EngL 3501: Public Discourse: Coming to Terms with the Environment

Tu/Th, 9:45 - 11 am
Lind Hall 215
3 credits
Spring 2011
Class #73836
Section 1

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Course Description
This course explores three significant environmental issues (biodiversity loss, toxic chemicals, and climate change) through the analysis of texts from three different literary genres (fiction, memoir, and nonfiction journalism). It focuses as much on issues of language and meaning as it does on the subjects these texts concern. Students examine the formal dimensions of these texts, as well as their social and historical contexts. In addition, students are introduced to the underlying scientific principles, the limitations of technologies, and the public policy aspects of each of these issues, in order to judge what constitutes an appropriate response to them. Students also learn how to identify and evaluate credible information concerning the environment. The course features many active learning components (small group discussions, work in pairs, and debates), as well as formal and informal writing assignments (4-5 page papers, short reading responses, and online discussion forums).

Course web site: https://moodle.umn.edu/
Class time: 40% lecture, 60% discussion
Work load: 75 pages of reading per week, 20 pages of writing per semester, 4 papers, 4 quizzes, 3 reading responses
Grade: 70% written reports or papers, 20% quizzes, 10% class participation
Exam format: short-answer quizzes

Liberal Education Requirements: Liberal Education courses help you investigate the world from new perspectives, learn ways of thinking that will be useful to you in many areas of your life, and grow as an active citizen and lifelong learner. This course fulfills the Liberal Education requirement for Literature core by exploring the relationship between language and meaning in literary texts, particularly through analysis of the “four coordinates of discourse”: author, audience, text, and context. In so doing, the course seeks to demonstrate the power of literature to enlarge our understanding of the human experience, transform our thinking and our lives, and help us imagine new possibilities for our society and the world. This course also fulfills the Liberal Education requirement for Environment theme by helping you become engaged with the science and policy surrounding the environment. In particular, it seeks to demonstrate how solving environmental problems will require not only science and technology but also individual action and public policy that is consistent with the ethics and values of society.

Objectives
What questions will the course help you to answer? How will you grow in knowledge and understanding? What intellectual abilities will the course help you to develop?

By the end of this course, you should be able to:
• recognize, understand, and connect basic facts and concepts involved in the study and practice of environmental communication in the public sphere
• collaborate with others to increase your knowledge and understanding of these facts and concepts
• identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information about both public discourse and controversial environmental issues
• analyze how communication about environmental issues is shaped by different worldviews (especially ethics) and rhetorical forms (especially literary texts, films, and the Internet)
• explain the value of communication in understanding and solving complex environmental problems
• communicate your ideas effectively in writing and in speaking
Student Learning Outcomes: This course also meets four of the University’s seven Student Learning Outcomes by helping you to:

- identify, define, and solve problems, through quizzes that assess your understanding of material from our textbook and my lectures concerning environmental problems and solutions, as well as through our in-class discussion of this material
- locate and critically evaluate information, through the Internet Analysis assignment
- communicate effectively, through your class participation, the writing of your papers and reading responses, and our in-class discussion of effective writing skills
- acquire skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning, through the writing of your papers and reading responses, and through our in-class discussion of public discourse about the environment

Texts
What reading materials will help you to pursue the goals of this course?

There are four required textbooks for this course:


We will also be reading a number of articles, which will be available on our course web site, listed above.

Grades
How will I evaluate the nature, quality, and progress of your learning?

I will award grades in this course according to the University of Minnesota’s Uniform Grading Policy:

- A: achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B: achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- C: achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
- D: achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
- F: represents failure and signifies that the work was either:
  - completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit, or
  - not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an “I” (Incomplete)

I will also award pluses and minuses, with the highest possible grade being an “A.”

An “I” (Incomplete) is assigned at the discretion of the instructor when, due to extraordinary circumstances, such as hospitalization, a student is prevented from completing the work of the course on time. An Incomplete requires a written agreement between instructor and student.

Students taking this course using the S/N option must complete all requirements, which will be graded using the A-F system. Students must earn a “C-” or better to receive an “S” (Satisfactory). Students earning a “D+” or worse will receive an “N” (No Credit).

Grades will be assigned in terms of a percentage of possible points according to the following standards:

- B+ >= 87%
- C+ >= 77%
- D+ >= 67%
- A >= 93%
- B >= 83%
- C >= 73%
- D >= 63%
- F < 63%

- A– >= 90%
- B– >= 80%
- C– >= 70%

I may choose to grade more generously, but I will not raise my standards above these. If at any time you have concerns about your grade, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Overall, I would say I am a “tough but fair” grader. I expect your work to be outstanding, and the way to get an “A” is to meet those expectations in every respect.
How to Calculate Your Grade
You can calculate your grade at any time by adding up all the points you received on your assignments to date and dividing that number by all the points you could have received on those assignments. (Grades for attendance and participation will not be calculated until the end of the semester.)

Credits and Workload Expectations
This three-credit course will require, for the average University of Minnesota undergraduate student, nine hours of academic work per week, averaged over the term, in order to complete the work of the course. Since the course meets for three hours a week, you should expect to spend an additional six hours a week on coursework outside the classroom. All grades are based on the quality of the work submitted, not on hours of effort.

Student Academic Success Services
University Counseling & Consulting Services (UCCS) offers learning support services, including classes, workshops, individual consultation and counseling, and study skills resources to help you be successful at the University. They have two Twin Cities campus locations: Minneapolis (340 Appleby Hall) and St. Paul (199 Coffey Hall). Phone: 612-624-3323. Web: http://www.uccs.umn.edu/

A Word About Quizzes
I don’t give quizzes that ask you to “guess what the professor is thinking.” Instead, I give quizzes and exams that attempt to evaluate the nature, progress, and quality of your learning. Yes, sometimes this involves asking you to identify, name, or define important facts, concepts, and ideas, but these will always be things we have read about or discussed, and I do this because developing a full understanding of our subject requires building a firm base of knowledge. At other times, I will ask you more probing “why” and “how” questions, which will allow you to demonstrate your understanding more thoroughly, and I may also ask you to apply your understanding to particular situations, or to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate evidence and conclusions, all of which involve the kind of higher-order intellectual activities that this course attempts to help you develop.

University Policies
What University policies apply to this course so that you will have a safe, productive, and fair environment for learning?

Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment by or toward a member of the University community is prohibited by Board of Regents policy. Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University’s Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 419 Morrill Hall.

Classroom Conduct
All students at the University have the right to a civil, productive, and stimulating learning environment. In turn, instructors have a responsibility to nurture and maintain such an environment. Lively, even heated, discussion is not disruptive behavior. Both instructors and students have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights of each other and an equally fundamental obligation to respect the instructional setting as a place for civil, courteous behavior. Students who disrupt the educational process because of discourteous, threatening, harassing, or other aggressive behavior will be removed from class.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. If you have a disability, please contact me and/or Disability Services (180 McNamara Alumni Center, [612] 626-1333 TTY/voice) to schedule an appointment with a Specialist. All requests will remain confidential. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty
Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else’s work as your own can result in disciplinary action. Any student found guilty of scholastic dishonesty in this course can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course and be reported to the University’s Office for Student Academic Integrity. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, please ask.
Requirements
What will you be doing to pursue the goals of this course?

To succeed in this course, you must complete the following requirements, which are worth a total of 1,000 possible points. For more information on this point system, see the section on grades.

1. Attendance and Participation (100 points)
Learning is social; it occurs in community. As a result, you will need to participate actively in this course on several levels, so that all of us can learn as much as possible from one another.

More than two unexcused absences will seriously affect your grade in this portion of the course, and a pattern of unexcused absences is cause for a grade of “F” or “N” in the entire course. If you know in advance that you are going to be absent on a particular day, please let me know. You are also responsible for documenting the legitimacy of any absence. You will not be penalized for absence due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. Such circumstances include:

- verified illness of you or your dependent
- participation in intercollegiate athletic events
- participation in activities sponsored by the University and identified as excused absences
- subpoenas, jury duty, military service, bereavement, and religious observances

Our time in class is limited and therefore valuable. For this reason you should:

- arrive on time and stay the entire class period. Students who arrive late or leave early disrupt the flow of class and may miss important information. You should not expect to pass this course if you arrive late or leave early on a regular basis.
- stow your cell phone, iPod, iPad, laptop, and other electronic devices. In order to learn as much as we can from one another, we must pay attention to one another, and that means no texting, emailing, or web surfing during class. Your cell phone must be off, away, and out of sight. If I see you texting during class, I will stop the class and ask you to leave. In addition, because I post most of my lecture notes online, you will not need a laptop.
- refrain from eating meals during class. You are welcome to bring a soda or light snack with you to class, but please be considerate of those around you.

In return, I will always begin and end class on time, will place any lecture notes online as soon as possible after the end of class, and will make myself available to answer your questions and discuss your concerns before and after class, whenever possible, in addition to during my office hours.

Your regular attendance and active participation matter because this course is not just about acquiring knowledge; it is also about improving your ability to engage in public discourse. This involves reading and listening carefully, interpreting what you have read or heard, and making your own contribution to an ongoing conversation. Your “participation grade,” therefore, is my attempt to evaluate how committed you have been to actively engaging others, observing how other people (myself and your fellow students) engage one another, and receiving feedback about your own engagement.

I will evaluate your class participation using the following scale:

A: frequent and courteous participation, with mature and thoughtful insights
B: above average participation and insight
C: moderate participation and reasonable insight
D: below average participation with little understanding of the issues
F: little or no participation

Halfway through the semester, I will ask you to evaluate your own class participation using this scale, as well as identify what you can do to improve. At the end of the semester, I will ask you to evaluate yourself again, as well as indicate what you have done to improve since mid-semester. I will then take this final evaluation into account when assigning grades in this portion of the course.

To receive the full 100 points for attendance and participation, therefore, you should read the assigned texts carefully, attend the class meetings conscientiously, and participate actively in class discussions, small-group work, and other in-class assignments.
2. Papers (600 points)
To encourage you to think deeply and communicate effectively about the subject of this course, at three points during the semester I will ask you to submit a 4-5 page paper discussing one of our main course texts. Each paper will be worth 200 points, and specific assignments will be given out in class.

Due dates and late papers: Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the schedule. If necessary, you may submit either your first or second paper late, but your final paper may not be submitted late. Late papers submitted after more than one week, as well as additional late papers, will have their grades reduced by ten percent for every class day they are late. Note that I cannot accept “computer problems” as an excuse for late papers. Please back-up your files and avoid waiting until the last minute to print your papers.

Submissions: Papers may not be submitted by email. You must bring a hard copy of your paper to class with you. I do, however, encourage you to print your papers on the reverse sides of previously used, recycled paper. Please keep a copy of each paper you write in case your original is somehow lost or destroyed.

Format: All papers must be typed, proofread, and spellchecked. The text should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and formatted in a standard-size font. Your pages should be numbered in the upper right-hand corner and stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Your name, the course number, my name, and the date should appear at the top left of the first page, and your title should be centered on the next line. Do not include a separate title page.

Documenting sources: If you quote from or refer to one or more of our course texts, lectures, or other outside readings in a paper, please cite them appropriately:

Within the body of your paper: Please indicate (a) the name of the author you are citing, (b) the title of the article or book the citation appears in, and (c) the page number on which it can be found. If you quote from or refer to a lecture from this course, simply place the word “lecture” in parentheses, followed by the date of the lecture, like so: (lecture, 1/20/11). Also, please do not drop quotations into your papers without providing context for them through the use of signal phrases. Here is an example of a quotation introduced by a signal phrase and cited with a parenthetical page reference (notice that the period falls outside the parentheses):
According to Roderick Nash in Wilderness and the American Mind, “the first immigrants approached North America with a cluster of preconceived ideas about wilderness” (8).

In a bibliography: You do not need to include a bibliography unless you are citing a source other than the texts used in this course. If you cite outside sources, use the citation style with which you are most familiar (MLA, APA, or Chicago). Please do not mix styles or create your own citation method. To cite a web page in your bibliography, simply give enough information that I can (a) locate it, and (b) evaluate its quality. If you are citing a single web page, give its author and/or title (if available), the web address, and the date you accessed it. If you are citing an article that is part of a database, and the address is quite long, you need only provide the short form of the address (for example, http://www.cnn.com/).

Grading criteria: I will grade your papers according to the following criteria:
1. Content: Did you follow the assignment instructions? Have you read and understood the course material? Is your analysis insightful?
2. Coherence and clarity: Is your paper focused and well organized? Do you clearly state your purpose, explain how you will fulfill that purpose, and devote your paper to doing so? Do you support your claims with evidence and address opposing arguments?
3. Format, proof-reading, and documentation: Did you follow the formatting guidelines? Is your paper free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling? Do you credit the source of borrowed ideas and statements appropriately?

The Center for Writing: The U of M Center for Writing offers free, individualized writing instruction, both face-to-face and online. 15 Nicholson Hall. Phone: 612-625-1893. Web: http://writing.umn.edu/
3. Quizzes (200 points)
Over the course of the semester I will give four quizzes, which will consist of several identification and short answer questions based primarily on the readings from our textbook and on my lectures. Each quiz will be worth fifty points, and partial credit will be given for partially correct answers. Quizzes will be given on the dates indicated on the schedule. Make-up quizzes will be given at my discretion and only if you can document the legitimacy of your absence.

4. Discussion Forums (60 points)
Another important part of our course are the Moodle Discussion Forums, which serve several purposes:

- they allow us to continue our discussions beyond the limits of the physical classroom
- they allow students who may not feel comfortable speaking up in class the opportunity to share their thoughts by another means
- they allow you the chance to try out your ideas informally on others before committing them to paper for your other assignments
- they improve your understanding and retention of our subject matter (i.e. your learning) by allowing you to actively engage with the course material rather than just passively reading or viewing it

To achieve these objectives, you must submit one discussion forum post and one discussion forum reply for each of the four parts of our course. All postings and replies are due by the beginning of class on the dates marked on the course schedule. You may, however, submit your postings and replies at any time prior to the deadline in each part of the course.

- Each discussion forum post should be approximately 300 words long and should be a thoughtful, considered reaction to one or more of the texts, films, or images in that part of the course. Your post should be based primarily on your own attention to and engagement with the course material. You might, for instance, explain why you agree or disagree with an author’s claims; provide additional historical or theoretical context about a film; describe something that confuses, shocks, or troubles you about an image; ask a question about a reading and then attempt to answer that question; compare one text or film to another; or provide new information about a subject addressed by some of the course material. Each discussion forum post is worth 10 points.

- Each discussion forum reply should be approximately 150 words long and should respond to another student’s post by building on it, disagreeing with it, or re-thinking it. Your reply should be a model of public discourse: careful reading of other ideas and opinions, respectful agreement or disagreement, and comments that reflect in-depth engagement with the topic. Each discussion forum reply is worth 5 points. You are, of course, encouraged to reply to more than one posting, but I cannot award points for more than one reply per forum.

Although it is not possible for me to provide feedback on every post and reply, I will let you know if your work falls below the minimum requirements for this course (that is, “C-level” work). At the end of the semester, I will evaluate your participation in all the discussion forums using the following scale:

- A: original, insightful, demonstrates rich understanding, very well written
- B: thoughtful, demonstrates good understanding, well written
- C: demonstrates some understanding, though may be hard to understand itself
- D: demonstrates little understanding, poorly written
- F: inadequate, very poorly written, or missing

5. Internet Analysis (40 points)
Your final assignment is an analysis of an Internet site related to the subject of our course. Given our interest in examining how new forms of Internet communication are influencing public debate about the environment, as well as our objective to collaborate with one another to increase our knowledge and understanding, I will ask you to work with another student to (a) identify and describe an Internet site of interest, (b) evaluate its worth according to a set of criteria (found at the top of our Moodle site), and (c) carefully and thoroughly assess its importance to public discourse about the environment. You may, for instance, choose to examine an environmental blog, an environmentally oriented web site, or one or more Wikipedia entries, Twitter accounts, or YouTube videos about the environment. (See the “Related Web Sites” on our Moodle site and the section of our textbook on “New Media and the Environment Online” [pp. 167-73] for more suggestions.) Your analysis should be 900-1,200 words long. Please write your analysis in full sentences and paragraphs (not bullet form) and post it to the submission forum at the top of our Moodle site. Be sure to put the names of both authors on your document. I will circulate a sign-up sheet in class with due dates for this assignment staggered throughout the semester.
Contact Me
How can you contact me to help you learn?

The best way to contact me is immediately after class; I would be happy to meet with you briefly to answer a question or elaborate on a point made in class. To contact me at other times, feel free to call me at my office, send me email, or stop by during my office hours. If my office hours are inconvenient for you, please let me know, and we can arrange to meet at another time. Even if you do not have a specific question, I encourage you to stop by my office at some point during the semester, so that I can get to know you better as a person and so that we can talk in more detail about the subjects that interest you. The main reason I am here is to help you learn and grow, so please take advantage of this opportunity and come see me. My contact information appears at the top of this syllabus.

Course Schedule
How is this course structured to develop your knowledge, understanding, and abilities throughout the semester?

This schedule is subject to change, so if you miss a class you should check with a classmate for the most current information. Lecture notes, handouts, and additional readings will be available on our web site.

1. What is environmental communication in the public sphere?

Tu 1/18 Welcome

Th 1/20 What is the public sphere?
Read: Cox, Introduction
   Al Gore, “The Assault on Reason”
   Anand Giridharadas, “Athens on the Net”
   Neil Swidey, “Inside the Mind of the Anonymous Online Poster” (optional)

Tu 1/25 What is environmental communication?
Read: Cox, chap. 1

Th 1/27 What is environmental rhetoric?
Read: Cox, chap. 2
DUE: Discussion Forum Post #1

2. How do we communicate about biodiversity loss in the public sphere?

Tu 2/1 How does environmental advocacy function?
Read: Cox, chap. 7

Th 2/3 How does green marketing interact with environmental advocacy?
Read: Cox, chap. 10
DUE: Discussion Forum Reply #1

Tu 2/8 Why are old growth forests such a powerful symbol of biodiversity loss?
Read: James Proctor, “Whose Nature?”
QUIZ #1

Th 2/10 Film: “The Last Stand: Ancient Redwoods and the Bottom Line”
Read: S.C. Gwynne, “Tree Ring Circus”
   Nathan Rushton, “Supreme Court rules in favor of EPIC in PALCO case”

Tu 2/15 How does a novel function as a form of public discourse?
Read: Matson, chaps. 1-6 (pp. 1-75)
   David L. Ulin, “The Lost Art of Reading”
DUE: Discussion Forum Post #2

Th 2/17 Read: Matson, chaps. 7-12 (pp. 76-156)
   Reviews of Julia Butterfly Hill, “The Legacy of Luna” on amazon.com
Tu 2/22  Read: Matson, chaps. 13-21 (pp. 157-246)
        Gregory Dicum, “Green Flaming SUVs”
In class: Mid-term reflection
DUE: Discussion Forum Reply #2

3. How do we communicate about human health risks in the public sphere?

Th 2/24  How do we measure and communicate risk?
Read: Cox, chap. 6
        Meghan Daum, “Of Planes, Bridges and Dire Spectacle”

Tu 3/1   How has the environmental justice movement addressed human health risks?
Read: Cox, chap. 8
PAPER #1 DUE

Th 3/3   What is Rachel Carson’s legacy?
Read: Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow”
        Sandra Steingraber, “Living Downstream of Silent Spring”
        Kirsten Weir, “Rachel Carson’s Birthday Bashing” (optional)
        QUIZ #2

Tu 3/8   How does a memoir function as a form of public discourse?
Read: Steingraber, foreword, chaps. 1-3 (pp. xi-58)

Th 3/10  Read: Steingraber, chaps. 4-6 (pp. 59-142)
        Mike Mitka, “New Report Argues Environmental Factors Are Underappreciated…”
        President’s Cancer Panel, “Reducing Environmental Cancer Risk” (optional)

Tu 3/15  Spring Break

Tu 3/22  Film: “Living Downstream”
Read: Web site for film
DUE: Discussion Forum Post #3

Th 3/24  Read: Steingraber, chaps. 7-10 (pp. 143-238)
        Jim Tarter, “Some Live More Downstream than Others” (optional)

Tu 3/29  Read: Steingraber, chaps. 11-epilogue (pp. 239-296)
DUE: Discussion Forum Reply #3

4. How do we communicate about climate change in the public sphere?

Th 3/31  How does science function in the public sphere?
Read: Cox, chap. 9
        Frank Luntz, “The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America”
        David Broder, “Seeking to Save the Planet, With a Thesaurus”

Tu 4/5   How does the media influence public discourse about the environment?
Read: Cox, chap. 5
PAPER #2 DUE

NOTE: The second annual English Undergraduate Conference will be taking place April 7-8, 2011 in 150 Lind Hall. Students will present academic papers, research findings, and creative writing for 10-15 minutes each. For more information, go to: http://english.cla.umn.edu/ugrad/conference.html
Th 4/7  Why is climate change such a “perfect storm” of public discourse about the environment?
Read: Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, “The Death of Environmentalism”
John M. Broder, “Climate Change Doubt Is Tea Party Article of Faith”
Leslie Kaufman, “In Kansas, Climate Skeptics Embrace Cleaner Energy”
Gelobter, et al., “The Soul of Environmentalism” (optional)
QUIZ #3

Tu 4/12  Film: “An Inconvenient Truth”

Th 4/14  How does a documentary film function as a form of public discourse?
Read: Al Gore, “We Can’t Wish Away Climate Change”
William J. Broad, “From a Rapt Audience, a Call to Cool the Hype”

Tu 4/19  How does science journalism function as a form of public discourse?
Read: Kolbert, chaps. 1-4 (pp. 1-90)
DUE: Discussion Forum Post #4

Th 4/21  Read: Kolbert, chaps. 5-7 (pp. 91-149)

Tu 4/26  Read: Kolbert, chaps. 8-afterword (pp. 150-199)
DUE: Discussion Forum Reply #4

Th 4/28  How can environmental communication change behavior?
Read: The Psychology of Climate Change Communication
Climate Communications and Behavior Change
Futerra Sustainability Communications web site (optional)

Tu 5/3  What role do universities play in public discourse about climate change?
Read: Cox, Epilogue
Judith Rodin, “The University as Discourse Community”
Ann Rappaport and Sarah Hammond Creighton, “A Time for Action”
QUIZ #4

Th 5/5  Last class
In class: Course evaluations
PAPER #3 DUE (no late papers)