed. Dana Fisher, the sociologist, argues that local governments already addressing climate change could face "significant challenges" if a national law is implemented.

And a new **report** from Indiana University policy professor Kenneth Richards assesses the strengths and weaknesses of three climate-change bills from the last Congress in a side-by-side comparison.

As the global warming debate heats up in Congress, professors from academic departments often ignored in the climate change conversation are weighing in with analyses, white papers and blogs. The input from the ivory tower comes as a slew of campuses are opening climate centers and offering new courses in subjects like carbon finance.

"Social sciences on the move include psychology, anthropology and history," said Barry Rabe, a public policy professor at the University of Michigan.

Rabe was one of the organizers of a recent **conference** on climate at the University of Virginia gathering experts from the fields of political science, public policy and management. Many of the attendees have published extensively on the topic, but about half are "new to this issue," Rabe said.

Some of these academic players are working at new climate institutes and programs sprinkled among campuses.

#### **New climate institutes and the yen to measure uncertainty**

In March, for example, Columbia University started a climate center bringing together economists, social scientists and business professors to advance knowledge about global warming. Similarly, Georgetown University Law Center recently established a climate resource center to focus exclusively on the state-federal relationship in greenhouse gas policy.

And like other schools, George Mason University has continued to churn out frequent papers about public opinion on the issue after launching a Center for Climate Change Communication in the fall of 2007.

Flatt, the University of Houston professor, is teaching one of the first courses nationally about carbon markets. A similar program will start up at the University of North Carolina School of Law next year with his assistance, he said.

Even social science disciplines that have a long history examining climate, like economics, have growing areas of exploration, said Robert Stavins, an economist at Harvard University.

"There's more attention to new aspects of cap-and-trade systems as we come closer to implementing something," he said.

One area that has become hot in the last several years is economic modeling of uncertainty, he said. Just this week, a **paper** highlighted the work of Martin Weitzman at Harvard University, who has argued that cost-benefit analyses of climate scenarios often fail to give enough weight to catastrophes that could skew calculations drastically.

For many in the social science community, though, the focus is as much about funding as it is about the plethora of new players, papers and positions.

Social scientists have been assessing the human dimensions of global climate change for decades, noted Howard Silver, executive director of the Consortium of Social Sciences Associations. He said there needs to be more understanding in policy circles about the importance of climate research in areas like behavioral psychology and political science.

"It's important to get more money" for social science, he said. "And get away from the fixation that technology will solve all the

problems."

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