

COMMS 596: Environmental Media and Climate Change

“We are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth; how dare you!”

— Greta Thunberg, at UN Summit in New York, September 2019

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This independent study is a 6-credit graduate research course and focuses on the various perspectives where “media” and the “environment” intersect. This course will explore various theoretical frameworks, including media ecology, new materialism, environmental communication, eco-feminism, and media studies in contemporary environmental issues, communication, and media systems, etc. It also deals with how these perspectives from communication and media theories can affect strategic communication practices that aim to bolster long-term global environmental sustainability. Case studies will cover a diverse set of environmental topics, including climate change, environmental justice, the global industrial food system, public understandings of scientific risk, human-animal relations, and environmental media and journalism. Course materials will include interdisciplinary readings, drawn not only from communication and media studies but also from environmental studies, geography, sociology, the natural sciences, and other fields. Some journalistic materials, films, radio documentaries, and other multimedia materials will also be included.

The goal of this course is to access various conceptual frameworks for addressing questions about the relationship between the environment, culture, and communication. Therefore, this course will focus on addressing the following questions: How are environmental problems discussed and mediated within the public realm? How do these rhetorical and visual discourses structure our relationship to environmental crises? How can students create a communication strategy that frames environmental problems in a specific way in order to align the problem with appropriate solutions?

SCOPES OF LEARNING

- Identify the role of discourse, rhetoric and representation in shaping the way we think about the natural world
- Gain an understanding of the interdisciplinary fields of research that highlight media and the environment.
- Critically analyze the role of media and communication in shaping public attitudes, values and behaviors related to human interaction with the natural world.
- Explain the way representations of nature and the environment are politically, socially, and economically structured.
- Reflect upon the opportunities and obstacles that characterize advocacy campaigns and social movements that work to encourage environmental social change.
- Interpret how conflicting discourses about the environment depend upon different values and views of nature and the human place in nature.
- Synthesize critical theory in order to create an environmental communication strategy for an environmental cause.

RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS

- Formulate **FOUR** research questions with regard to different current environmental issues for writing research proposals that include an introduction, literature review, methodology, anticipated result, and a pilot study in the latest APA or MLA style.
- Build a website that focuses on one particular environmental issue to showcase the progress of personal development and research outcomes during the semester. For researchers to be “good” researchers, they need to be “good” communicators. Building websites has become a common tool for research beginners and experts to exhibit their achievements and reach a broad audience within and beyond the scholarly community.
- Publish your portfolio of research outcomes on the website. Maintaining a website for scholarly communication plays a significant role in individual research development to track and record personal progress and contribution to academia.
- Complete **ONE** full-fledged research paper as the final project based on one of your environmental communication research proposals or new topics (if you choose to start a new topic for your final project, a new proposal must be approved accordingly.). This research paper includes an abstract, an introduction, a section dedicated to reviewing relevant literature, the research question, an appropriate method of data collection, findings, an analysis as well as implications of the findings and bibliography in the latest APA or MLA style.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Research proposals: 20%, (5% for each)
- Final research project: 45%
- Final project presentation: 5%
- Website design and portfolio: 30%

COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Biweekly meeting with independent study director(s) is required while weekly meeting is recommended; Each meeting should be at least 30 minutes.
- For each meeting, student should be well-prepared for discussion.
- During each required meeting, the student should summaries and discusses the readings assigned during the previous week and report to independent study director(s) verbally.

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Week & Deadlines	Assignment
<i>Week 1 – week 2 (01/20)</i>	○ research proposal #1
<i>Week 3 – week 4 (02/03)</i>	○ research proposal #2 ○ website design proposal
<i>Week 5 – week 6 (02/17)</i>	○ research proposal #3 ○ final project proposal opens
<i>Week 7 – week 8 (03/02)</i>	○ research proposal #4 ○ website constructing
<i>Week 9 Spring break (03/14)</i>	○ final project proposal ends
<i>Week 10 – week 12 (03/30)</i>	○ final project production ○ IRB checklist
<i>Week 13 – week 14 (04/13)</i>	○ final project presentation ○ website workshop
<i>Week 15 – week 16 (04/27)</i>	○ final project and website revision
<i>Week 17 Final week (05/08)</i>	○ final project and website submission

TENTATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Please note that this reading list is subject to change as the semester progresses.)

- **TEXTBOOKS**

- Adam, B., Allan, S., & Carter, C. (Eds.). (2013). *Environmental risks and the media*. Routledge.
- Carson, R. (2002). *Silent spring*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Cox, R. (2013). *Environmental communication and the public sphere*. Sage.
- Gore, A. (2006). *An inconvenient truth: The planetary emergency of global warming and what we can do about it*. Rodale.
- Hansen, A. (2018). *Environment, media, and communication*. Routledge.
- Pinto, J., Gutsche Jr, R. E., & Prado, P. (Eds.). (2019). *Climate change, media & culture: Critical issues in global environmental communication*. Emerald Publishing Ltd
- Miller, N. (2017). *Environmental politics: interest groups, the media, and the making of policy*. CRC Press.
- Strate, L. (2017). *Media Ecology*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- Wallace-Wells, D. (2019). *The uninhabitable earth: Life after warming*. Tim Duggan Books.

- **READINGS**

Week 1: Environmental Sustainability Basics

- Agenda, P. (2018). United Nations Environment Programme. *Group, 11*, 11h15.
- Hansen, A. (2015). Promising directions for environmental communication research. *Environmental Communication, 9*(3), 384-391.
- Gamaleri, G. (2019). Media ecology, Neil Postman's legacy. *Church, Communication and Culture, 4*(2), 238-244.

Week 2: Environmental Communication and Environmental Ideology

- Hildebrand, J. M. (2018). Modal media: connecting media ecology and mobilities research. *Media, Culture & Society, 40*(3), 348-364.
- Hopke, J. E., & Hestres, L. E. (2018). Visualizing the Paris climate talks on Twitter: Media and climate stakeholder visual social media during COP21. *Social Media + Society*.

- Manuel Castells. (2008). The new public sphere: Global civil society, communication networks, and global governance. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 78-93.

Week 3: Pop Culture and Environmental Journalism

- Kitzberger, P. (2017). Against the current: The emergence of a media democratization policy agenda in Latin America. *Global Media and Communication*, 13(3), 229–248.
- Luthfa, S. (2019). Showcasing environmental justice movements from the South: Comparing the role of media in Bangladesh. *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 5(2), 290–328.

Week 4: Globalization and Glocal Environmental Risks

- Adger, W. N., Arnell, N. W., Black, R., Dercon, S., Geddes, A., & Thomas, D. S. (2015). Focus on environmental risks and migration: causes and consequences. *Environmental Research Letters*, 10(6), 060201.
- Ben Mathis-Lilley (February 2016), A comprehensive guide to the total outrage that is the flint water crisis, *Slate*.
- Nadler, A. (2019). Nature's economy and news ecology: Scrutinizing the news ecosystem metaphor. *Journalism Studies*, 20(6), 823-839.

Week 5: Environmental Campaigns and Social Movements

- David Roberts (August 2016), Is it useful to think of climate change as a “world war”?, *Vox*.
- Veltri, G. A., & Atanasova, D. (2017). Climate change on Twitter: Content, media ecology and information sharing behavior. *Public Understanding of Science*, 26(6), 721–737.
- Warrick, E., Preece, J., Kibutu, J., & Sihanya, B. (2016, November). Social media as an indigenized information world for environmental stewardship. In *Proceedings of the First African Conference on Human Computer Interaction* (pp. 126-137). ACM.

Week 6: The Environmental Justice Challenge

- Brentin Mock (July 2014), Are There Two Different Versions of Environmentalism, One “White,” One “Black”?, *Grist*.

- Kristin Moe. (2014). Why the smartphone became the lightsaber of the environmental justice movement. *Truthout*.
- Moore, E. E., & Lanthorn, K. R. (2017). Framing disaster: News media coverage of two native American environmental justice cases. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 41(3), 227–249.

Week 7: Corporate Environmentalism and Greenwashing

- Banerjee, S. B. (2017). Corporate environmentalism and the greening of strategic marketing: Implications for marketing theory and practice. In *Greener Marketing* (pp. 16-40). Routledge.
- Naomi Klein (2015). The climate crisis is a once-in-a-century chance to make our world more equitable. *Huffington Post*.
- Till Bruckner (2015). Naomi Klein’s own form of climate change denial: Blame Capitalism. *Huffington Post*.

Week 8: Energizing the World: Status Quo vs. Scaling Back vs. Scaling Up

- David Roberts (May 2016), Here's what it would take for the US to run on 100% renewable energy, *Vox*.
- International Renewable Energy Agency (2016). *Roadmap for a Renewable Future*.
- Lester, L. (2015). The changing ecology of environmental communication. *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication*, 232.

Week 9: Case Studies on Food Movements and the GMO Debate

- Brad Plumer (May 2016), 5 big takeaways from the most thorough review of GMOs yet, *Vox*.
- Garrett Broad (2016), “Chapter 2: Food Systems, Food Movements, Food Justice” In *More Than Just Food*.
- Tamar Haspel (January 2016), The surprising truth about the “food movement”, *The Washington Post*.

Week 10: From Informing to Collaborating, From the Local to the Global

- Colin Jerolmack (May 2016), Fighting climate change is hard when you live on a natural gas reserve, *Slate*.
- Listen: <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/fixing-the-world-bang-for-the-buck-edition-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/>
- McCosker, A. (2017). Social media work: reshaping organizational communications,

extracting digital value. *Media International Australia*, 163(1), 122–136.

Week 11: Disaster, Pandemic and Humanitarianism

- Eikenberry, A. M., & Mirabella, R. M. (2018). Extreme philanthropy: Philanthrocapitalism, effective altruism, and the discourse of neoliberalism. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(1), 43-47.
- Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler (2012). “Our Grandest Challenge” and “It’s Not as Bad as You Think” in *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*.

Week 12: Human-Animal Relations and Nonhuman Legal Considerations

- Interview with Elizabeth Kolbert (2014). Humans will eventually become extinct. *Mother Jones*.
- Natasha Scripture and Sylvia Earle (2014). “Should You Stop Eating Fish?” TED.

Week 13: Sustainable Futures

- Poell, T., & Van Dijck, J. (2015). Social media and activist communication. *Social Media and Activist Communication*. In *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, 527-537.
- Ralón, L. (2016). The Media ecology–Philosophy of technology disconnect: A matter of perception?. *Explorations in Media Ecology*, 15(2), 113-128.
- Treré, E., & Mattoni, A. (2016). Media ecologies and protest movements: main perspectives and key lessons. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(3), 290-306.