

Syllabus Spring ~ 2019 ~ COMM 8980

Special Topics: Communicating Environmental Issues

CRN: 22382 25 Park Place, Room 1127 Time: Wednesdays 7:30 - 9:45pm

Disclaimer: The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

Instructor Information:

Carrie P. Freeman, Ph.D.

GSU Associate Professor of Communication. Email: cpfreeman@gsu.edu

Office Phone: 404-413-5736 Office Location: Room 939 on 9th floor of 25 Park Place

My Office Mailbox is located in the Comm Dept Main Office on the 8th floor of 25 Park Place.

Meeting/Communicating with me: Rather than having set office hours, I schedule them by appointment Monday or Wednesday late afternoon or potentially Tuesdays and Thursdays. I can usually respond daily to EMAIL during the workweek. Please email me only from your GSU email account (or, better yet, through icollege) as opposed to personal email accounts.

Required Texts:

- Pezzullo, P. & Cox, R. (2018). *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere. (5th edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 1506363598 (you can rent this book) (TEXTBOOK)
- Dryzek, J. (2013). *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses. (3rd edition)*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press. ISBN 9780199696000 (on reserve at library)
- Almiron, N., Cole, M. & Freeman, C. P. (2016). *Critical Animal & Media Studies: Communication for Nonhuman Animal Advocacy*. NY: Routledge ISBN 113859797X (on reserve at library)
- Abram, D. (1997). *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. NY: Vintage Books. ISBN: 0679776397 (affordable)
- Lappe, F. M. (2011). *EcoMind: Changing the Way we Think to Create the World we Want*. NY: Nation Books. ISBN 9781568587431 (affordable)
- **OPTIONAL RESOURCE:** Hansen, A & Cox, R. (2015). *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication*. NY: Routledge. ISBN: 9780415704359 (Not affordable. Get e-version for \$40-50. Also to be put on reserve at library). Not Required.

There is no course packet of hard copies to purchase. Additional articles/chapters will be provided electronically on iCollege via PDFs, such as from *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature & Culture*, so be prepared to read the articles online (saves paper) or make arrangements for printing off hardcopies (try double-sided). Other good readings and bibliographies you might consider are available on the website for the **International Environmental Communication Association**. <https://theieca.org/> Joining as a student member gives you access to more of their resources; announcements for jobs, conferences, and papers; and weekly emails of current studies and news on environmental comm issues.

Course Description:

The discussion over environmental issues will only grow in importance over the course of our lifetime, as we navigate the global crises of climate change, extinction of species, genetic modification of life, environmental injustice and inequities, overconsumption and mass pollution, water and energy shortages, and exploitation of animals and nature. Often limited to the realm of science and technology, these issues must also begin to be recognized as socio-political and moral issues. The sustenance of life on earth relies not just on chemistry and biology but on cultural values and belief systems that define who we are and what we care about. The process of communication is fundamental to constructing our values and relationships with the natural world and defining and framing issues, culprits, and solutions as well as inspiring change. This recognition has spawned the burgeoning academic subfield of “environmental communication” to study environmental issues via media and film, journalism, public relations, advertising, rhetoric, and public participation and activism. In this class we will examine:

- How communication constructs and maintains our worldviews on humanity, other animals, nature, and “the environment.”
- How these common worldviews cause material problems for all species and then discursively define and prioritize what gets recognized as a problem and what that means. And
- How communication can serve as the solution to create a more just and sustainable world.

We will explore the historical roots of humanism and instrumental attitudes toward nonhuman life as well as the emergence of philosophies on environmental and animal ethics. Students will review the various players and discourses struggling to define major environmental topics, such as: climate change and pollution, energy, water, food and agriculture, biodiversity and extinction, ocean life, wilderness habitat, environmental racism/injustice, human population growth, war, and consumerism/ commerce. Students will have the choice of producing a paper that is suitable for an academic conference submission or a final project that involves service, activism, or a multi-media creation in support of environmental protection.

Course Objectives & Goals:

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- Explain major theories and ideas from various academic disciplines regarding the rhetorical challenges and strategies of defining, advocating for, and/or solving environmental issues.
- Compare and contrast the various discourses constructed around an environmental issue.
- Evaluate which ideas, perspectives, and resources you find most viable and useful in environmental communication.
- Apply communication theory and additional literature toward a major project to improve or better understand the communication or advocacy strategies constructing a cause/issue of your choice.
- Define your environmental worldview, values, and moral vision.

What course objectives or goals do you have for yourself?

Expectations:

I aspire to do the following FOR YOU and the class:

- To provide a productive, interesting, and interactive learning environment.
- To provide a variety of current resources and materials.
- To maintain a secure, welcoming atmosphere in which to express your beliefs and questions.
- To respect you as an intelligent individual.
- To assume the best of you.
- To be open and responsive to your feedback.
- To give my time and attention to you to help you make the course meaningful.
- To provide opportunities for you to personalize the course to meet your goals/interests.
- To be enthusiastic toward the subject matter and your learning.
- To communicate clearly about assignments and my expectations.
- To maintain a sense of humor and keep things interesting.

I expect the following FROM YOU regarding your participation:

I have high expectations for your thoughtful engagement with the class and material as you are graduate students at a major public university. This class relies on your oral and written participation and philosophical engagement with the ideas. It is not my style to lecture much, and I prefer much of the class time to be used for discussion and exercises – which requires you to do the readings and think critically about the issues ahead of time, coming with organized notes in order to be able to meaningfully contribute during class. I appreciate you being here, on time, and attentive.

All participation is not created equal. The most productive participation is:

- thoughtful,
- relevant to the current topic and readings on the agenda,
- respectful to fellow participants,
- engaged in actively listening to others,
- fairly concise; generous in allowing for *everyone* to get an equal chance to speak, and
- professional (not that it rules out some humor).

Participation is not just about sharing your thoughts with everyone but is about productively contributing to the facilitation of the class agenda and demonstrating your willingness to *actively listen* to your peers and learn from their different perspectives. And in order for everyone to feel comfortable sharing their beliefs and feelings, we should agree to be respectful of others' differences. This means not making critical responses personal (directed at someone) and avoiding demeaning or discriminatory remarks. Be prepared to think critically not just about others' ideas but also your own. I want you to feel like you have grown personally and professionally during this class.

If ever you have suggestions for how the class could be improved or you could feel more comfortable participating, or if you have any documented (dis)abilities that I can help accommodate, please come and see me to share your thoughts.

Coursework and Evaluation:

Your final course grade is based on the following:

- 15% Productive Class Participation
- 10% Facilitation of Readings in Class Discussions
- 25% Issue Review (and presentation)
- 10% Moral Vision Statement
- 40% Final Paper / Project (and presentation)

I'll tabulate these elements as points out of 100 total.

ATTENDANCE:

We only meet once a week, so each class is important to attend; attendance is particularly expected at the graduate level and is built into your grade. But to accommodate for conflicts, either unforeseen or planned (such as for a conference or illness), you have one floating absence to use if necessary. Just let me know via email as soon as you know you need to miss. Only one other absence will be excused if it is a medical issue. If you miss any more days than this, then two points will be deducted off of your final course grade for each class missed. Perfect attendance all semester will earn you a half point.

PRODUCTIVE CLASS PARTICIPATION (15%):

Since this is a discussion-oriented class, you should get rewarded for your participation and for doing the readings. In-class participation is factored based on how attentive and engaged you are in class, how willing you are to participate productively (respectfully, professionally, and appropriately on target with the topic), and how well you actively listen and respond to others. Over-participation that dominates the discussion is not quality participation, so ensure that you allow others to talk a fair share and keep your comments relevant to the topic and fairly concise. Regarding content, your participation should demonstrate that you have been engaging with the readings and can think critically about the ideas and make connections among them. **You will need to bring organized notes to class.**

Feel free to use electronic devices (particularly laptops) if you are only using them for note-taking or referencing our class materials/readings. Otherwise, use of smartphones and other electronic devices during class is considered distracting.

Part of the class participation will be you providing a green living tip and an online action item several times during the term.

- One student per class will share a **green living tip** to start the class off. This is just a brief tip on how to live well and be eco-friendly, animal-friendly, and/or healthy, and why it is particularly beneficial. Just describe it to us in 60 seconds. You can write part of it on the board (no other visuals required and nothing to turn in to the instructor).
- The **online action item** is where you share a prompt for us to sign a petition or write a letter (or do a social media posting) to a politician, government agency, company, or media outlet on some timely eco issue. This civic opportunity can be something that is organized by a social movement organization in a user-friendly digital format. You simply post it in a discussion posting in icollege when it's your assigned week. Other students can choose to participate in that action item if they want and agree with its premise and approach. Students can also post a reply to the author about their opinions on that action item's strategic approach.

FACILITATION OF READINGS (10%)

Four to five students per class will each be assigned to one of the week's readings and then will be the person who helps facilitate or move forward the discussion on that reading during the class. This will serve as a substitute for writing journal entries or abstracts on all assigned readings weekly, as your facilitation will help me assess that people are indeed engaging with the readings (without turning in written proof). I will be assessing your grade based on how prepared you are for each class in terms of helping to ensure there is fruitful, relevant, and meaningful discussion on the core concepts in your assigned readings, while also being conscientious of time management and helping me keep to schedule (we might not be able to give more than 30 minutes to each reading). It's good if you can also draw some connections between the assigned reading and other readings from the class as well as current issues.

ISSUE REVIEW (25%):

You will be responsible for investigating and teaching the class about the various discourses that define a particular environmental issue (issue chosen at the beginning of the term from a list). This issue review is a cross between a literature review and a discourse analysis. It should be approximately **nine to eleven pages long** (double-spaced with references) and is due around the date of your presentation (week 6 or 7).

Issue Review should include:

- (1/4) An overview of basic facts and figures that make this topic an "environmental issue," including how these facts or the degree of the problem is or has been debated among a number of parties/sources. This can include the breadth and depth of the problem in context of how it relates to other environmental or social issues.
- (1/4) Specific scholarly studies and findings that best relate to your particular topic/issue, especially from a communications standpoint. (this part is a brief literature review and can be combined with the overview from the first bullet point above).
- (1/2) Pick two different and even opposing organizations (from a variety of governmental, industry, activist, and scholarly sources) that serve as major parties competing in the public sphere to define this issue for the public. Based on your observations of the relevant info on their websites, compare and contrast how these two groups are defining the issue in terms of how they are framing and constructing aspects such as: problems, solutions, major players, images, facts and evidence, values and emotions, and motivations. Categorize their discursive perspective according to one or more of Dryzek's discourse categories. Briefly describe what problems or opportunities are created (in terms of progress/change) by these various constructions of the issue. (this part is an informal discourse analysis/overview)

The cited sources should include Dryzek's book, plus at least three scholarly sources from outside the course reading list, and however many sources you want from the class reading list. You will post your paper online for the class to read as well as present it to the class (approximately 12-15 minute slideshow plus Q&A/discussion, depending on the number of students). The presentation component will comprise 10% of your overall course grade, making the written component worth 15% of your grade.

FINAL PAPER or PROJECT (40%)

You have the choice to do either a paper or a project. It is due week 15 (end of April). Many people will choose to write a PAPER, and it should meet academic standards so that it would be appropriate to send to an academic conference for presentation or possibly a journal for publication. **For MA students, the paper should be between 18 and 22 pages; for PhD students the paper should be between 20 and 25 pages.** Papers should be double-spaced and include references in the total page count. I will leave it open-ended in content, except that it should utilize many of the readings and theories from class (in addition to others that you add) to examine a specific environmental issue (local, regional, national, or global) (and this topic can include animal protection or environmental justice) and how the issue is or could be

communicated or advocated. It should include a literature review and provide background/context on your topic prior to more specific analysis related to communication (rhetoric, advocacy, media, etc.).

If you would like to do a PROJECT instead of a paper, please come and talk to me about what idea you have, so we can agree on a plan. The project is more practical or applied than the paper, as it means that you are going out and testing or applying the ideas from class toward solving an environmental problem. This could mean that you are actively participating in advocacy communication on an issue or possibly creating a media product (web site, publicity materials, short film, etc) during the term. The project should also have a written component to explain to me: background on the cause and communication status/challenges, what advocacy or participant observation you did (if applicable), how you applied the ideas from academic readings (and connected to them), what the results were (evaluation), and what you learned. **The project's written component should be 10-15 pages long**, including references (double-spaced).

During weeks 14 and 15 (last two class periods), everyone will be expected to present their paper/project to the class, including some visual component (either a brief handout, powerpoint, film clip, etc). Find a way to present the most useful and interesting components as an overview (but do not just read the paper aloud). The presentation should be 10-15 minutes long (depending on the number of students in our class), and we will then open it up for 5-10 minutes of questions and class discussion. The presentation component will comprise 15% of your overall course grade, making the written component worth 25% of your course grade.

MORAL VISION STATEMENT (10%):

As this class hopes to be about change as much as assessment, we will each be encouraged to spend time in self-reflection toward the end of the term to determine our values, beliefs, and vision for the kind of world we want to create that represents a healthy, sustainable way for humans to live. In week 13 (April), each of you will post and share a moral vision statement online (around 500 words), and be prepared to discuss it in class. This helps to end the term on a positive note where we don't just critique the status quo or discuss problems (and revel in the apocalyptic), but we inspire solutions and change strategies by defining a vision of what that viable society / planetary community looks like.

EARTHDAY ANALYSIS (extra credit)

Because Earthday (April 22nd) falls within the end of the term, you can use that major eco-related event as an opportunity to apply what we have learned about environmental communication. If you want extra credit, pick an Earthday event (local, global, virtual, etc.) to observe or participate in, so that you can provide an analysis/evaluation of how that event or site "works" and functions (or *could better* work and function) from a communications standpoint. Consider it in context of the larger communicative sphere in which we are operating. Write a three page analysis (double-spaced) and share your thoughts (and any useful visuals) informally in class to earn extra credit (one or two points).

CITATION GUIDELINES:

Make sure that the work you turn in is your own or properly cited to avoid plagiarism (see GSU Academic Honesty Policy, Section 409 <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwfhh/sec409.html>). Here's how to avoid that (using APA style):

- If you **paraphrase** an idea you read about, using your own words, cite just the specific author and year of his/her publication in parenthesis at the end of the first sentence where you drew upon the source...ex: (Garcia, 2008). Or, if you mention the author by name in the sentence, you can just put the year in parenthesis after his/her name. Ex: Garcia (2008) found that students who plagiarize get caught at some point in their careers.

- Each new paragraph needs new citation, even if you are still referring to the same source used in the previous paragraph.
- If you **copy the author's words verbatim**, even just a phrase, then you **MUST** put **quotations** marks around it to give the author credit. Be judicious about over-using direct quotes instead of paraphrasing. Avoid using very long quotes (ex: over 60 words), or too many of them, as it can look lazy. **For quoted material, add to the text citation the page number (p. __ for a book) or paragraph number (para. __ for web citation)**, so readers can easily verify the quotation (ex: Cho, 2010, p. 45).
- Have a **reference section** at the end of your paper with the full text/book citation for every reference you used in the paper (and they should all also be overtly cited with the author's name and year in parenthesis somewhere within the body of the paper). I prefer you use APA style unless you have a reason to use a different reference style (based on where you might send the paper for presentation or publication). The alphabetical list by author's last name should correlate to how you listed the author's name/source in the in-text citation earlier in your paper (ex: don't list "Jackson" as the source author in the text and then in the reference section list her article under P for Poynter Institute. It should be under J so it matches).

GRADING:

Grading will consider such aspects as:

- inclusion of required elements (following assignment criteria);
- quality of writing's organization and structure, and its overall professionalism;
- correct grammar and spelling;
- correct referencing/citations and academic honesty; (*this is important*)
- depth of thought and critical thinking; logical reasoning in argumentation;
- explanation of appropriate and relevant theory and scholarly literature for context;
- useful application of theory and scholarly literature toward analysis; and
- some recognition of socio-political context (historic and current).

If for some reason you must turn in a major assignment late, please notify me ahead of time. You won't get a zero, but there is a 10% grade penalty for each day late, so punctuality in meeting deadlines is beneficial. The penalty may be waived if you have a doctor's note, but the assignment cannot be more than a few days late. Because the assignments are associated with presentations, your attendance in class that day is especially necessary.

This is how your final percentage score at the end of the term equates to a letter grade.

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------|--------------|---|
| 100 – 97 = A+ | 96 – 93 = A | 92 – 90 = A- | ←(<i>hopefully you'll be up here</i>) |
| 89 – 87 = B + | 86 – 83 = B | 82 – 80 = B- | |
| 79 – 77 = C+ | 76 – 73 = C | 72 – 70 = C- | |
| 69 – 67 = D+ | 66 – 63 = D | 62 – 60 = D- | |

Course Schedule:

This is a tentative overview of the plan for the semester. In the future, **please see our iCollege class website at least weekly** for the most up-to-date and detailed assignment and reading list by week.

Week 1: Jan. 16th

IN-CLASS: Syllabus overview. Class expectations and goals. Introductions and interests. Discuss environmental issue review assignment options. Overview of major concepts and resources in environmental communication.

Week 2: Jan. 23rd

IN-CLASS: Foundational environmental and animal ethics readings

READINGS: Choose from a list of PDF articles, plus read chapter 2 in textbook (contested meanings: a brief history), and *Critical Animal & Media Studies* book chapter 1 on media theories.

Week 3: Jan. 30th

IN-CLASS: Deconstructing the nature/culture and human/animal dualisms.

READINGS: Book: *Spell of the Sensuous* (only the first half), plus a PDF of an article on deconstructing the human/animal dualism.

Week 4: Feb. 6th

IN-CLASS: Various environmental discourses. Issue review assignments finalized.

READINGS: Select parts of the book: *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, plus review Ch 3 in textbook if interested (symbolic constructions of the environment) OR review Ch 10 on Looking at Humans Looking at Animals (visual culture article from GSU English professor Randy Malamud in the *Critical Animal & Media Studies* book).

Week 5: Feb. 13th

IN- CLASS: Corporate rhetoric, sustainability, advertising (including greenwashing)

READINGS: Ch 8 in textbook (sustainability and the greening of corporations and campuses). *Critical Animal & Media Studies* book chapter 2 on political economy behind the oppression of other animals, and chapter 4 on consumer vision: speciesism, misogyny, and media.

Week 6: Feb. 20th

IN-CLASS: We learn about environmental issues from student presentations of issue reviews (discourse analyses). ASSIGNMENT DUE: Issue Review papers due several days *after* your presentation (½ the students have papers due this week, ½ next week)

READINGS: None. Read for your issue review.

Week 7: Feb. 27th

IN-CLASS: We learn about environmental issues from student presentations of issue reviews (discourse analyses). ASSIGNMENT DUE: Issue Review papers due several days *before* the day of your presentation (last ½ of class)

READINGS: None. Work on issue review or read ahead.

Week 8: March 6th (online class)

Pick your final paper/project topics and describe them to us on icollege for my/our feedback.

READINGS: Find articles pertinent to your final paper/project.

Week 9: March 13th

IN-CLASS: Advocacy campaigns

READINGS: Textbook Ch 9 (advocacy campaigns and message construction); Textbook Ch 11 (environmental justice and climate justice movements). Ch 3, 14, or 15 (select one from the *Critical Animal & Media Studies* book).

Week 10: Spring Break - March 20th (no class)

Week 11: March 27th

IN-CLASS: environmental journalism

READINGS: Textbook chapter 5 (environmental journalism) and chapter 6 (scientists, technology, and environmental controversies). *Critical Animal & Media Studies* book (Ch 11 on news media constructions of animals in agriculture).

Week 12: April 3rd

IN-CLASS: Media and popular culture.

READINGS: Textbook Ch 4 (the environment and visual and popular culture). Select a chapter from *Critical Animal & Media Studies* part II on representation, plus review Ch 13 on the animalsandmedia.org style guide or explore the website.

Week 13: April 10th

IN-CLASS: Changing hearts and minds; collaborating in ecological problem solving

READINGS: Assigned chapters in *EcoMind* book. Optionally, review textbook Ch 13 on environmental conflict management and collaboration.

ASSIGNMENT: moral vision statement due.

Week 14: April 17th

IN-CLASS: Presentations of final projects by half the class.

READINGS: None. Prep for final paper.

Week 15: April 24th (Earthday this week) Last day of class.

IN-CLASS: Presentations of final projects by remaining half of the class. Wrap-up and review of most important ideas. ASSIGNMENT DUE: Final paper/project due electronically on a date we agree on in week 15th.

READINGS: None. Prep for final paper.

There is nothing due in finals week.

Your constructive assessment of this course
plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State.
Upon completing the course, please take the time to
fill out the online **course evaluation**. Thank you!

Criticism (and radical criticism) is utterly indispensable for any transformation. For a transformation that would remain within the same mode of thought, a transformation that would only be a certain way of better adjusting the same thought to the reality of things, would only be a superficial transformation. On the other hand, as soon as people begin to have trouble thinking things the way they have been thought, transformation becomes at the same time very urgent very difficult, and entirely possible. (Foucault, 2000, p. 457)

Foucault, M. (2000). So is it important to think? (R. Hurley, trans.). In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (pp. 454-458) (Vol. 3). New York: The New York Press. (Original work published 1981).