



Tishman Environment
and Design Center



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Curriculum Disruption at AASHE



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in climate-change politics, Guenther also teaches courses in Renaissance literature at The New School, researches sustainability as Affiliated Faculty at TNS' Tishman Environment and Design Center, and directs [EndClimateSilence.org](https://endclimatesilence.org), a volunteer organization that helps the media link stories about climate-change impacts to climate change itself. Additionally, Guenther gives talks about climate change as a member of Al Gore's [Climate Reality Leadership Corps](https://climateresponse.org).



A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of presenting on behalf of the Tishman Center at the annual conference of the [Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education \(AASHE\)](https://aashe.org). This conference offers university sustainability staff, faculty, and students the opportunity to present their efforts to promote

sustainability in curriculum, operations, culture, and community engagement. I spoke about the [university-wide Curriculum Disruption on climate change](#) that the Tishman Center helped organize and implement at The New School in February, 2018. This week-long event, entitled Disrupting Climate Injustice, enabled the whole university to suspend "business as usual" in order to study climate change and its implications, particularly its unequal and devastating impacts on the most vulnerable and least responsible populations around the globe. I highlighted the interdisciplinarity of our work, noting that we grounded our practice in the [Principles of Environmental Justice](#), with the goal of raising awareness of the climate crisis and its equitable solutions, while creating new coalitions across the university and into the surrounding community. Beginning with the event's conception, I narrated how faculty at the Tishman Center, committed to the importance of working in solidarity and mutuality, reached out to the University community to understand what resources they would need to feel confident foregrounding lessons and projects about climate change in their week of Disruption. I described how we ultimately created resources for different levels of disruption,

interrogating business as usual on the most basic, physical level, by lowering thermostats and dimming lights on campus, all the way to the most layered, intellectual level, by offering faculty complete course modules on climate justice to import into their syllabi. The sustainability officers attending my presentation were particularly interested in the "Daily Disruptions" that we posted on the Tishman Center's social media. These Daily Disruptions served not only as elements of the university's public communications during the week, but also as tools that faculty outside the sustainability disciplines could use to spark student discussions. Every day during the Disruption, the Tishman Center posted an interrelated fact, quotation, and question on Facebook and Twitter. Over the course of the week these posts traced a historical arc from the beginning of colonialism in the 17th century up through the present and into the future. Thursday's Daily Disruption, for instance, highlighted the fact that only ten out of the world's 195 countries are responsible for two-thirds of global CO₂ emissions. And, foregrounding environmental justice, the Daily Disruption asked whether the nations most responsible for causing climate change have a responsibility to finance global mitigation and adaptation to

address it. After describing the Daily Disruptions, I presented the other ways the Tishman Center Affiliate Faculty shared our expertise with the larger university community, such as through the Facebook Live events we created by staging interdisciplinary conversations between faculty from departments as diverse as Chemistry and Design and Technology; or through the performance of Assistant Professor of Music Tanya Kalmanovitch's musical "Tar Sands Songbook," which explores the experiences of people living and working in Alberta Canada near the Athabasca Tar Sands. I especially highlighted the contribution of students in Disrupting Climate Injustice, like the students in the course "Collab: Climate Science and Design," who took over the lobby of the main Parsons School of Design building to showcase projects and games they developed to teach their peers about climate change and its social-justice impacts. Finally, I emphasized that the University also engaged with the New York City sustainability community, from the NYC Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency to the Lower East Side Ecology Center, to create events that would enable even the general public to participate in the Disruption and engage with the urgent problem of climate justice. After giving this presentation, I was approached by

many faculty members and sustainability officers from other schools who said they wished they could stage an analogous disruption at their school. It was clear that our social-justice approach to teaching and engaging on climate change really makes The New School stand out. Some other schools are still simply trying to integrate climate science into their sustainability curriculum because they operate in in states where many people still deny that climate change is real. But the way the Tishman Environment and Design Center created the Curriculum Disruption for The New School provides a model showing how climate justice can be foregrounded for an entire university and its surrounding community, demonstrating that institutions of higher education can indeed be allies in the fight for environmental equity and and a just climate future.



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