

COMM 475: Environmental Communication

Spring, 2013

2:00-4:50 M

ASC 232

Professor: Dr. Randy Lake

Office: ASC 206C

Hours: TBD & by appointment (Typically, I will be in the office four days a week, so appointments should be fairly easy to obtain.)

Telephone: (213) 740-3946

E-mail: rlake@usc.edu (This is the most efficient way to reach me. I check my email regularly during the weekday, when I am in the office. However, weekends and evenings are much more sporadic so, if you email me at these times, please do not expect an immediate reply. Because improper email format is unprofessional, inappropriate, and communicates a poor image of its sender, please use proper grammar, letter format, and “netiquette” when communicating with me.)

Objectives:

- to understand how nature and the environment influence communication and society;
- to understand how we construct “nature” through symbols, both discursive and visual;
- to learn about significant environmental controversies, from toxic waste to climate change, to lifestyle choices;
- to explore key issues raised in environmental controversies, such as public participation in environmental decision-making, the role of media, movements for environmental protection, environmental racism and justice, and corporate responsibility and “green” marketing; and
- to put theories into practice through service learning, by participating and intervening strategically in the public aspects of an environmental controversy

Website:

There is a course website, located at blackboard.usc.edu. All students enrolled in this course have access to the website through their USC username and password. This website is an official place for posting information relevant to the class, such as announcements, assignments, and grades, for discussing lecture materials, and so on. You are as responsible for knowing any material posted to the website as you would be responsible for material distributed or discussed during class. Because the University does not unequivocally recognize material placed on this website as the intellectual property of its creator, copies of my lecture notes, etc., will not be made available here.

Readings:

- [Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* \(3rd ed.; Sage, 2013\)](#) [REQUIRED]. Professor Cox has served three terms as president of the Sierra Club (the oldest environmental organization in the U.S., co-founded by John Muir) and knows what he’s talking about!

- ❑ [Julia B. Corbett, *Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages* \(Island, 2006\)](#) [REQUIRED].
- ❑ [MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers \(7th ed.; 2009\)](#) [RECOMMENDED]
- ❑ Other readings as assigned

Readings should be completed *before class* on the day assigned. Some readings may be presented to the class in the form of reports, to be assigned at the appropriate time.

Assignments: Detailed instructions for all assignments will be provided in due course. Due dates are noted on the tentative syllabus, below.

- ❑ Class Project, 40%. This project may take several forms, including: (A) a traditional research paper, 20-25 pages, on a topic approved in advance; (B) participation in an environmental organization or campaign that includes a written, analytical journal applying class concepts to your experience and activities; and (C) an online project, such as a blog or website that gathers together resources in order to facilitate public understanding and involvement in an environmental controversy. Projects may be individual or group (approved in advance).
- ❑ Reports, 15%
- ❑ Final Exam, 30% (comprehensive)
- ❑ Class Discussion and Participation, 15%

All assignments must be the original work of the student and cannot have been used previously or concurrently in any other course. **All assignments must be attempted and turned in to pass the course.**

Participation and Attendance:

This class emphasizes collaborative learning, in which we jointly ask questions of the material and each other, and explore possible answers. Lectures will be the exception rather than the rule, may not cover all important aspects of the readings, and may cover materials not in the readings. Thus, it is very important that you be present and prepared to participate appropriately in each class not only as a discussant but also as an audience for others. Also, because some of the issues we'll cover are controversial, we undoubtedly will encounter disagreement. Disagreement need not—and should not—be disagreeable. The best policy is to always **T.H.I.N.K.** before you speak by ensuring that your comment is: **Thoughtful, Helpful, Interesting, Necessary, Kind.**

Roll will be taken in every class. Because we meet only once a week and miss two weeks of class for holidays, time is at a premium: any absence for any reason (including medical emergencies or other so-called “excused” absences) may affect your course grade adversely, as much as **a full letter grade per absence**, and even may cause you to **fail the course**.

Arriving late, leaving early, and other activities not conducive to learning—such as turning off a ringing cell phone or leaving the room to answer it—are extremely disruptive, and may be counted as absences.

Technology: “Topless”

No electronic devices, including laptops, notebook computers, iPods, and iPads, are allowed in class at any time unless giving a presentation, or in order to accommodate a registered disability, or otherwise approved in advance by me. Cell phones also are prohibited unless otherwise indicated. **Turn them off before class.** According to the [Wall Street Journal](#): “In

Silicon Valley itself, as the *Los Angeles Times* reported last year, some companies have installed the ‘topless’ meeting—in which not only laptops but iPhones and other tools are banned—to combat a new problem: ‘continuous partial attention.’ With a device close by, attendees at workplace meetings simply cannot keep their focus on the speaker. It’s too easy to check email, stock quotes and Facebook. While a quick log-on may seem, to the user, a harmless break, others in the room receive it as a silent dismissal. It announces: ‘I’m not interested.’ So the tools must now remain at the door.”

Tentative Daily Syllabus:

Some adjustments and small changes may well be necessary as we proceed. Some sessions will include supplementary readings, which will be provided in advance.

Session 1: January 14

Introduction to the course
READ Cox, Ch. 1

January 21

Martin Luther King, Jr., Day—NO CLASS

Session 2: January 28

The Roots of Environmental Beliefs
READ Cox, Ch. 2; Corbett, Chs. 1-2
DUE Environmental Autobiographies

Session 3: February 4

Influencing Environmental Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors
READ Cox, Ch. 3; Corbett, Ch. 3; Hendry, Judith. *Communication and the Natural World*. State College: Strata, 2010. Chapter 5; Appendix..

Session 4: February 11

Work and Leisure: Environmental Attitudes in Consumer Culture
READ Corbett, Chs. 4-5

February 18

Presidents’ Day—NO CLASS

Session 5: February 25

Green Marketing
READ Cox, Ch. 10; Corbett, Chs. 6, 9

Session 6: March 4

Public Participation and Conflict Management
READ Cox, Chs. 4-5

Session 7: March 11

Case Study: “The Fire Next Time”

READ Forester, John. “Making Participation Work When Interests Conflict.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 72 (2006): 447-56.

March 18

Spring Break–NO CLASS

Session 8: March 25

Advocacy Campaigns

READ Cox, Chs. 8-9

Session 9: April 1

Protest and Movements

Case Study: “30 Frames a Second: The WTO in Seattle”

READ Corbett, Ch. 10

Session 10: April 8

Media Coverage of the Environment

READ Cox, Chs. 6-7; Corbett, Ch. 8

Session 11: April 15

Communicating Science and Risk

READ Cox, Chs. 11-12

Session 12: April 22 (EarthDay!!)

Case Study: “An Inconvenient Truth” and Its Critics

VIEW “An Inconvenient Truth”; “An Inconvenient Truth . . . or Convenient Fiction?”

READ Rosteck, Thomas, and Thomas S. Frenz. “Myth and Multiple Readings in Environmental Rhetoric: The Case of ‘An Inconvenient Truth’.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 1-19.

Session 13: April 29

REPORTS on key figures in environmentalism

May 13

FINAL EXAM (2:00-4:00)