

Environmental Advocacy

COMM 306, Spring 2014

TTh 10-11:15, Cuneo 203

Dr. Mark Pollock (mpolloc@luc.edu)

This course explores the rhetorical means by which we influence the policies and practices that affect our natural and human environments. We will examine both current controversies and past ones. The course seeks to provide an understanding of the history of environmental advocacy in the U.S. and to help students develop practical skills relevant to entering into environmental debates. To that end, it explores the *communication* and *public forums* that are used to address environmental controversies in the U.S. and other nations. Decisions to protect wilderness, health, or the global climate result not just from the “facts” or environmental sciences alone. What we choose to do about the environment often arises from the influence of language itself as well as from the diverse voices in the *public sphere*—for example, citizens who speak at public hearings, “toxic tours” of polluted neighborhoods, corporate “clean coal” ads, social networking sites like 350.org (climate change), and popular films like *The Day After* or *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Course Outcomes

Students will become familiar in this class with:

- Ways that language (and images) influence our perceptions of “Nature”
- How individuals participate in environmental decisions, including a “Right-to-Know” and “Right to Comment”
- New uses of “collaboration” and consensus in resolving environmental conflicts
- News media “agenda setting” and “framing” of issues
- Advocacy campaigns by groups like the Sierra Club or Rainforest Action Network
- How what is an “acceptable risk” is socially constructed
- New grassroots movements for “environmental justice” and “climate justice”
- How global warming “skeptics” seek to discredit climate scientists’ communication
- Corporations’ use of “green marketing” and “Greenwashing”

Students also will develop skills that allow them to productively participate in environmental advocacy and make sounder judgments about the advocacy of others.

Required Readings

1. Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, 3rd edition (2009)
2. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*
3. Sakai readings: Other readings are available via Sakai under each week in the left-hand menu, either as links or as files to be downloaded; check the week entries as assigned readings may be updated weekly.

Assessments

Class participation (14%): Graded using criteria explained below in *Attendance and class participation*.

Journal (21%): at least 6 entries, at least three by Feb. 28, six by April 1.

Midterm exam (30%): Feb. 20 (in class portion); online portion due Feb. 25 by 10am.

Final paper (35%): Apr. 29 at 1pm. Students will write a 12-15 page research paper in which they critique and evaluate an environmental advocacy campaign or document, drawing from course concepts. Papers must follow the guidelines found in the MLA Handbook.

Rules

Academic integrity: Students are required to read the SOC Statement on Academic Integrity, found [here](#). Violations of the statement will result in failure of the course and will be reported to your academic dean.

Grade scale

100-92 (A), 91-90 (A-), 89-87 (B+), 86-83 (B), 82-80 (B-), 79-77 (C+), 76-73 (C), 72-70 (C-), 69-67 (D+), 66-60 (D), 59-0 (F)

Please check Sakai ahead of time—and during the semester—for all readings, quiz, and oral and written assignments, and midterm exam. Ordinarily, no “make-ups” will be given without a University or medical excuse.

Attendance and Class Participation

Regular attendance is expected, and roll will be kept. Occasionally, sickness, family emergencies, or a job interview may cause you to miss a class. It is a good idea to alert me ahead of time if you are able.

Class participation is not simply “showing up.” It’s also your active engagement in class discussions and/or raising questions about readings or lecture topics, as well as timely completion of short assignments and/or oral reports. The expectation is you’ll come to class having closely read this material, and ready to raise or respond to questions from the instructor or others about readings.

What questions arise for you from the readings or lectures? You can contribute to the class by commenting or taking a position on a lecture, or on readings you consider controversial or simply wrong! Such participation and active engagement enables us to create a “public sphere” in the class itself.

IMPORTANT NOTE: After two unexcused absences, one point will be deducted from your final course average for each absence.

You are responsible for all notes and films on days that you are absent. Please identify a classmate from whom you can get notes on the days you miss.

Office hours

By appointment, in person or via email or phone. I enjoy meeting and talking with students in this course. If you have any questions or concerns about the class, or want to discuss topics from the class, please contact me: mpolloc@luc.edu. (I have multiple accounts, so it’s possible that you may also receive a reply from me at <mailto:mpolloc@rcn.com> or isadreamalie@gmail.com.) If you are having difficulty with lectures or readings, it is best to discuss this with me early in the semester.