

ENVS 411: Communicating Climate Change

Spring 2015 | T, Th, 12-1:50

Course website: <http://blogs.uoregon.edu/envs411s12crayne/>



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Course Description:

Climate change is an important issue, and yet many people don't seem to understand or care about it. Why? And what can be done? How can scientists, activists and educators communicate about climate change in a way that promotes public knowledge about the issue and inspires action? Drawing from science, sociology, psychology, education theory, and the humanities, this course will examine barriers to communicating climate change and assess a variety of real-life climate communication projects and consider how successful they are. As a culminating project, students will work in groups to develop and implement their own vehicle to "communicate climate change" to an audience of their choosing.

Note: This class takes as a given that climate change is real, problematic, happening now, and caused by humans. Little to no time will be spent in class explaining or defending the scientific evidence to this point. However, out-of-class resources (readings, review sessions, etc.) will be provided to any students who would like more scientific background knowledge.

Course Goals:

This course will:

- Assess climate change education from a variety of disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) perspectives, including that of sociology, psychology, education studies, environmental education, the arts, humanities, and science.
- Examine existing climate education projects in a variety of formats, including formal lessons, service learning, public outreach campaigns, and a variety of multimedia formats like documentary, art, print journalism, and more, and assess their various strengths and limitations.
- Consider that the barriers to successfully communicating climate change go beyond basic assumptions ("It's all the fault of Fox News," or "If people just heard the facts, they would understand and care"). Even very smart, highly educated, and "progressive" people struggle to communicate about and engage with the issue of climate change. In this course we'll examine some of the reasons why.
- Serve as a forum and a safe space to productively discuss what can often be a depressing and frustrating issue. Hopefully this class will provide a metaphorical selection of flashlights, floodlamps, headlights, and/or tiki torches that participants can carry with them into the often dimly lit world of climate activism.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Describe current trends in public understanding and concern related to climate change.
- Identify and assess various psychological, social, and cultural phenomena that affect the communication of climate change.
- Identify and assess various strategies for communicating and educating about climate change.
- Employ one or more of those strategies for communicating and educating about climate change—taking into account the various psycho-socio-cultural phenomena already discussed—and then evaluate it.

Course Requirements:

- **Participation – 10%** - This includes attendance, active participation in class discussion, in-class assignments, and displaying evidence of having done the reading and coming prepared for class. There may also be times in class when, before discussing a topic with classmates, students will be asked to write down their thoughts. These written responses may be collected for participation points, as well. Students may accrue up to 2 unexcused absences before losing points in participation.
- **Reflection Assignments – 20%** - Each week, students will complete an activity or writing assignment that challenges them to reflect on the week's readings and lecture topics. Responses will be submitted in the form of posts on our class blog, no later than Wednesday night of each week, at midnight.
- **Mini lessons – 10%** - Students will work in pairs to present one "mini lesson" in class on a climate-related subject of their choosing—for example: a current news event, a social justice issue, or an aspect of climate science. See assignment guide for more details.
- **Final project – 60%** - Students will work in groups of 2-4 to produce creative projects that communicate climate change to an audience of their choosing. There are a wide variety of approaches that can be taken. The goal is to take into account all the issues we've been discussing and strategically implement different techniques for communicating about this issue. To ensure that projects progress in a productive direction, groups will be required to submit a proposal prior to beginning work and will complete several "check-ins" with the instructor along the way.
 - Proposal and Rationale (20%) – Each group will turn in a short paper (3-5 pgs) describing their proposed communication project and explaining their rationale for their proposed content and delivery method. **Due Week 8.**
 - Implementation (20%) – Are you producing and screening a short film? Embarking on a Facebook campaign? Installing an interactive art exhibit? Developing a podcast episode? Writing a book of climate haikus? Projects must have an audience (i.e. you must actually distribute your book of climate haikus). You should also have something to "show" for it. So if your project doesn't involve some kind of physical product you can turn in (like a film clip or a book), you should submit some other kind of documentation, written, photographed, or otherwise. **Due Week 10.**
 - Presentation (20%) – Here you will share your successes and challenges with the class and get lots of feedback! Your presentation should be 15-20 minutes long. **Due Week 10.**

Academic Integrity

Consider why you are here, both in ENV5 411 and at college in general. Is it to do the bare minimum? To maintain your straight-A streak from sixth grade? Or to learn all that you can, from as many people as you can, so that you can be a better citizen, employee, and human being? Hopefully, the latter is your motivation (at least on good days). With that in mind, my expectations for you are that you:

- € Show up. Physically, intellectually, and socially.
- € Turn in your assignments on time.
- € Exercise academic integrity and present only your own, original work.
- € Ask for help if you need it. And the sooner, the better.

If you find yourself struggling, the campus offers lots of resources to help you out, including tutoring, counseling, and support for nontraditional students (parents, veterans, older students, etc.), under-represented groups, and just about anyone else who would like some support. See <https://education.uoregon.edu/student-academic-services/student-support-resources> or our class website for a complete list of resources. Success in this class is within reach!

Assigned Readings and Media

All readings and other assigned media will be posted on our class blog, on the calendar page.