“The ability to have one’s symbols accepted by others is an important source of power. …

The critical question becomes, who controls the meaning of these key symbols, a battle with significant economic and social consequences. In this battle, language itself becomes a form of political action.”

—Michael Reich, *Toxic Politics*

“What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future.” —Rajendra Pachauri, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007

*Focus of this class:*

This class explores the communication and public forums that are used to address environmental controversies in the U.S. and other nations. Decisions to protect wilderness, health, or the global climate result not just from the “facts” or environmental sciences alone. What we choose to do about the environment often arises from the influence of language itself as well as the diverse voices in the public sphere—for example, citizens who speak at public hearings, “toxic tours” of polluted neighborhoods, corporate “clean coal” ads, social networking sites like 350.org (climate change), and popular films like *The Day After* or *An Inconvenient Truth.*

Media reports about loss of biodiversity, toxic pollution, and global warming also fuel public controversies and debate. For example, news reports about Arctic and Greenland’s melting glaciers, rising ocean levels, and spreading disease have stirred debate about ways to lessen catastrophic impacts of global climate change. By studying these controversies, you will become familiar in this class with:

- Ways that language (and images) influence our perceptions of “Nature”
- How individuals participate in environmental decisions, including a “Right-to-Know” and “Right to Comment”
- New uses of “collaboration” and consensus in resolving environmental conflicts
- News media “agenda setting” and “framing” of issues
- Advocacy campaigns by groups like the Sierra Club or Rainforest Action Network
- How what is an “acceptable risk” is socially constructed
- New grassroots movements for “environmental justice” and “climate justice”
- How global warming “skeptics” seek to discredit climate scientists’ communication
- Corporations’ use of “green marketing” and “Greenwashing”

*Required Readings:*

2. Online and Blackboard readings: URLs are listed on syllabus; other readings are at https://blackboard.unc.edu (BB) (see: “Course Documents”); additional URLs may be given weekly.
Class Schedule:

Aug. 25. Introduction to the class and each other/First assignments

(1) “Introduction: Speaking for and about the Environment,” *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, pp. 1-9 (abbreviated on syllabus as *ECPS*)

Conceptual Foundations

“One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives in a world of wounds.”
—Aldo Leopold, *Round River* (1953)

Aug. 27. “Mapping” the Landscape for Study: Nature, Communication, and the Public Sphere

(1) Chapter 1, *ECPS*
(3) Optional reading: “Beneficial or Biohazard? How the Media Frame Biosolids” (2006), at: http://pus.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/15/3/359

Sept. 1. Social/Symbolic Constructions of “Nature” and “Environment”

“What could they see but this hideous wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men?"
—William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1620)

(1) Chapter 2, pages 45-58, 58-66, *ECPS*

(2) Case Study: Is “wilderness” real? Does the social construction of nature mean it doesn’t exist?

Sept. 3. “Visual Rhetoric” and the Environment: *Climate Change and Polar Bears*

“I have seen firsthand the impacts of global warming in the Arctic, when the sea ice retreated so far offshore that a lone polar bear was stranded in open water, swimming for what little ice it could find in search of its ringed seal prey that were hundreds of miles away at the ice edge. That bear was not long for this world, and the image haunts me …”

--Melanie Duchin, Greenpeace Climate Campaigner

(1) Chapter 2, pp. 66-71, *ECPS*
(2) Case Study: *Polar Bears and Popular Media.* View:
• BBC *Planet Earth* clip: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0F-RmOswOs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0F-RmOswOs)
(4) First set of “Response Questions” distributed; due Sept. 22nd

**Citizen Voices and Public Forums**

“Make diligent efforts to involve the public …”
—National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 1506.6[a]

Sept. 8. Public Participation in Environmental Decisions, I: *The ‘Right-to-Know’*

(1) Cox, Chapter 3 (pp. 83-92), *ECPS*
(2) For recent illustration of the use of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), read:

(5) **Assignment:** Use the Toxic Release Inventory to check toxic chemicals in the community where you or your family lives; *be ready to report orally in class.* See: [www.scorecard.org](http://www.scorecard.org)

Sept. 10. **Quiz** (Shortened class)
Sept. 15. Public Participation, II: *Public Comment and Public Hearings*

1. Chapter 3 (pp. 92-99, and 104-110), *ECPS*
3. See assignment below….

Assignment: Check out the new the U.S. government’s new e-Rulemaking Program ([http://www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)), a Web site that provides one-stop, public access to information related to current and forthcoming regulations issued by federal agencies, such as the EPA, Department of Interior (National Parks, Mining and Minerals, etc.), Dept. of Agriculture (Forest Service), and more.

Experiment with the site, and examine several agencies and proposed rules. Then, identify one “proposed rule” in an agency and explore ways to comment online; be ready to describe your experience orally, in class.

Sept. 17. Public Participation, III: The right of “Standing” (in courts of law)

1. Chapter 3 (pp. 99-104), *ECPS*
2. Case study: *Is carbon dioxide (CO₂) an “air pollutant,” under the U.S. Clean Air Act? Who has the “standing” to ask this question?*
   - Supreme Court ruling on global warming in *Massachusetts versus Environmental Protection Agency* (April 2, 2007) and the clash over “standing” at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_v._Environmental_Protection_Agency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_v._Environmental_Protection_Agency)
   - (Optional): Text of the Supreme Court ruling in *Massachusetts vs. EPA*, at: [http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/06pdf/05-1120.pdf](http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/06pdf/05-1120.pdf)
Mediating Environmental Conflicts

“Coalitions of ranchers, environmentalists, county commissioners, loggers, skiers, and jeepers are popping up as often as wood ticks across the Western landscape.”

—High Country News (1996)

Sept. 22. Mediating Environmental Disputes: Stakeholders and the Search for Consensus

1. Ch. 4, ECPS
2. Case study: The Great Bear Rain Forest: Read background at:
   - For the history of the campaign to save the Great Bear Rain Forest, see: http://www.savethegreatbear.org
3. Critical responses to 1st set of “Responses Questions” due in class, via email

Sept. 24. No class

News Media Coverage of the Environment

“Global warming is no longer a new story... [It] no longer supplies new or dramatic headlines. The first collapse of an ice shelf is ‘big news,’ but by the third or fourth collapse, it becomes pretty regular and normal.... We get used to these occurrences.”

—Robert Brulle, Drexel University (2008)


1. Chapter 5, ECPS (pp. 151-167)
4. Second set of “Response Questions” distributed; due by Oct. 8th
Oct. 1. Do Media Make a Difference? New Media, “Agenda-Setting” and more …

(1) Chapter 5, ECPS (pp. 167-180)
(2) “U.S. Environmental NGOs … in Changing Media Landscape;,”
   www.yaleclimatemediaforum.org/2009/08/ngos-media-moles-or-moguls
(3) Optional: “News on the Web: Agenda Setting of Online News in Web Sites of major Newspaper, TV, and Online News Services,” at:
   www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/1/5/2/2/p15225_index.html

**Risk Communication:**

*Communicating Environmental Dangers*

“Those who control the discourse on risk will most likely control the political battles as well.”

—Plough and Krimsky (1987)


(1) Chapter 6 (pp. 189-208 only), ECPS
(2) Case study: Air pollution and children’s IQ; read:
   • “Kids' lower IQ scores linked to prenatal pollution,” *Washington Post*, 2009:
     www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/20/AR2009072000068.html

Oct. 8. Exposing Environmental and Health Dangers of Industrial Hog Farms in North Carolina

**GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. Steve Wing,** Professor of Epidemiology at UNC-CH

(1) Chapter 6 (pp. 208-211, 214-216), ECPS
(2) For the story of the hog industry harassment of Dr. Wing, read: “Manufacturing doubt: Journalists' roles and the construction of ignorance in a scientific controversy,” *Public Understanding of Science*, 2009, pp. 23-38, at: BB
(3) (Optional): Steve Wing, “Social Responsibility and Research Ethics in Community-Driven Studies of Industrialized Hog Production,” at:
(4) **Critical responses to 2nd set of “Response Questions” due in class or via email**

Oct. 13. Communicating the Risks of Climate Change (and Skeptics’ Denials)

(1) *The Great Global Warming Swindle* (film), screened in class
(2) Chapter 6, pp. 211-214, ECPS
(3) “Global Warning’s Six Americas” (Read *Executive Summary and Overview*, pp. 1-4 only), at: http://environment.yale.edu/uploads/SixAmericas2009.pdf
(4) Optional readings: Background on skeptics:
   • “How to Talk to a Climate Skeptic: Responses to the Most Common Skeptical Arguments on Global Warming,” *Grist.org*: www.grist.org/article/series/skeptics, and video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wj-lnC7MyxY

Oct. 15. **Midterm Exam** *(A study guide will be distributed in advance; bring blue books.)*

Oct. 20, 22 No class (fall break)
Environmental Advocacy Campaigns

Kayford Mountain, WV, has been almost entirely destroyed by mountaintop removal coal mining. The un-mined portion (upper left) belongs to longtime activist Larry Gibson, whose family has lived on Kayford for 200 years. Advocacy campaigns to stop mountaintop removal mining have gained much support in recent years.

Oct. 27. Environmental Advocacy Campaigns:

(1) Chapter 7 (pp. 225-243 only), ECPS
(2) Case studies: Check out the “campaigns” link at Rainforest Action Network (http://www.ran.org/) for descriptions of different types of campaigns (e.g., freedom from oil; old growth forests, etc.); see: http://ran.org/campaigns
(3) Third set of “Response Questions” distributed; due November 10th

Oct. 29. Case Study: Advocacy Campaigns to Stop Coal-Burning Power Plants:

(1) Chapter 7, pp. 243-248, ECPS
(2) Case study: The Sierra Club’s “Beyond Coal” Campaign
   • Check out the Sierra Club’s “Beyond Coal” site, and its links for “learn more,” news, blogs, and “take action,” at: www.sierraclub.org/coal/

Nov. 3. Crafting Messages: Recent Controversies over How to Frame “Global Warming”

(1) Chapter 7, pp. 248-255, ECPS
Environmental Justice and Climate Justice

“I heard words like ‘economic blackmail,’ ‘environmental racism.’ Somebody finally put words, names on what our community was experiencing.”
—Rose Marie Augustine (1993)

“As a movement, climate justice advocates are working from the grassroots up to create solutions to our climate and energy problems that ensure the right of all people to live … in safe, healthy, and clean environments.”
—Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative (2008)

Nov. 5. Environmental Racism and the Discourse of “Environmental Justice”

1. Chapter 8, pp. 263-288, ECPS
2. Case study: see the news story, photos, and video of Sheila Holt-Orsted, at:

Nov. 10. The Movement for “Climate Justice”: Human Rights and Global Warming

1. Chapter 8 (pp. 281-287), ECPS
2. For class discussion, check out some of the climate justice blogs and social networks, mobilizing for the upcoming Copenhagen conference on climate change and other actions:
   - “Mobilization for Climate Justice,” at: [http://www.actforclimatejustice.org](http://www.actforclimatejustice.org)
   - [www.350.org](http://www.350.org) (a social networking site for climate justice advocates)
   - “Join the Fight for Climate Justice,” at: [http://www.timeforclimatejustice.org](http://www.timeforclimatejustice.org)
3. Critical responses to 3rd set of “Response Questions” due in class or vial email
Science and Symbolic Legitimacy

“The scientific debate is closing but not yet closed. There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science.”
—Frank Luntz, political consultant (2002)

Nov. 12 Environmental Sciences and Attacks on the “Symbolic Legitimacy” of Science

(1) Chapter 9, pp. 299-315, ECPS
(2) For examples of political attacks on environmental scientists, see:
   • “A Bid to Chill Thinking,” Washington Post, July 22, 2005, at:
     www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/21/AR2005072102186.html
(3) Optional: “The Organization of Denial: Conservative Think Tanks and Environmental Skepticism,” Environmental Politics, June 2008, at:
     www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a793291693~db=all~order=page
(4) Fourth set of “Responses Questions” distributed; due December 1st

Nov. 17. “Early Warners”: The Public Role of Scientists in Alerting the Public

“Frustration among climate scientists and advocates runs high. They see the problem of global warming as urgent … Yet their strategies to raise the sense of urgency in the public and among policy-makers don’t seem to be working—at least not fast enough.”
--Moser & Dilling, Communicating Climate Change (2007)

(1) Chapter 9, pp. 316-324, ECPS
(2) “Separating Fact from Fiction on the Environment,” at:
     http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/separating_fact_fiction_environment
(3) (Optional): Read the Summary of: Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration’s Misuse of Science:
     • www.ucsusa.org/scientific_integrity/interference/scientific-integrity-in-policy-making-204.html

Nov. 19. No class

Corporate Discourses and Environmentalism

“Challenging existing environmental programs and priorities is not anti-environment... The free market provides the basis for a superior approach to environmental policy.”
—The Competitive Enterprise Institute (2008)

Nov. 24. Discourses of the “Free Market” and Corporate “Green Marketing” Campaigns

(1) Chapter 10 (pp. 331-348), ECPS
(2) “The Truth about Going Green,” MSNBC cable TV on “Green Washing,” at:
     http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21134540/vp/22931294#22931294
(3) Case study of industry campaigns for “clean coal”:
   • ABC News compilation of the coal industry’s “Clean Coal” advertisements on TV:
     http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=7391369
   • Coal PR firm memo boasts about manipulating Democrats and Republicans (2009):
Nov. 26. Thanksgiving holiday

Dec. 1. Corporate Advocacy Campaigns: “Clean Coal” or Greenwashing?

“The truth about clean coal has been absent from the mainstream conversation because … Big Coal [has spent] more than the Tobacco industry did … to make us believe the "Saudi Arabia of coal" - the United States - will lead a clean, prosperous, independent future.” —The Sunlight Foundation (2008)

(1) Chapter 10 (pp. 348-356), ECPS
(2) Case study: the corporate PR campaign for “Clean Coal”:

- Check out the video ad “I believe,” featured on CNN for “Clean Coal,” at: http://www.desmogblog.com/same-front-group-different-day
- For an independent look at this industry group “American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity,” featured in the above stories, see: www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=American_Coalition_for_Clean_Coal_Electricity

(3) Critical responses due to 4th set of “Responses Questions” in class or vial email

Dec. 3. Environmental Backlash: “SLAPP” Lawsuits against Industry’s Critics

(1) Chapter 10 (pp. 356-359)
(2) For a SLAPP suit by the cattle industry against Oprah Winfrey, see:

(3) For a review of defenses (and successful cases) against SLAPP suits, see:

- Landfill owners to pay $400,000 to woman who fought SLAPP,” online at: http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=4350
Conclusion

Dec. 8. Imagining a Different World: *Epideictic Rhetoric and the Future*

(1) “Epilogue” pp. 365-367, *ECPS*
(2) For class discussion: *Who (or what) inspires you? About the future of the Planet, your own life, or your community? Why does this inspire you? What exactly is it that is said, visually shown, or sung that does this inspiring?*

Dec. 17 (Thursday), 12:00 noon, **final exam**

Assignments and Grades:

We’ll use a balance of readings, films, and class discussion, along with an early quiz, critical responses to the readings, and mid-term and final exams to evaluate your engagement with ideas, principles, and theories in this course:

- **Class attendance and participation** (10%); (See below)
- **Quiz** (10%) on key terms, concepts, and theories early in class (September 10th)
- **Midterm exam** (25%): Oct. 15th
- **Critical responses to class readings** (30% total): You will get 4 sets of “Response Questions” based on the assigned readings for class. You respond to three (3) of these sets (for 10% each). Each set of questions will contain several specific questions. You will be asked to write a response to two of these questions, in a set (your choice). For each question that you choose, write no more than one double-spaced, typed page in response. Each set of Responses Questions will be assigned 2 weeks in advance. Again, you will choose three of these sets (choosing 2 questions within a set to respond to). Guidelines and a sample response will be provided in class. See the schedule for dates that responses are due.

- **Final exam** (25%) Dec. 17, 12:00 noon; comprehensive; bring blue books

**Grade scale:** 100-92 (A), 91-90 (A-), 89 (B+), 88-82 (B), 81-80 (B-), 79 (C+), 78-72 (C), 71-70 (C-), 69 (D+), 68-60 (D), 59-0 (F)

Please check your syllabus ahead of time—and during the semester—for all readings, quiz, and oral and written assignments, and midterm exam. Ordinarily, no “make-ups” will be given without a University or medical excuse. **UNC requires that permission to reschedule a final exam must be obtained from your Dean in advance.**
Attendance and Class Participation:

Regular attendance is expected, and roll will be kept. Occasionally, sickness, GRE or L-SAT exams, family emergencies, or a job interview may cause you to miss a class. It is a good idea to alert me ahead of time if you are able.

Class participation is not simply “showing up.” It’s also your active engagement in class discussions and/or raising questions about readings or lecture topics, as well as timely completion of short assignments and/or oral reports. Since the lectures seldom go over or repeat all of the background information from readings, you will need to stay current in these. The expectation is you’ll come to class having closely read this material, and ready to raise or respond to questions from the instructor or others about readings.

What questions arise for you from the readings or lectures? How can you contribute to the class by commenting or taking a position on a lecture, or on readings you consider controversial or simply wrong! Such participation and active engagement enables us to create a “public sphere” in the class itself.

IMPORTANT NOTE: After two discretionary or unexcused absences, one point will be deducted from your final course average for each absence.

You are responsible for all lecture notes and films on days that you are absent. I will try to post lecture outlines on Blackboard, but these are no substitute for the actual lectures or class discussion. You may be able to arrange with the professor to check out a film. Please identify a classmate from whom you can get notes on the days you miss.

Office hours: By appointment (Bingham Hall 308), in person or via email or phone

I enjoy meeting and talking with students in this course. If you have any questions or concerns about the class, or want to discuss topics from the class, please contact me: rcox1@email.unc.edu. (I have multiple accounts, so it’s possible that you may also receive a reply from me at robbiecox@mindspring.com.) If you are having difficulty with lectures or readings, it is best to discuss this with me early in the semester.

A Final Disclaimer:

I bring a particular point of view to my teaching, having worked in the U.S. environmental movement for the past 30 years, as well as my work as a communication scholar. (I've served as President of the national Sierra Club for a number of years, most recently in 2007-08, and I continue on its board of directors.) My views, therefore, have been influenced by my research but also by my experiences with the environmental movement and political process.

Although, I believe this background brings a very useful perspective for a class titled, “Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere,” my views are sometimes affected by this experience. So, I’ll try hard to create a climate in our classroom that respects differing viewpoints in our discussion. I encourage you, as well, to raise questions and challenge ideas or statements that suggest bias on my part. I believe robust debate about the issues and controversies that we’re studying can be a helpful and educational approach, so I welcome your active discussion in this class!