# COMM/EVST 575: Seminar in Rhetoric and Environmental Controversy

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“Despite the growing importance of urban and industrial issues in the agendas of most environmental groups, there remained during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, disjointed and at times contradictory elaborations of what can be called *environmental discourse*. These elaborations were reflected in the use of language and presentation of ideas and concepts about the environment, much of which still assumed the long-standing separation of the social from the ecological.

“These disputes over discourse have also been reflected in the divergent pathways and discordant messages of environmentalism in the last three decades, despite the movement’s successful appeal. The significance of these disputes over environmental discourse should not be underestimated. Since discourses, as David Harvey has argued, are ‘manifestations of power…the coded ways available to use for talking about, writing about, and representing the world,’ they also become ways to shape actions as well as perceptions. More than many other social movements, environmentalism has become associated with compelling ideas and images—whether of Nature (the value of wilderness) or Society (the negative association of urban pollution or hazards). These images are made manifest by language and representation. The power of environmental discourse also makes it fair game for varying interpretations and associations. Claims made by different actors, such as the chemical or oil and gas industries, about their commitment to the environment and participation as “environmentalists” often muddies the debate about nature and environment and further underlines the importance of who controls the discourse. Environmental politics should therefore be seen not simply as debates over how to act or what policies to establish. Conflicts of interpretation over the terms of environmental discourse also become debates over how to influence the language that people use in talking about the environment.”

~Robert Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound: Exploring New Pathways for Change.* MIT Press, 2001.

“Environmental communication describes the many ways and the forums in which citizens, corporations, public officials, journalists, and environmental groups raise concerns and attempt to influence the important decisions that affect our planet. They and others realize that our understanding of nature and our actions toward the environment depend not only on science but on public debate, media, the Internet, and even ordinary conversations.”

~Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere,* Sage, 2013.

# Course Description

This course is a graduate-level seminar in environmental rhetoric. With Gottlieb, the course proceeds from the assumption that public discourse itself is a key site of struggle in efforts to influence environmental attitudes, policies and actions. With Cox, the course also proceeds from the assumption that science is only one mode of discourse mediating our relationship to the natural world.

**Our task is to understand how participants in environmental communication struggle for control over discourse: the words and images used to perceive the natural world, define human relationships with that world, and negotiate individual and societal decisions about environmental issues.** Because discourse is a site of struggle, *all* players in environmental controversies—environmental advocacy groups, industry spokespersons, government officials, scientists, journalists, and interested citizens—should be seen as rhetors who attempt to influence personal opinions and public decisions through the invention of public discourse.

Since the struggle to shape meaning and action is so apparent in this area of public life, environmental rhetoric can be fertile ground for students of communication who wish to gain insight into the art of rhetoric. And since rhetoric constitutes the very means by which environmental issues are described, negotiated, silenced, and transformed, it is essential that future environmental professionals understand the rhetorical dimensions of the discourse that surrounds them.

**Course Objectives**

The course has two basic objectives. First**,** it intends to **introduce students to a broadly rhetorical perspective on public discourse**, a perspective which takes seriously the role that symbols, arguments, narratives, metaphors, audiences, identities and ideologies play in shaping meaning and action. We are interested in how rhetors “adapt ideas to people and people to ideas” (Bryant).

Second, the course intends to **improve students’ ability to engage and interpret environmental controversies from a rhetorical perspective**. We do so by shuttling between primary texts and scholarly literature that can inform our readings of those texts. Thus, there is a transactional relationship between the two objectives of the course: theoretical concepts will shed light on environmental texts, and those texts in turn can help us develop rhetorical theory. Ultimately, I want you to develop a more keen eye for the rhetorical strategies and patterns that influence meaning and action on environmental issues.

# Course Format

In spite of the size of the class, we will still approach it as a discussion-driven seminar. This means that *your* intellectual activity will be the central component of the course. This activity will take the form of oral presentations on scholarly literature; participation in class discussions of scholarly literature and primary texts; oral and written feedback on your colleagues’ work; and presentation of your own work. My role in this is to guide discussions, provide background on rhetorical theory and facilitate the development of your thinking about environmental rhetoric. *In order for this format to be productive, you need to attend and participate in all class sessions.*Debilitating illness and extraordinary emergencies should be the only reasons for missing class.

**Course Texts**

The texts for this course (articles and book chapters, and a few primary rhetorical artifacts) will be made available on Moodle.

Several of the articles come from a journal with which you need to be familiar. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* is the primary journal for scholars in this field. You can access it electronically via Mansfield Library; you can look it up under Journals, or if you are logged onto the UM system, you can get access to full-text PDFs of articles at: [http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t770239508~db=all](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content%3Dt770239508~db%3Dall)

**Other Texts**

All of you can benefit by immersing yourself in environmental texts beyond the formal assignments for the class. This is perfectly in line with an ecological approach to communication, by the way, which suggests that texts can only be understood through their relationship to other texts. For those of you who are new to environmental issues, it is especially important to begin the immersion process. Many of you are already doing this, but I want to underscore a few resources that I find particularly helpful.

 1. *Mountain West News*, a daily email news service sponsored by UM’s Center for the Rocky Mountain West. It is a collection of the day’s news about our region, and it is an excellent way of getting familiar with regional environmental issues (public land management, growth and sprawl, waste issues (toxic and otherwise), energy development, endangered species, etc.). You can subscribe at <http://mountainwestnews.org/Subscribe.aspx>

# 2. *High Country News*, a twice-monthly news magazine. It has more in-depth reporting and usually one long-form piece of journalism in each issus. Some articles are for pay-subscribers only, but many are available at [www.hcn.org](http://www.hcn.org).

# 3. *Yale Environment 360*, which bills itself as an “online magazine offering opinion, analysis, reporting and debate on global environmental issues.” It gets a wide range of contributors (not just journalists) and addresses an equally wide range of topics. Available at: [e360.yale.edu/](http://e360.yale.edu/)

4. *Dot Earth,* a blog by Andrew Revkin, science writer at the *New York Times.* Since everyone wants to influence “the paper of record,” he can stage a good deal of debate that can’t be addressed adequately in standard journalism. Also has a great “blogroll” of other blogs and websites on enviro issues. Available at: <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/>

5. *Grist Magazine,* a Seattle-based, non-profit, online environmental magazine. One of their mottos/slogans is “Gloom and doom with a sense of humor,” so it is more punchy than *Newsweek* and less literary than *Orion.* They also editorialize pretty freely. Their daily service sends short, snarky blurbs about the day’s environews, links to original sources, and columns and interviews on their site. You can subscribe at: <http://www.grist.org/cgi-bin/signmeup.pl>

6. *IECA website.* The International Environmental Communication Association is a relatively new organization devoted to the “practice, study, and teaching of Environmental Communication.” It is the primary scholarly organization for EC scholars but also includes environmental communication practitioners.

Around town, pay attention to the *Missoulian,* *Independent,* and *NewWest.net.* Comparing the coverage in these publications is a good way to start ridding yourself of flimsy notions of “bias” and replacing them with more nuanced ideas about point-of-view, objectivity vs. neutrality, dramatization, framing etc. Finally, bookmark the EVST Conservation Calendar or subscribe to their weekly e-news. <http://www.cas.umt.edu/evst/whats_new/calendars/calendar.cfm>

# Requirements and Evaluation

The course requirements fall into three categories:

Class Participation: 25% of final grade

Short Essays: 25%

Final Essay: 50%

The percentages are intended to convey the relative importance of different aspects of the course, not a mathematically precise formula. Basically, a solid final paper that has benefited from substantive revision is necessary but not sufficient for an A in the course. In my view, the primary function of grades at the graduate level is to signal whether you’re meeting the standard of graduate-level engagement. If your engagement with the course materials is thoughtful and sustained, and you write a paper that shows a similar kind of engagement, an A will be the “natural” result. If your participation in class does not reflect engagement with the readings, or you write your papers just to get them done, you will not earn an A.

*Short essays*: these will consist of written responses to readings, and perhaps some mini-rhetorical analysis. Each student will compose position papers that respond to the assigned readings for that day or week. The purposes of this assignment are to give you practice engaging scholarly arguments and to jump-start class discussion.

Typically, I will ask you to bring a copy to class on Monday and revise and post on Moodle on Tuesday so that others may read and reflect, and so that we have a record of the progression of our discussion throughout the semester. I will also ask a couple of you to take the lead in starting discussion based on your papers. I will assign you to either group A or B; the syllabus designates when you are responsible for producing a position paper. The papers should be about 3 pages, double-spaced*.* I will set up a discussion forum on Moodle

*Final paper*: this will be a well-crafted essay of ~20 pages that analyzes a primary text or set of texts that contribute to some environmental controversy. Plan to submit a complete draft of the essay in early November and revise it on the basis of instructor and peer feedback. I expect you to negotiate the topic with me in advance, and your grade will take into account the quality of your preliminary work on the essay (proposal, initial draft, oral presentation) as well as the finished product. Details and due dates will be outlined on the syllabus and in class.

Ideally, this essay would lead toward a) a paper that could be submitted to a scholarly conference, or b) a portion of your thesis/dissertation, professional paper, or portfolio. Please see me if you are considering submitting to a conference, since you will need to revise and develop beyond what you can accomplish during the semester. The ones I would suggest are:

NWCA (mostly student conference, Feb 1 deadline for April mtg in Coeur D’Alene)

NCA (national conference, March deadline for Nov conference in Washington, DC)

WSCA (regional conference, Sept deadline for Feb 2014 conference in Anaheim).

**Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarism, and deliberate interference with the work of others. It is the intellectual equivalent of fraud, and the aesthetic equivalent of plastic surgery. Like the former, it ruins the trust necessary for a well-functioning community; like the latter, it mistakenly sacrifices personal uniqueness and replaces it with a disfigured, false ideal.

At the graduate level, it is primarily a matter of conducting scholarship ethically: giving credit to others for their ideas, and providing fair and accurate representations of the discourse of others (your “data”). Go to the UM Student Life web page and read all about it. At the graduate level, there is no excuse for plagiarism; it results in an ‘F’ on the particular piece of work and, in most cases, a permanent ‘F’ on your course transcript. Bottom line: don’t do it.

**Deadlines**

I have found that deadlines tend to promote health and well-being, at least over the long run. Because I am a kind and caring individual, I intend to hold you to them. Incompletes will be given only in unusual circumstances.

**Autumn 2012 Schedule (Tentative)**

Aug 27/29 Course Introduction: What is Environmental Communication and What Are We Doing?

Robert Cox, “Study and Practice of Environmental Communication”

Robert Cox, “Nature’s ‘Crisis’ Disciplines: Does Environmental Communication Have an Ethical Duty?” *Env****i****ronmenta****l*** *Commun****i****cat****i****on: A Journa****l*** *of Nature and Cu****l****ture* 1.1 (May 2007).

Susan L. Senecah, **“**Impetus, M**i**ss**i**on, and Future of the Env**i**ronmenta**l** Commun**i**cat**i**on Comm**i**ss**i**on**/**D**i**v**i**s**i**on: Are We St**ill** on Track? Were We Ever?**”**, *Env****i****ronmenta****l*** *Commun****i****cat****i****on: A Journa****l*** *of Nature and Cu****l****ture* 1.1 (May 2007).

Steve Schwarze, **'**Env**i**ronmenta**l** Commun**i**cat**i**on as a D**i**sc**i**p**li**ne *of* Cr**i**s**i**s**,”** *Env****i****ronmenta****l*** *Commun****i****cat****i****on: A Journa****l*** *of Nature and Cu****l****ture* 1.1 (May 2007).

Kristin Shrader-Frechette, “An Apologia for Activism: Global Responsibility, Ethical Advocacy, and Environmental Problems.” In Ferre and Hartel, eds., *Ethics and Environmental Policy: Theory Meets Practice,* U of Georgia Press, 1994.

W Sept. 5 The Fundamental Problematic: Nature/Culture, Symbolic/Material (ALL)

William Cronon, “In Search of Nature” from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature,* ed. Cronon (1996).

Jenny Price, “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A,” (2006). <http://www.believermag.com/issues/200605/?read=article_price>

Julie Schutten, “Chewing on the Grizzly Man: Getting to the Meat of the Matter,” *Environmental Communication* 2.2 (July 2008).

Emma Marris, “Ragamuffin Earth,” *Nature* 460 (23 July 2009): 450-453

M Sept. 10 Pristine Wilderness and its (Ee)Constrcutions (A)

 John Muir, from “The Mountains of California” and “Hetch Hetchy Valley”

Christine Oravec “John Muir, Yosemite, and the Sublime Response: A Study in the Rhetoric of Preservationism” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67.3 (August 1981).

Christine Oravec, “Conservationism vs. Preservationism: The ‘Public Interest’ in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy,” *QJS 70* (1984).

Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, “Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17.3 (September 2000)

W Sept. 12 The Ecological Turn and Rhetorics of Pollution (B)

Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring*

Cheryl Glotfelty, “Cold War, *Silent Spring*: The Trope of War in Modern Environmentalism” in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring,* Ed. Craig Waddell.

Phaedra Pezzullo*,* from *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*, (U of Alabama Press, 2007).

W Sept. 12 From Environmentalism to Environmental Justice (A)

Giovanna Di Chiro, “Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice” from *Uncommon Ground*

Jennifer Peeples and Kevin DeLuca, “The Truth of the Matter: Motherhood, Community, and Environmental Justice” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 29.1 (Spring 2006)

Steve Schwarze, “Silences and Possibilities of Asbestos Activism: Stories from Libby and Beyond,” in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism,* Pezzullo and Sandler, eds., MIT Press (2006).

W Sept. 19 ‘Clean and Green:’ The Rhetoric of Ecological Modernization (B)

Brenden E. Kendall, “Personae and Natural Capitalism: Negotiating Politics and Constituencies in a Rhetoric of Sustainability,” *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture,* 2.1 (2008).

Ross Singer, “Neoliberal Style, the American Re-generation, and Ecological Jeremiad in Thomas Friedman’s ‘Code Green.’” *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture,* 4.2 (2010).

David Schlosberg, and Sara Rinfret, “Ecological modernisation, American style,” *Environmental Politics*, 17.2 (2008).

Sept. 24 & 26 Narrative Rhetoric: The Irreparable, Apocalpytics, and Jeremiads (ALL)

J. Robert Cox, “The Die is Cast: Topical and Ontological Dimensions of the Locus of the Irreparable,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982).

M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer, “Millenial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to Global Warming” from *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in America,* Eds. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown

John Opie and Norbert Elliot, “Tracking the Elusive Jeremiad: The Rhetorical Character of American Environmental Discourse,” in *The Symbolic Earth: Discourse and Our Creation of the Environment* (U of Kentucky, 1996).

Thomas Rosteck and Thomas S. Frentz, “Myth and Multiple Readings in Enviromental Rhetoric: The Case of *An Inconvenient Truth,” Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95.1 (2009).

Oct. 1/3 The Power of the Image

Jennifer Peeples, “Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes,” *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture,* 5.4 (December 2011).

Kevin DeLuca, from *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*

Terence Check, “The Framing of Radical Environmental Rhetoric: TV News Coverage of the Earth Liberation Front,” Conference on Communication and the Environment, 2003.

 Chris Russill, “Whale Wars: A Deeper Shade of Green on the Public Screen,” *FlowTV* 9.11 (2009). Available at <http://flowtv.org/?p=3465>

PROPOSAL DUE

Oct. 8/10 The Contours of Environmental Conflict

Jonathan Lange, “The Logic of Competing Information Campaigns: Conflict over Old Growth and the Spotted Owl,” *Communication Monographs* 60 (1993).

Mark P. Moore, “Constructing Irreconcilable Conflict: The Function of Synecdoche in the Spotted Owl Controversy,” *Communication Monographs* 60 (1993).

Brant Short, Earth First! and the Rhetoric of Moral Confrontation” *Communication Studies* 42.2 (Summer 1991).

Steve Schwarze, “Environmental Melodrama,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92.3 (2006).

The remainder of the course will be adapted to student interests. We will have 4-5 weeks of additional readings, paper workshopping immediately before and after Thanksgiving, and paper presentations during the last week of classes and finals.