

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.

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*](#), 5th edition (2017)
- 2 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*
- 3 Sakai readings: Other readings will be available via Sakai.

Assessments

Class participation (25%): Graded using criteria explained below in *Attendance and class participation*.

Midterm exam (25%): February 28 (in class portion); online portion due February 28 by 7pm.

Final project (50%): April 30 at 7:00 pm. This project may take several forms, including: (a) a traditional research paper, 12-20 pages, which draws from course concepts to critique and evaluate an environmental advocacy campaign or document; (b) participation in an environmental organization or campaign that includes a written, analytical journal applying class concepts to your experience and activities; or (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). 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

100-94 (A), 93-90 (A-), 89-87 (B+), 86-84 (B), 83-80 (B-), 79-77 (C+), 76-74 (C), 73-70 (C-), 69-67 (D+), 66-60 (D), 59-0 (F)

Late assignments and makeup work

It is your responsibility to check Sakai for course updates and assignments. Ordinarily, no make-ups will be given without a University or medical excuse.

Attendance and Class Participation

Regular attendance is expected. Occasionally, sickness, family emergencies, or a job interview may cause you to miss a class. Alert me ahead of time if you are able. You are responsible for all material on days that you are absent. Please identify a classmate from whom you can get notes on the days you miss.

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, five points will be deducted from your final course average for each absence.

Office hours

By appointment, in person or via email or phone. My office is downtown and I am teaching at LSC this semester, so we will meet near campus. I enjoy meeting and talking with students in this course. If you have questions or concerns, or if you 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 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.

Disability Statement

Any student with a learning disability who needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.