

**Communication 4350:
Environmental Communication
CRN: 14018
Quinn Hall, 202
Fall 2011**

General Information

Professor: Dr. Stacey Sowards
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Office Hours:

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00-1:00 pm, 4:30 – 5:30 pm
and by appointment

Course Overview

This course is designed to explore various environmental philosophies as they relate to communication contexts. We will examine how communication plays a role in environmental issues such as journalism and news reporting, sustainability, consumerism, politics, environmental organizations, and ecotourism. We will also examine how environmental theories and communication contexts play out in local, national, and international debates and contexts.

Course Goals

1. To build foundational knowledge in the area of environmental communication through an examination of:
 - a. contemporary theories and approaches to the study of environmental philosophy.
 - b. how communication plays a significant role in the framing and discussion of environmental problems and solutions.
2. To apply environmental theories to various environmental communication contexts.
3. To compare and contrast environmental theories in communication contexts.
4. To learn about self and others through an examination of privilege and culture as they relate to environmentalism.
5. To increase sensitivity toward others, communities, and the environment.
6. To emphasize lifelong learning and critical self-reflexivity on environmental practices and issues.

Departmental Learning Objectives and Outcomes

- *Objective 1:* To provide high quality instruction to produce students with excellent oral and written communication skills and excellent critical thinking skills
- *Objective 2:* To provide students with current knowledge of the discipline and its theories in interpersonal, organizational, and mediated contexts
- *Objective 3:* To provide students with relevant knowledge of the discipline for production, comprehension, analysis, and evaluation of selected message systems
- *Objective 6:* To provide students with awareness, knowledge, and application about ethics in multiple communication contexts

Learning Outcome: Competence in research methods used in communication contexts

Learning Outcome: Competence in understanding and applying communication theories in communication contexts

Learning Outcome: Competence in understanding and applying ethics in multiple communication contexts

Textbook and materials

1. Robert Cox. (2010). *Environmental communication and the public sphere*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN: 978-1-4129-7211-6
2. J. E. de Steiguer. (2006). *The origins of modern environmental thought*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press. ISBN: 978-0-8165-2461-7
3. Course reading packet, available on Blackboard.

Course Prerequisite

For undergraduates, it will be helpful if you have completed other upper level communication courses, especially COMM 3371: Communication Theory & Analysis, before enrolling in this course.

Special Needs

If you have a special or learning need, please see me right away for appropriate accommodation.

Classroom Expectations

Students are expected to be respectful and supportive of other students. Many different ideas will be welcomed and encouraged. We will discuss some controversial topics, and students must feel that they are comfortable to express their thoughts.

Attendance

Please be on time for class! It is distracting and disrespectful when students come in late and leave early. Your attendance and participation are vital for discussion and assignments. It is very difficult to get a satisfactory grade in this course if you frequently miss class. **Your participation grade will be based mostly on your attendance record, because if you are not in class, you cannot participate.** If you miss a class, **it is your responsibility** to get the notes and any additional information given out on the day you missed. Although I will be happy to meet with you to discuss any questions, I will not provide notes for you. Check Blackboard for details.

Use of Laptops, Cell Phones, and Other Technologies

Use of laptops, cell phones, ipods, and other technologies during class is not permitted, unless prior permission is granted. The necessity of classroom interaction in this course negates the usefulness of these technologies as note-taking devices. The use of these technologies during class can also prove distracting to your classmates, so please refrain from using them during class.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

There are several assignments in the course designed to meet the objectives of the course:

1. Reading questions. Each set of reading questions is designed to focus your reading of texts and to help build foundational knowledge of various readings. We will use the reading questions as a basis for class discussion of the readings. Limit your responses to two pages. You **should do question #1 for each reading selection, and #2-5 for the readings as a whole (rather than for each reading selection).**

For each reading assignment set (e.g., for each class meeting), answer the following questions:

1. What do you think are the important points in the essays?
2. Which arguments or points do you agree with or find persuasive? Why?
3. Which arguments or points do you disagree with or find unpersuasive? Why?
4. What questions do you have about the readings? What would you like to discuss further in class?
5. In what ways do you see these readings connecting to what you see in media, your everyday life, your workplace, or elsewhere? Give some examples.

Reading questions are due by 12:00 pm, on Tuesdays. Please submit reading questions on Blackboard (using the discussion board function). On Thursdays, you will respond to others' posts and questions posed for discussion and reflection.

Purpose:

The purpose of the reading questions is to help you learn materials better through encouraging students to read before class and through team discussions. These reading questions will help you to build foundational knowledge in communication (course goal #1) and to learn how to apply and use ideas from the readings (course goals #2 & #3). Research literature suggests that after reading, you should retain about 50% of the material. The team-based discussions will enable you to work with other students to maximize retention of material and how to apply and use those ideas. Research also indicates that team efforts outperform the top student as an individual by 12-15%, so your team projects and discussions should be of higher quality than if you were to do these activities alone.

2. Semester-long research project. This project will focus on an environmental issue/organization in the El Paso/southern New Mexico/Chihuahua area. Each team will choose an issue or organization (e.g., related to ecotourism in Chihuahua, the Otero Mesa drilling project, the Acequia Institute in southern Colorado, problems in nearby colonias, Franklin State Park, or Hueco Tanks, etc.). Each team will be comprised of 4-5 people. The team members will then work to: develop an understanding of the environmental issue/organization, analyze problems faced, discuss problems with local leaders, address how social change and activism might occur, and write a report about these issues. This project will culminate in a final paper that is approximately 20 pages in length and will include approximately 20 sources. Ideally, the quality of the final paper will be such that it can be submitted to a national or regional conference. All papers must conform to APA (5th ed.) guidelines.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to analyze and apply communication theory to a communication event (course goal #2), to better understand environmental issues as they relate to the El Paso community and for ourselves (course goal #4 & #5), to establish a critical framework from which to use to better understand human communication and to develop skills that can be used beyond the classroom, such as critical thinking and writing (course goal #6).

3. Class participation and group discussions. Much of this class will be based on discussion groups and vigorous participation in class. "Vigorous participation" means that you have completed the reading, thought about it, formulated opinions, and are prepared to engage in discussion with one another about the material. You must be ready to actively participate, but also actively listen. Your participation and group discussion grades will also be based on completion of in class activities that might include (but is not limited to) small group discussions, case studies, and one to two paragraph in-class essays. Your participation grade will be based on attendance, your active participation, and your discussion board responses. Your discussion grade will also be dependent on your online responses to your classmates' reading questions (at least two posts per week).

Purpose: The purpose of these activities is to engage each student in more active and significant learning rather than passive learning (e.g., lectures). The activities are designed to help you better understand each theory (course goal #1), compare and contrast theories (course goal #3), work well and discuss ideas with your team (course goal #4), apply and integrate theories into your everyday life (course goal #5), and to help you develop critical thinking skills for lifelong learning (course goal #6).

4. Service-Learning Project. There are two options to complete this assignment, both of which are designed to provide experience in real world organizational needs related to the study of environmental communication.

a. Center for Environmental Resources Management at the University of Texas at El Paso & Paso del Norte Watershed Council, City of Sunland Park, New Mexico:

“Background & Rationale: The Río Grande runs through Sunland Park, New Mexico. In centuries past, the area was the location of extensive wetlands and Native American settlements. The [proposed] study will investigate the feasibility of using constructed wetlands to polish the city’s treated wastewater while providing riparian habitat. Sunland Park is the southernmost city in Doña Ana County, New Mexico with a population of 15,000 and is approximately 11 square miles in area... The city’s key features are Mt. Cristo Rey, the Río Grande and Sunland Park horse racetrack and casino. The median household income is \$22,000 which is approximately half of that for the state. Although Sunland Park is a poor community, it is growing rapidly. Community leaders are working to provide opportunities for its citizens while enhancing the quality of life and the riparian environment. A constructed wetland is fed with treated wastewater and improves effluent quality through the conversion of toxic components such as ammonia to more stable forms such as nitrate. Nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrate are partially removed and other compounds such as endocrine disruptors are also reduced prior to discharge into the receiving body of water – the Río Grande in this instance. Constructed wetlands must be designed to handle a specific flow rate of treated wastewater that moves through the wetland in a controlled manner... Constructed wetlands can handle short term overloads but the design must meet specific performance criteria set by the New Mexico Environment Department. Wetland systems can be designed to look natural with the use of curved boundaries, trails, “tree islands,” and nesting habitats. The wetland can be designed to enhance the community park system and is not a source of disease vectors such as mosquitoes when properly designed. The disadvantages of constructed wetlands are the concentration of salts and loss of water through the system due to evaporation and infiltration. Additionally, relatively large land areas are needed to meet treatment objectives.” (Charles Turner & W. L. Hargrove, “Plan of Work for Constructed Feasibility Analysis”)

Tasks:

1. Newsletter production, for the Center for Environmental Resources Management.
2. Presentation, using video and/or power point, producing short segments on each proposed topic.
3. “A Fact Sheet summarizing the project and its advantages to water resources management and environmental conditions of the Río Grande, for use by the City of Sunland Park and the Paso del Norte Watershed Council in promoting the benefits of the project,” in both English and Spanish.
4. Reflection questions at the end of the project.

b. International Environmental Communication Association (IECA):

“The IECA is dedicated to advancing the practice, study, and teaching of Environmental Communication in civic, political, educational, business, and cultural contexts. We are a professional association of teachers, scholars, practitioners and organizations involved in Environmental Communication...How well we communicate with each other about nature and environmental affairs will determine how well we address the ecological crisis. Ecological sustainability requires a shift in views and values towards the natural world, and environmental communication influences how individuals, groups and cultures see, value and ultimately act in the world. Environmental communication is also how we advocate for change, raise awareness, collaborate to address environmental issues, change behavior, and pass legislation. Political, economic, and technological initiatives need effective communication to succeed” (from www.environmentalcomm.org). The IECA recently held the Conference on Communication and the Environment at the University of Texas at El Paso in June 2011 and will publish the conference proceedings in the next few months. For this project, you will work with the conference director and editor of the conference proceedings (Stacey Sowards).

Tasks:

1. Help the editor organize and edit conference papers.
2. Develop layout and format for conference proceedings.
3. Produce final copy of conference proceedings.
4. Reflection questions at the end of the project.

Purpose: The purpose of these service-learning projects is to provide a service to an environmental organization in need and to help you to develop real world skills that relate to environmental communication. The activities are designed to apply environmental communication theories to real world situations (course goal #2) and to help you develop critical writing skills for lifelong learning (course goal #6).

Grading

<u>Points for Assignments</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>
semester-long final project	35 points
service-learning project	15 points
reading questions (3 points each)	36 points
<u>participation</u>	<u>14 points</u>
Total points	100 points

Blackboard

I will use Blackboard to post reading assignments, grades, announcements, and other relevant information. The website is at: my.utep.edu. From there, click on the Blackboard link, which should take you to your classes for the semester. Readings are posted on Blackboard, but if you have a slow internet connection at home, download these essays at UTEP.

Late Assignments and Incomplete policy

Late written assignments will receive **a one point deduction for each twenty-four hour period** (including weekends) the assignment is late. If you are unable to attend class on the day that an assignment is due, you must contact me before the due date to arrange to hand in your assignment. Generally, I find it unacceptable for students to turn in late assignments, unless there are extreme and extenuating circumstances.

Late final papers will not be accepted. If your final paper is late, you will receive a zero for the assignment.

A grade of incomplete will not be given for any reason, unless there are **EXTREME** extenuating circumstances **AND** you have talked to me in advance. An incomplete will only be given if some extenuating circumstance prevents you from completing the final paper by the deadline.

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarizing, collusion, and deliberately interfering with the work of others.

Plagiarizing means representing the work of someone else (such as another student or an author of a book, article, or internet site) as your own. If you use the ideas or words of someone else, **you must cite the source** of the original information in your paper or presentation. For this class, using your own papers completed for another class also would be considered plagiarism.

Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying answers from other students' papers or tests, discussing test questions with students who have not taken the test, and/or using notes when taking a test. Another example of cheating is to use a source from a text book without obtaining the original author's work. If you do not read a work in its entirety, you may misrepresent the original author's work. Another example is to copy answers from another student or to allow another student to copy from your work. Collusion refers to collaboration with another student to commit any academically dishonest act. If you provide answers to someone or knowingly allow someone to copy your work, you will be held responsible.

Invented or plagiarized work can result in an F grade for the course and may result in possible disciplinary action at the university level. Students may be suspended or expelled for engaging in academic dishonesty.

Letters of recommendation policy

Letters of recommendation should be written by someone who knows you well, thinks highly of your work, and has had you in class before. For these reasons, I will only write letters of recommendation for students who I have had in two or more classes, and received grades of B or better. If you plan on asking me for a letter of recommendation, you should provide me a copy of your resume, UTEP transcript (unofficial is acceptable), the addresses and names of the people to address the letters, stamped and addressed envelopes, and descriptions of the programs to which you are applying. I will need approximately two weeks advance notice for writing letters of recommendation. This policy is also a good guideline to follow when asking anyone for a letter of recommendation.

Syllabus Schedule

All assignments listed by chapter refer to the Cox or de Steiguer text book. Other reading assignments are listed by author's last name, and can be found on Blackboard. All readings on Blackboard are in the order that they appear on the syllabus schedule. Also, there are a few handouts on Blackboard as well. Please bring these to class and read them before class.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Assignments due before class, by 12 pm</u>
Part I: Introduction to the Study of Environmental Communication		
Tuesday, August 23	introduction to course & syllabus	none
Thursday, August 25	overview to assignments (no class meeting)	respond to posts on discussion board
Tuesday, August 30	introduction to environmental history and environmental communication	de Steiguer, chapters 1 & 2 Cox, chapter 1 reading questions set 1, due by 12 pm
Thursday, September 1	analysis and discussion	respond to posts on discussion board
Tuesday, September 6	major contributors to environmental philosophy and environmental rhetoric	de Steiguer, chapters 3 & 4 Cox, chapter 2 reading questions set 2, due by 12 pm
Thursday, September 8	application and reflection: how does communication shape our understanding of environmental issues? Visit by Dr. Vanessa Lougheed for wetlands service-learning project A	respond to posts on discussion board
Part II: Media Coverage of Environmental Issues		
Tuesday, September 13	environmental journalism	Cox, chapters 5 & 6 reading questions set 3, due by 12 pm
Thursday, September 15	analysis & application: "Toxic Waters" series from the <i>New York Times</i>	respond to posts on discussion board service-learning project selection
Tuesday, September 20	media framing of environmental issues	Cox, chapter 9 Nitz & West, Blackboard reading questions set 4, due by 12 pm
Thursday, September 22	analysis & application: CNN, MSNBC, Fox News	respond to posts on discussion board service-learning project task selection
Tuesday, September 27	green advertising and marketing analysis & application: Clorox Greenworks products	Cox, chapter 10 reading questions set 5, due by 12 pm
Thursday, September 29	reflection & integration compare and contrast media framing in journalism, popular culture, and advertising: which has the greatest impact on audiences?	respond to posts on discussion board

Part III: Environmental Philosophies and Communication

Tuesday, October 4	population ecology	de Steiguer, chapters 10 & 11 Killingsworth & Palmer, Blackboard reading questions set 6, due by 12 pm
Thursday, October 6	analysis & discussion: Motavelli's "Myths, Truths, and Half-Truths about Population Growth"	respond to posts on discussion board service-learning project task deadline
Tuesday, October 11	deep ecology and ecofeminism Analysis & discussion of philosophies	de Steiguer, chapter 16 Bullis, Blackboard Knopper et al., Blackboard reading questions set 7, due by 12 pm
Thursday, October 13	activity: Starhawk's ritual (meet in the Chihuahua Desert Gardens) Reflection on what it means to connect with nature	respond to posts on discussion board service-learning reflection questions
Tuesday, October 18	environmental justice Film & discussion: Maquilapolis	Cox, chapter 8 Jennings & Jennings, Blackboard reading questions set 8, due by 12 pm
Thursday, October 20	analysis & application: United Farm Workers and indecorous speech	respond to posts on discussion board semester team project: topic selection
Tuesday, October 25	international environmental issues: north/south divide case study: Indonesia, palm oil plantations, orangutans, and rain forests	Mater, Blackboard Sowards, Blackboard reading questions set 9, due by 12 pm
Thursday, October 27	reflection & integration: What are the connections among the readings? What ideas are most valuable to you?	respond to posts on discussion board

Part IV: Environmental Advocacy and Public Participation

Tuesday, November 1	public participation and decision making	Cox, chapter 3 Peterson, Peterson, Peterson, Allison, & Gore, Blackboard reading questions set 10, due by 12 pm
Thursday, November 3	analysis & application: Case study: San Antonio's Salado Creek & Houston toad conservation plan	respond to posts on discussion board semester team project: part 1
Tuesday, November 8	conflict resolution	Cox, chapter 4 Peterson & Franks, Blackboard reading questions set 11, due by 12 pm
Thursday, November 10	analysis & application: Supreme Court Case Winter v. Natural Resources Defense Council	respond to posts on discussion board semester team project: part 2

Tuesday, November 15	environmental advocacy campaigns semester projects: first draft deadline or paper #3	Cox, chapter 7 Delicath and Deluca, Blackboard reading questions, set 12 reading questions set 12, due by 12 pm
Thursday, November 17	no class: National Communication Association conference	semester team project: part 3
Tuesday, November 24	analysis & application: Rare's environmental campaigns	respond to discussion board posts
Thursday, November 26	Thanksgiving – no class	
Tuesday, November 29	integration & reflections, choices, actions: what does environmentalism mean to you?	work on final team project
Thursday, December 1	summary and conclusions	work on final team project

Final projects and team evaluations due by: Thursday, December 8, 6:45 pm

Team members:

_____	_____	_____
Name	Telephone Number	Email Address

_____	_____	_____
Name	Telephone Number	Email Address

_____	_____	_____
Name	Telephone Number	Email Address

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Name	Telephone Number	Email Address