

**COM 380**  
**Environmental Communication**  
Spring Term 2013

Dr. Emily Plec  
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Office Hours:  
M/W 1:30 – 2:50 p.m.  
T/R 9:00 – 9:20 a.m.  
Tuesday 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

**Course Text**

Hendry, J. (2010). *Communication and the Natural World*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing.

**Course Description**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to various communication perspectives on environmental studies with a focus on civic engagement and public participation in environmental decision-making. No prior experience or coursework in Communication or Environmental Studies is necessary. The course helps students critically analyze and assess environmental issues, engage in environmental communication praxis and reflect on their own environmental perspectives and commitments.

**Learning Outcomes**

By the conclusion of the course, students will have:

- 1) Examined their own relationships with the natural world,
- 2) Critically analyzed and assessed symbolic representations of the environment,
- 3) Engaged in discussions about the communication of risk and resolution of environmental conflicts,
- 4) Studied scientific, political, economic and activist approaches to environmental issues, and
- 5) Actively participated in an environmental service project, in which they put communication principles into practice.

**Course Assignments**

Pop Quizzes & Assignments	20 points
Tracking Consumption (Exercise 1)	10 points
Living Simply (Exercise 2)	10 points
Environmental Service Project	40 points
Papers (2 @ 10 points each)	20 points
Total Possible	150 points

94 – 100 %	A
90 – 93 %	A-
88 – 89 %	B+
84 – 87 %	B
80 – 83 %	B-
78 – 79 %	C+
74 – 77 %	C
70 – 73 %	C-
65 – 69 %	D+
60 – 65 %	D
≤ 59%	F

**Course Policies**

- Students are expected to arrive on time and ready for class. Bring your book to class.
- Late papers and exercises will be docked 2 points per day. Academic misconduct will result in a failing grade for the assignment in question and a report to Campus Judicial Affairs.
- This is a discussion-based course and students are expected to contribute to class discussions. You are encouraged to bring your own specific environmental interests, ideas, questions, concerns, and agendas to bear on class discussions and exercises. It is not your perspective on the issues, but your willingness to engage them, that will determine your success in this class.

**Accommodations Statement**

Students who feel that they may need accommodations for any type of disability or medical condition are encouraged to make an appointment to see me during the first week of the course and should contact the Office of Disability Services (838-8250 v/tty) in APS 405.

## DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

### Pop Quizzes & Assignments

Pop quizzes will include 5 or fewer multiple choice or short answer questions. Quizzes and assignments will cover the assigned reading for the class period in which they are administered or due. Students will be allowed to use hand written or printed notes, but not textbooks, while taking the quiz. Late quizzes & assignments will not be accepted.

### Tracking Consumption Exercise

Over a 5 day period, track your consumption of resources using the criteria distributed and discussed in class. At the conclusion of the seven days, compose a short summary of your “ecological footprint” based on what you observed and set some goals for minimizing your negative impact on the environment. See handout for additional details, questions, and resources.

### Living (a little more) Simply

For one day following your consumption exercise, make an effort to live without many of the technologies and (in)conveniences of your everyday life. To the extent possible, eat only fresh and locally grown foods, avoid using nonrenewable energy sources (batteries, most electricity, gas), and compost or recycle your “garbage”. Journal about the experience throughout the day, noting where you succeeded, how you felt, and what aspects of the assignment were difficult or impossible and why. Conclude by reflecting on the day and the choices you made.

### Environmental Service Project

Over the course of the term, you will engage in a service project that benefits a campus or community partner engaged in positive environmental change. Several service project options are listed on the next page; in addition, you are welcome to propose your own individual project. All service projects must be approved in advance by the instructor and will be evaluated by the following components, worth up to 10 points each: 1) project proposal, 2) completed project and service partner evaluation, 3) reflection paper, and 4) presentation.

### Project Proposals are due April 16th and should include answers to the following questions:

1. What do you plan to do?
2. Who is your community contact? (name, email, phone number, address)
3. What community/communities will benefit from your project?
4. What information have you gathered (what kinds of things should you know?) before you undertake the project? Include a list of resources, websites, etc. that you have consulted.
5. What criteria should be used to evaluate the success of your project? (be specific!)

### Papers

1. Self in Nature Narrative
  - In 4-6 typed, double-spaced pages, describe in detail a significant experience that you have had in or with the environment. Similar to the passages by Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Carson, use imagery and vivid language to bring the reader into the experience.
2. Final Examination: Discourse Analysis
  - In lieu of a final examination, you will be provided with a piece of environmental discourse (an artifact) to analyze. Draw connections to the course text, project, and discussions where possible. Examine the environmental perspectives, philosophies, rhetorical frames, and other facets of your artifact in order to try to explain the worldview of its author. Include quotations from, or descriptions of, the artifact to support your claims. Compare the worldview expressed by the author to your perspective on the topic addressed in the artifact after having taken this class. Final papers should be **at least 4 pages** in length.

## Project Options

- **Volunteer for a campus or community-based environmental organization.** Choose an organization that operates in your neighborhood, county, or state; volunteer and serve the organization for roughly 15-20 hours of contact time. You must turn in a 2-3 page summary or journal of your time spent with the organization with a focus on the communication dynamics, challenges and strategies of the organization/project. Include any other documentation acquired as part of the project (training, certification, materials, etc.).

***Campus Garden.*** Participate in WOU's first ever campus garden. Learn about organic gardening, composting, soil amendment, and permaculture all while getting dirty and growing great food. Develop and strengthen your abilities in the following areas: public relations, fundraising, media production, community relations, event planning, and volunteer coordination. Contact: Green Wolf Sustainability Club & ASWOU Sustainability Director.

***WOU Arbor Day & Earth Fair.*** This project requires a tremendous amount of work up front and includes a Friday/Saturday commitment (April 26-27, 2013) but is an excellent way to raise consciousness on campus while having fun (and getting your project done early!). Brainstorm events, assist with organization, coordination, volunteer recruitment, and all aspects of event planning. Includes expectation of participation in Friday Arbor Day planting. Contact: ASWOU Sustainability Director.

***SOLV Community Clean-ups.*** Work with SOLV (<http://www.solv.org/volunteers/>) to improve the environment through beach, community, and stream restoration activities across the state. In addition to volunteering for one or more SOLV events, assist with the recruitment of other volunteers, photograph and write up the event for a local newspaper, and lend your particular talents to the organization in a way that helps them to improve their communication with volunteers and with the public at large.

***Watershed Council Outreach.*** Work with the Luckiamute Watershed Council (LWC) and neighborhood associations such as *Friends of Ash Creek* on several public relations, organizational communication, multi-media and public information projects related to the Luckiamute State Natural Area, local farm tours, K-12 conservation education and other council activities. Contact: Kristen Larsen at [info@luckiamutelwc.org](mailto:info@luckiamutelwc.org)

- **Conduct an environmental assessment of your workplace.** Conduct a thorough environmental assessment of your workplace (see the instructor for additional instruction and information). Submit a summary of your findings as they would be communicated to an organizational leader in a decision-making capacity related to your findings. Identify possible actions that could be taken, and develop an environmental communication plan for encouraging positive environmental behavior change in your workplace.
- **Volunteer for a national or international environmental organization.** Choose an environmental organization that takes on issues of interest to you, volunteer your time, and serve the organization for roughly 15-20 hours of contact time. You must turn in a 2-3 page summary or journal of your time spent with the organization, with a focus on the communication challenges and strategies of the organization.

## Class Schedule, Readings, and Due Dates

### Week 1

4/2 Course Introduction: What is Environmental Communication?  
Film: *Bag It: Is your life too plastic?*

### Week 2

4/9 Communication and the Environment      Read Ch.1 & Appendix; **Paper 1 due**  
*The Story of Stuff*      *Tracking exercise assigned*

### Week 3

4/16 Our Changing Environment      Read Ch. 2 & Review Timeline (p. 289)  
Film: *An Inconvenient Truth*      **Tracking exercise due**; *Living Simply assigned*

### Week 4: Earth Week at WOU

4/22 *Earth Day!*

4/23 Environmental Worldviews (**6 p.m.**)      Read Chs. 3 & 4; **Project proposals due**  
Project meetings: LWC 5-5:15; SOLV 5:15-5:30; Workplace 5:30-5:45; Garden/Earth Fair  
5:45–6 p.m.

4/26 *Arbor Day!*

### Week 5

4/30 Environmental Rhetoric      Read Chs. 5, 6 & 7  
Polarizing and Prophetic Rhetoric  
Film: *The Last Mountain*

### Week 6

5/7 Food Studies and the Rhetoric of Risk      Read Ch. 8  
Film: *Food, Inc.*      Project report out

### Week 7

5/14 Environmental Reporting & Greenwashing      Read Chs. 9 & 10  
*Michael Pollan at the Newmark Theatre*

### Week 8

5/21 Public Participation & Praxis      Read Ch. 11 & 12; **Living Simply exercise due**  
Film: *No Impact Man*

### Week 9

5/28 Environmental Justice      Read Ch. 13; *Paper 2 assigned*  
5/30 *Academic Excellence Showcase*

### Week 10

6/4 Final Project Presentations      **Reflection papers & Service Partner Evals due**

### Finals Week: Final Project Presentations

Tuesday, June 11: Papers due by email by 7:50 p.m.

**Paper 2 due**