

## COMM 475: Environmental Communication

#20690R

Spring, 2019

2:00-3:20 MW

ANN 405

*Professor:* Dr. Randy Lake

*Office:* ASC 206C

*Hours:* TBA

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*E-mail:* [rlake@usc.edu](mailto: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.)

### *Course Description:*

From the first Earth Day in 1970 to contemporary concern over global climate change, controversies over human impacts on the environment increasingly have informed public awareness and shaped public policy. This course introduces the emerging, exciting field of environmental communication. Its guiding question is: How can effective publics be constituted in order to promote awareness and understanding of environmental issues, meaningful public participation in environmental decision-making, and innovative, effective solutions to environmental problems? Specific topics include: the history of environmentalism; forms and forums of citizen participation; media coverage of environment, science, and risk; advocacy campaigns and movements, such as environmental justice; and discourses of science and industry, such as “green” marketing. Case studies of specific environmental controversies, past and present, elaborate these topics. Students are encouraged to put concepts and theories into practice by participating in efforts to address an environmental issue of their choosing.

### *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](http://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:*

- [Julia B. Corbett, \*Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages\* \(Island, 2006\)](#) [REQUIRED]
- [Judith Hendry, \*Communication and the Natural World\* \(Strata, 2010\)](#) [REQUIRED]
- Additional readings and materials as assigned. You are responsible for the Corbett and Hendry books; I will furnish PDFs of other readings. Among other materials will be videos, which may be assigned in advance or which we may watch together in class.

Readings (and videos) 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:* See also the instructions under “Assignments” on Blackboard.

- Class Project, 200 points (20%). This project may take one of three forms: (A) a traditional research paper, 12-15 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). DUE: XX
- Environmental Autobiography, 100 points (10%). DUE: XX
- Report on a Key Figure in Environmentalism, 150 points (15%). DUE: XX
- Midterm Exam, 150 points (15%).
- Final Exam (comprehensive), 150 points (15%).
- Group Discussion, 100 points (10%). Your task is to become expert on one class session’s readings and then lead the class in vigorous discussion of their main ideas. On the day of your presentation, you may elect to divide up the class into small groups and assign each group questions to work on, or you can show us some media samples and then have us analyze the samples using the ideas from the readings. Or you could do ANYTHING you can creatively devise that will get the class thinking and talking about these provocative readings. You must turn in a one-page summary to Blackboard providing three key ideas from the readings and five questions for class discussion. Hopefully, this will be done in teams; once enrollment stabilizes, we’ll work out arrangements and dates.
- Journal, 100 points (10%; 10 @ 10 points each).
- Participation, 50 points (5%). Included here are contributions in class, any reports that may be assigned, and any unannounced quizzes that may be given during the semester. The quality of your contributions is more important than the quantity.

### *Grading Policy:*

All assignments must be the student's original work and cannot have been used previously or concurrently in any other course. All assignments must be attempted and turned in to pass the course. 1000 total points can be earned in the class. Points will be given for each assignment, in the assumption that 90-100% of the points possible are comparable to an A; 80-89% are comparable to a B; 70-79% are comparable to a C; 60-69% are comparable to a D; and less than 60% are comparable to an F. In addition, points in the upper third of each range are comparable to a plus (+), while points in the lower third are comparable to a minus, indicating relatively stronger or weaker work. Final course grades will be calculated by summing total points earned and converting to a letter grade; conversion may employ the same curve (900-1000 = A, 800-899 = B, 700-799 = C, 600-699 = D, with appropriate pluses and minuses), but the instructor reserves the right to employ a different curve.

Points are assigned by applying the following criteria to the work being judged. My assumption is that each grade subsumes the requirements for the grade(s) below it, e.g. that B work meets and exceeds the requirements for C work, as follows:

- ❑ "A" signifies superior work that demonstrates original insight into the theories and materials presented in class, the application of these theories and materials, and comparisons among these theories and materials; an unusually clear and comprehensive understanding of course materials; and an articulate, polished, and correct communication style. This grade is difficult to achieve; it requires superior study habits and writing skills, and superior performance on all assignments and in attendance and participation.
- ❑ "B" signifies excellent work that demonstrates a better-than-average comprehension of the course material, as evidenced by greater detail and thoroughness in exposition, and by organized and solid, if flawed, writing or speaking. Even average students often can achieve this grade through hard work, such as utilizing a study group effectively, making a point in class of seeking clarification of difficult ideas or ideas they don't understand, conferring with the instructor during office hours, writing and revising multiple drafts of papers, and so on.
- ❑ "C" signifies adequate work, and is considered to be average. It is given for work that demonstrates a basic familiarity and understanding of the course materials, as evidenced by an ability to summarize main points correctly, to identify key figures and main ideas from memory on examinations, and to convey understanding in basic, readable prose. This grade should be achievable by any student with decent study habits and good time management skills.
- ❑ "D" signifies deficient work that demonstrates an inadequate grasp of the course materials, as evidenced by unfamiliarity with, confusion about, or misunderstanding of key ideas, persons, and events on examinations, and hastily and poorly written assignments. This grade is often a sign of inadequate study or application, and also may be a sign of a problem in attendance or participation that contributes to inadequate study.
- ❑ "F" signifies failing work that demonstrates an unacceptably poor familiarity with or grasp of the course materials, as evidenced by an inability to identify even basic ideas, person, and events on examinations and seriously deficient writing. This grade may indicate an unacceptable lack of participation in the class, such as excessive absences would produce. This grade may be assigned to any work that fails to meet the stated requirements of the assignment, no matter how well done this work otherwise might be. This grade will be

assigned to any work that violates the academic integrity standards and policies of the School or University. A grade of “F” in any part of the course should be taken as a sign of a problem in need of remedy.

Please bring any grade discrepancies (e.g., you were not given credit for a correct answer on an examination question) to my attention immediately. In the event of a grade disagreement (e.g., you believe that your answer should be counted as correct, or that you deserve a higher grade on an assignment), please: (a) wait 24 hours; and (b) submit your complaint/rationale to me in writing. Only those who submit an acceptable written justification will receive credit where credit is due.

### *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: **T**houghtful, **H**elpful, **I**nteresting, **N**ecessary, **K**ind.

Roll will be taken in every class. More than two absences for any reason may affect your course grade adversely, as much as **50 points per absence**, which could even 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 you may be considered absent that day.

### *Technology: “Topless,” or “Off the Grid”*

Some time ago, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported, “In Silicon Valley itself . . . 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.” Research supports this policy, including a study called [“Why you should take notes by hand – not on a laptop”](#); a *New Yorker* piece called [“The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom”](#); and the studies of the late Stanford professor (and USC Annenberg graduate) Cliff Nass, demonstrating the dangers of multitasking (summarized in [this NPR segment](#)). Or, read Nicolas Carr’s piece in the *Wall Street Journal* last year called [“How Smartphones Hijack Our Minds: Research suggests that as the brain grows dependent on phone technology, the intellect weakens.”](#) The *Los Angeles Times* published a similar article on this “off the grid” policy in 2015. Most recently, and even more importantly, [a new \(July 2018\) study in Educational Psychology](#) reveals that technology use during class is detrimental to long-term retention (as measured by lower exam scores), not only among users but among *all* students. Hence, like smoking, using technology harms not only you but, second hand, those around you.

**Accordingly, no electronic devices, including laptops, tablets, and phones, are allowed in class at any time except as an accommodation for a registered disability, or otherwise approved by me.** There will be times when we will want to use them, so please bring them to class but also *turn them off* before class. You can expect to be called out publicly for violating this policy, not because I am an unreasonable, unhip dude, but because the policy is in your own best interest.

### *Academic Integrity*

The Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism is committed to upholding the University's academic integrity code as detailed in the *SCampus* guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the academic integrity code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor.

If you have any doubts about what is and is not an academic integrity violation, please check with me. The University presumes that you are familiar with its standards and policies; should you be found to have committed a violation, ignorance of these standards and policies will **not** be accepted as an excuse.

### ***University Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems***

#### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

#### Support Systems:

*Student Counseling Services (SCS)* – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* – 1 (800) 273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)* – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center* For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance* – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support* Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs* Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

*Student Support and Advocacy* – (213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa)

*Diversity at USC* Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

*USC Emergency Information* Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety* – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

#### *Tentative Daily Syllabus:*

This preliminary schedule is organized by week, not by day, so some refinements and additions will be necessary as we proceed; the schedule after spring break is especially subject to revision. Many sessions will involve additional readings and other materials, which will be provided in advance.

#### **Week 1: January 7 & 9**

Introduction to the course and to environmental communication  
READ Hendry, Ch. 2

#### **Week 2: January 14 & 16**

Environmental Worldviews  
READ Corbett, Ch. 2 (Hendry, Chs. 3-4 supplementary)

#### **January 21**

MLK Jr. Day–NO CLASS

#### **Week 3: January 23 & 28**

Sources of Environmental Beliefs and Attitudes  
READ Corbett, Ch. 1; Hendry, Ch. 1; Corbett, Ch. 7  
DUE Jan. 23: Journal 1

#### **Week 4: January 30 & February 4**

Rhetoric and the Environment  
READ Hendry, Chs. 5-6  
DUE Jan.30: Environmental Autobiographies

#### **Week 5: February 6 & 11**

Rhetoric and the Environment, cont.  
READ Hendry, Chs. 7-8  
DUE Feb. 6: Journal 2

#### **Week 6: February 13 & 20\***

The Contemporary Nexus: Nature, Capital, and Democracy

READ Corbett, Chs. 4-5

DUE Feb. 13: Journal 3

\*February 18: Presidents' Day–NO CLASS

**Week 7: February 25 & 27**

Selling the Contemporary Nexus: Media

READ Corbett, Chs. 6, 8; Hendry, Ch. 11

DUE Feb. 25: Journal 4

**Week 8: March 4 & 6**

REPORTS Key Figures in Environmentalism

MIDTERM EXAM

DUE Mar. 4: Journal 5

**Week 9: March 11 & 13**

Spring Break–NO CLASS

**Week 10: March 18 & 20**

Public Participation and Environmental Advocacy

READ Hendry, Ch. 12; Corbett, Ch. 10

DUE Mar. 18: Journal 6

**Week 11: March 25 & 27**

Environmental Justice

READ Hendry, Ch. 13

DUE Mar. 25: Journal 7

**Week 12: April 1 & 3**

Attitudes and Behaviors

READ Corbett, Ch. 3

DUE Apr. 1: Journal 8

**Week 13: April 8 & 10**

Public Relations

READ Corbett, Ch. 9

DUE Apr. 8: Journal 9

**Week 14: April 15 & 17**

Case Study: "The Fire Next Time"

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

**Week 15: April 22 & 24**

Direct Action/Civil Disobedience

WATCH "30 Frames a Second: The WTO in Seattle"  
DUE Apr. 22: Journal 10  
DUE Apr. 24: Class Project

**May 6**

FINAL EXAM (2:00-4:00)