

ENGL 3501

Public Discourse: Coming to Terms with the Environment

Tu/Th 11:15 - 12:30 pm
 Pillsbury Hall 214
 3 credits
 Spring 2026
 Class # 54347
 Section 1

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Course Description

This course explores significant environmental issues (such as environmental justice, toxic chemicals, and climate change) through the analysis of texts from diverse literary genres. 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.

Course 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:

- *explain* your personal relationship to “the environment,” however you define it
- *describe* how and why public discourse about the environment has changed over time
- *appreciate* the various strategies that have effected change in environmental discourse and the relationship between individual action and social change
- *analyze* how public discourse about environmental issues reflects the diversity of human experience (especially differences in race, class, and gender) and is shaped by different worldviews (especially ethics) and rhetorical forms (especially literary texts, films, and the Internet)
- *identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use* information about both public discourse and environmental issues
- *collaborate* with others to increase your knowledge and understanding of these subjects
- *communicate* your ideas effectively in writing and in speaking

Degree Requirements

- *English major and minor*: This course fulfills the requirement for an upper-division elective for the English major and an elective for the English minor.
- *Other degrees and programs*: This course also fulfills requirements for several other degrees and programs:
 - Biology, Society, and Environment B.A.
 - Climate Justice Education Minor
 - Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management B.S.
 - Sociology B.S. [“Supportive Field Course” for “Policy Analysis” sub-plan]
 - Sustainability Studies Minor
 - Technical Writing & Communication B.S. [option for the “Environmental Science” sub-plan]

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.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course meets five of the University’s seven Student Learning Outcomes by helping you to:

- *identify, define, and solve problems*, through the development of your final project
- *locate and critically evaluate information*, through the research for your final project
- *understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies*, through our discussion of the different perspectives on the environment, especially race, class, and gender
- *communicate effectively*, through your class participation, writing assignments, and final project presentation
- *acquire skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning*, through the writing assignments and final project, which encourage you to reflect on the role of ethics in private and public life

CLA Core Career Competencies

This course helps you develop several of the CLA Core Career Competencies, especially:

- *ethical reasoning and decision-making*: This competency incorporates assessing your own personal and moral values and perspectives as well as those of other stakeholders and integrating them into an ethical framework for decision-making. You will develop these skills as you consider the ethical challenges related to our environmental choices and the changes that individuals and organizations can make to help build a healthier society.

Texts

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

Most of our readings will take the form of articles and chapters that will be available on our Canvas site.

Instructor

How will my background help you achieve your goals in this course?

I was born in upstate New York, to parents with French-Canadian, Irish, and Dutch ancestry, but I grew up in northern New Jersey. For the last 28 years I have taught at the University of Minnesota, where I am a Professor of English. I received my B.A. in English at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and my M.A. and Ph.D. in English at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. I currently teach undergraduate and graduate courses in the environmental humanities, literary nonfiction writing, and sustainability studies. Three of my proudest achievements have been helping to co-organize the University’s Environmental Humanities Initiative in 2016, receiving the Morse-Alumni Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education in 2017, and receiving the Arthur “Red” and Helene B. Motley Exemplary Teaching Award in 2022. My research interests concern American environmental literature and its relationship to the

ideas of nature, culture, place, and food. I am the author of two books, *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement* (2004) and *The Farmer, the Gastronomer, and the Chef: In Pursuit of the Ideal Meal* (2024), as well as the editor of several others, including *Our Neck of the Woods: Exploring Minnesota's Wild Places* (2009). I am also a Past President of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), and I have been a Senior Fellow at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Germany, a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Turin and University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy, and a Visiting Professor at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon in France.

Names and Pronouns

What should we call one another?

Please tell me how you would like to be referred to in class. I will happily address you by the name and gender pronoun you use, or by any other form of reference, and I would be glad to inform class members to do the same. I encourage you to call me by my first name (most people do), but you are welcome to call me “Professor Philippon” if you prefer. I use he/him pronouns. Note that class rosters will list your legal name unless you [enter a different one](#) through your OneStop account.

Contact Me

How can you contact me to help you learn? What are my office hours?

The easiest 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, or to arrange to meet at another time, email is the best way to reach me. I will do my best to respond to you within 24 hours during the work week. My contact information appears at the top of this syllabus.

I do not keep office hours, but I would be glad to set up a time to talk with you, in whatever way is most convenient (email, phone, video, etc.). Even if you do not have a specific question, I encourage you to talk with me at some point during the semester, so that I can get to know you better as a person and learn more about the subjects that interest you, since the main reason I am here is to help you learn and grow.

Feedback and Grading

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

Feedback

I will attempt to provide feedback to you in multiple ways, in person and online. Sometimes this feedback will be for the entire class, and sometimes it will be for you individually. I will also solicit feedback from you about how the course is going on multiple occasions, so I can improve the course and help you learn more effectively.

Grading

Grades are an admittedly imprecise attempt by me to measure the nature, quality, and progress of your learning. You should consider the course requirements listed below, therefore, as a means to provide me with *evidence of your learning* — that is, evidence of your acquisition of the knowledge and skills this course is meant to help you cultivate.

I will award grades in this course according to the University of Minnesota's [Grading and Transcripts](#) policy:

- A: achievement that significantly exceeds expectations in the course.
- B: achievement that is above the minimum expectations in the course.
- C: achievement that meets the minimum expectations in the course.

D: achievement that partially meets the minimum expectations in the course. Credit is earned but it may not fulfill major or program requirements.

F: represents failure in the course and no credit is earned

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

I will assign an "I" (Incomplete) only in extraordinary circumstances, such as hospitalization. An Incomplete requires a written agreement between us, and it will automatically become an "F" at the end of the next semester of your registration if you do not complete the course requirements by that time.

If you are taking this course using the S-N option, you must complete all the requirements, which will be graded using the A-F system. You must earn a "C-" or better to receive an "S" (Satisfactory). If you earn a "D+" or worse, you will receive an "N" (No Credit). If you wish to change from the A-F grading system to the S-N system, or vice-versa, you must do so within the first two weeks of the semester.

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.

Although I will be posting grades on Canvas, please keep in mind that the "total" grade shown on the site throughout the semester may not be an accurate prediction of your "final" grade. This is because the "total" grade does not reflect your performance on the assignments and activities that will not be evaluated until the end of the semester. These include your attendance and participation, your reading responses, and your final project. Please consider these when using Canvas to see "how you are doing in the class."

University Policies and Resources

What University policies and resources exist to help you succeed in this course?

Because the number of University policies and resources that apply to academic courses has become quite large, the English Department has compiled a [list of these](#) on its web site. These include important policies on:

- Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences
- Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty
- Student Conduct Code
- Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action
- Sexual Harassment
- Disability Accommodations
- Mental Health and Stress Management
- Academic Freedom and Responsibility

These also include a wide range of resources to support your learning, such as the [Tutoring & Academic Success Center](#), [Student Writing Support](#), and [Student English Language Support](#). Please familiarize yourself with these policies and resources, which will help you succeed in this course.

Basic Needs Security Statement (adapted from Sara Goldrick-Rab)

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, who lacks a safe and stable place to live, or who needs assistance receiving healthcare or paying their expenses, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the [Office for Student Affairs](#) for support. (Click on “Basic needs - housing, food, healthcare, financial.”) Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so, so I can provide any resources I may possess.

Academic Freedom (from Alan Lightman’s “The End of the Enlightenment?”)

“Academic freedom ... is the freedom to express and debate ideas without fear of censorship or reprisal. It is the freedom to explore. It is the freedom to let the imagination wander. It is the freedom to exchange knowledge with colleagues and others. It is the freedom to question authority and received wisdom. It is the freedom to test ideas against experiment and to reject those ideas that fail the test. It is the freedom to be honest, even if that honesty challenges prevailing views. It is the freedom to be one’s true self.”

AI Policy

The writing assignments in this course are intended to help you learn the course material and practice various skills, including thinking critically and creatively, making connections, and structuring an argument. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT, make it difficult for me distinguish between *your* intelligence and artificial intelligence and thus may undermine the validity of any grade I assign to your work. In addition, AI has the potential to exhibit bias, spread misinformation, and produce inaccurate and/or incomplete statements. **For these reasons, I do not allow the use of AI tools to complete the writing assignments for this course.** You may use AI as a *research* tool, as long as you check to ensure the accuracy of any information it provides. ***But you may not use AI to generate text you claim as your own.*** (Using basic grammar- and spell-checkers is fine.) In short, I want to read your work, not the work of a computer. Failure to follow this policy will be considered a form of scholastic dishonesty.

Course 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 grading.

Summary of Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (100 points)
2. Reading Responses (200 points)
3. Practice Papers (450 points)
 - a. Environmental Memoir (150 points)
 - b. Science Story Pitch (150 points)
 - c. Climate Journal (150 points)
4. Final Project (225 points)
5. Learning Assessments (25 points)

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 we can all work together to broaden our knowledge and deepen our skills.

Attendance: Your regular attendance is important, because we cannot learn from one another if you are not here. If you know in advance that you are going to be absent on a particular day, please let me know. I follow the University’s policy on [Excused Absences and Makeup Work](#). ***Note that a pattern of unexcused absences is cause for a grade of “F” in the entire course.***

Illness: If you experience [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or any potentially infectious respiratory illness, you should not come to class. Such an absence is an excused absence. Boynton Health offers [PCR testing for COVID-19](#). To make an appointment in the Gopher Quick Clinic or Urgent Care, call 612-625-3222.

Community Guidelines: Throughout the semester, we will get to know each other's ideas, personalities, and foibles—both in writing and in person. To make the most of our time together, therefore, I expect only the best of what you have to offer. Ideally, your mind, your courtesy, and your sense of humor should all be operating in top form. You should be eager to learn and grow, open to constructive criticism, and willing to help and collaborate with others. In return, I will always begin and end class on time, will place any course materials online as soon as possible, and will make myself available to answer your questions and discuss your concerns before and after class, whenever possible, in addition to by appointment.

Technology: You are welcome to use a laptop, tablet computer, or cell phone for course-related activities, but sometimes I will ask you to put away all technology to achieve our learning objectives. Please respect me and your fellow students by not using your devices for other purposes (such as non-course-related email, social media, web surfing, and texting). Disrespectful use of technology distracts you and me from the experience we are trying to have together. In particular, studies have shown that putting your cell phone away can increase your comprehension, lower your anxiety level, and foster your mindfulness. Because disrespectful use of technology interferes with learning, it is considered a violation of the Student Conduct Code.

Informal Assignments: As part of your attendance and participation score, I may also ask you to submit other kinds of writing, to work in teams and give informal presentations, and to connect with one or more classmates outside of class as needed.

Why Attendance and Participation Matter: 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. It is about helping you find your voice, showing that every voice matters, and practicing the skills of civic participation. 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.

Non-Verbal Participation: Because I recognize that some of your participation will occur in ways that may be difficult for me to judge—such as in small-group discussions, in conversations with one or more other students, and in other unstructured activities—I would also be happy to evaluate your non-verbal participation (or “active listening”) by reviewing the notes you take in class. Although active listening cannot take the place of actively contributing to a learning community, it can be an indicator of the depth of your engagement. Please see me if you wish to take advantage of this option.

Grading Criteria: At the end of the semester, I will grade your participation according to 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

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. Reading Responses (200 points)

Purpose: To prepare for our class meetings, I would like you to write a series of ten weekly reading responses over the course of the term, in response to our assigned texts. These responses serve several purposes:

- they help you actively engage with the course material and thus improve your understanding and retention of our subject matter (that is, your learning)
- they provide a means for you to share your thoughts with the other students in the class, which not only allows us to exceed the limits of our class meetings but also allows students who may not feel comfortable speaking up in class the opportunity to share their thoughts by another means
- they help me to know your interests in advance of our class meetings, so I can tailor our class discussions accordingly

Instructions: Each reading response should be approximately 150-200 words long (about half a double-spaced page) and should be a thoughtful response to one or more of the texts you have read for class that day. You may certainly write more than this, but 150 words is the minimum. You might, for instance:

- explain why you agree or disagree with a reading
- provide additional historical or theoretical context about a subject
- describe something that confuses, surprises, or troubles you
- ask a question, and maybe even attempt to answer that question
- compare one reading to another
- provide new information about a subject

I may post discussion prompts for some of the readings, but in general I would prefer that these responses reflect your own interests and questions. ***Pro Tip: If it's not clear from your reading response whether or not you have actually read the text, you're probably not going into enough detail.***

Reading responses should be submitted to the appropriate "Discussion Forum" on our Canvas site by 9 a.m. on the days posted on the Course Schedule. **Please post them as text entries, not file attachments.**

Follow-up Responses: Either before or after each of our class sessions, I also encourage you to post at least one follow-up response to something you read, heard, or reflected on since you posted your initial Reading Response. For example, this could be:

- an addition to or reconsideration of your original response
- a reaction to something someone else has posted
- a response to new information you have learned
- a development of something said in class

This need not be an extensive response. Think of it instead as the equivalent of a "minute paper/muddiest point" assignment you might be asked to complete as a form of in-class writing. Writing a follow-up response (either to our in-class discussion or in response to other people) is optional, but I will take any follow-up responses you write into account when calculating final grades.

Feedback and Grading: Although I will read these responses regularly, I will not be providing written feedback on individual entries. Instead, I will watch for trends in the length, number, timing, and quality of your responses throughout the semester, and I will let you know if you need to improve. Each reading response will be graded pass-fail and is worth 15 points (10 responses x 15 points = 150 points). At the end of the semester, I will award an additional grade of up to 50 points for overall merit, based on the following scale:

- A: substantial, detailed, and/or insightful engagement or analysis
- B: some engagement or analysis, perhaps with some summary
- C: mostly summary, with little engagement or analysis
- D: shorter than required, little to no understanding, and/or poorly written
- F: a pattern of missing or inadequate responses

Late Responses: Because late reading responses cannot help you or me prepare for class discussion, it is important that most of your responses be submitted on time. **You may submit up to two late responses with no penalty;** any additional late responses will receive no credit, with the exception of legitimate absences, as defined by University policy. *Late responses must be submitted within a week of the deadline; after a week, each discussion forum will be closed for submissions.* Please plan your reading and writing accordingly.

In-class Responses: Depending on the needs of the class, I may ask you to complete some of your Reading Responses in class instead of online. I will announce any changes to the schedule in advance of the due dates.

3. Practice Papers (450 points)

I call these “practice papers” not because they are practice for some “real thing” that comes later (no more than college is practice for the “real world”), but because they embody two fundamental definitions of *practice*: (1) “the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it,” and (2) “repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). By writing these papers, therefore, you are both developing your understanding of a genre by *practicing it* and developing your writing and thinking skills by *practicing them*.

- a. **Environmental Memoir (150 points):** To help you understand the memoir genre, I would like you to submit an environmental memoir recounting and analyzing some aspect of your own personal engagement with the natural environment, however you define it. The primary purpose of this memoir is *recounting* (to help you to formulate your own environmental narrative), but a secondary purpose is *analyzing* (to get you to think critically about the content of that narrative). Your environmental memoir should be 750-1,000 words (approx. 3-4 pages) long.
- b. **Science Story Pitch (150 points):** To help you understand the complexities of science writing, I would like you to pick a topic in environmental science and/or public health that you think would make a good story for a popular audience and pitch that story to an editor. Note that you are *not* writing the story itself but describing how you *would* write that story if you had the time and resources to do so. Your pitch should be 750-1,000 words (approx. 3-4 pages) long..
- c. **Climate Journal (150 points):** Because understanding climate change requires understanding not only *place* but also *time*, I would like you to write two entries in a place-based climate journal: one in late winter and one in early spring. Your entries may also be accompanied by drawings, photos, and/or videos if you wish. Each journal entry should be 500-750 words (approx. 2-3 pages) long and is worth 75 points.

These practice papers should be formatted in 12 point Times Roman (double-spaced with 1-inch margins) and submitted as PDF files to our Canvas site on the days indicated on the Course Schedule.

While your papers should primarily express your own ideas, ***your memoir must incorporate the memoir-writing techniques we discuss in class, and your science story pitch and climate journal must include information from the reading materials and lectures***, so that they demonstrate your engagement with the ideas of others. *This is how you will show me evidence of your learning.* When you include material from other sources, be sure to indicate this with quotation marks (unless you are paraphrasing) and include an appropriate citation.

More information about all of these papers, including grading criteria, is available on our Canvas site.

Late Papers: For every due date listed on the syllabus, there is a 24-hour grace period, during which you may submit your paper late, no permission needed, no questions asked. If you need more time than this, you may request (via email or in person) up to a one-week extension with no consequences. If you do not request an extension, or you submit your paper after the extended deadline, your submission will be considered late, and its grade will be reduced proportionate to how late it was submitted. (I generally deduct 5 points per day it is late, but the exact amount will vary by personal circumstances.)

4. Final Project (225 points)

What is the final project?

The final project, or “passion project,” is a chance for you to learn about a topic related to our course in a self-directed way, so that your learning is more likely to stick with you, be meaningful to you, and reflect your strengths as a learner. It provides an opportunity to engage our subject more deeply, so that your choices help to create the kind of experience you have in the course, rather than me just saying, “Read these texts, write these papers, take these quizzes, and let’s call that learning.” Instead, I’m hoping you say, “Hey, I’m inspired by this course to pursue this subject, which I think is super cool, and look at all this awesome stuff I learned in the process.” So it’s not so much a reflection on the things we’ve read and discussed in class (that’s what the other assignments are for) so much as it is a chance to use what we’ve read and discussed as a jumping off point for a further, more focused exploration of a subject that’s meaningful and/or intriguing to you. It should, in short, allow you to follow your passion.

What form should it take?

The form your project takes is largely up to you, although I will work with you to make sure it includes SMART goals (or goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound), keeping in mind that this framework will not necessarily apply to projects that are more about exploring ideas or creating art. You may, for example, choose to:

- complete a personal activity involving a course topic, such as tracking your food intake, trash generation and/or collection, energy use and/or savings, social media sabbatical/digital detox, etc.
- investigate a subject and/or interview a scientist, subject expert, policy-maker, or other relevant individual about it
- review one or more books related to a major theme of our course
- compose a manifesto, white paper, or work of creative writing (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama)
- record a documentary [video](#) or [podcast](#)
- create a publicly accessible, digital, web-based, visual, or multi-[media](#) project (e.g., [website](#), blog, slideshow, Infographic, and/or [StoryMap](#))
- develop a sample museum exhibition, art installation, or public education and/or social marketing campaign on Instagram or TikTok
- volunteer for a non-profit, government agency, or other organization that accomplishes something related to the environment that you support
- create a children’s book, comic book, art project, or other illustrated text
- pursue a collaborative project with one or more other members of the class

Ideally, your final project should be a challenge for you, involving either a level of sacrifice, a degree of emotional or physical discomfort, or a difficult task you would not normally undertake. It should also not be something you received credit for in another course. Be creative. Push the envelope. Knock yourself out.

How should I decide what to do?

Ask yourself these questions:

- **What kind of process do you most enjoy?** Given that this assignment is as much about process as it is about product, one helpful way to approach it is to ask what kind of process you most enjoy: the design process (building a prototype), the artistic process (creating an art project), the documentary process (telling a story), or the inquiry-based process (answering a question). In this sense, the final project is a form of “Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning” (POGIL), which seeks to empower you to explore a subject that interests you in more detail, in whatever way you wish.
- **Do you want your project to have a personal component?** This is completely fine, but keep in mind that your project will still need to connect your personal experience to some larger social or cultural context.

- **Do you want to work with other students?** This is not required, but some of the best projects I have seen were collaborative projects in which several students contributed their unique talents toward achieving a single goal. I will work with your group to ensure that you collaborative effectively, allocate tasks equitably, and are graded fairly as individuals and as a group.
- **Do you want to work with a community partner?** We can work with the [Center for Community-Engaged Learning](#) to help you identify a community partner for your project, if you would like to pursue this opportunity.

How should I document my learning?

To document what you learned, you will need to give ten-minute presentation to the class at the end of the semester that answers the following five questions:

1. What did you do, where, and when?
2. *Why* did you do it? What motivated you? What was the purpose of your project?
3. What was the hardest thing about it?
4. What did you learn about our subject by doing it?
5. What did you learn about yourself and what you value by doing it?

In your presentation, be sure to share any research you did about your topic, provide relevant context for any action you took, and report any data you collected to the class.

If you wish to use slides in your presentation, please share these with me *before* the presentations begin, either by sharing your Google Slides, logging in to your account (bring your phone to Do the Duo), emailing me your PowerPoint or Keynote file, or bringing a flash drive with your files on it. There will not be time to swap out laptops. Please plan to use the whole ten minutes and *talk with us* about your slides, not *read from* them. (An exception is if you are reading from a paper or story you wrote for your project.) You should also plan to practice your presentation to be no more than ten minutes long. Don't just plan to "wing it," as ten minutes go much faster than you realize!

Everyone should be prepared to present on the first day of presentations. I will first take volunteers, then use a random number generator to select the people who will present each day.

What milestones do I need to complete?

To help you achieve your goal, I will ask you to submit two "milestones" during the semester. Each of these components has its own point value:

- **Milestone #1:** A 1-2 page, single-spaced proposal, along with a 1-2 page, single-spaced annotated bibliography. (15 points)
- **Milestone #2:** One-page, single-spaced progress report explaining what remains to be done, including (if appropriate) an excerpt from your project-in-process. (10 points)
- **Final Project Presentation:** Due during the last few weeks of class. (200 points)

Although you may submit your proposal and progress report late, following the policy for your reflection papers, I strongly encourage you to submit them on time, so that you do not fall behind in your work and so I have time to give you feedback.

Grading criteria: I will grade your project and your presentation holistically using the following criteria:

- **Content:** Is your project insightful? Does it demonstrate a rich understanding of the material it examines? Is it inspiring, impressive, and something you are proud to call your own?
- **Coherence and clarity:** Is your project focused and well organized? Does it have a clear purpose, and is it devoted to fulfilling that purpose? If you are making an argument, do you support your claims with evidence and address opposing arguments? If your project is creative or artistic, is it original and interesting? Does it compel our attention?
- **Execution vs. difficulty:** Was your goal ambitious, even if the result was imperfect?

- **Presentation:** Is your presentation thoughtful, well organized, creative, and/or original, as appropriate? Do you demonstrate good verbal and non-verbal communication skills (clarity, volume, pacing, tone, eye contact, gestures)? Do you manage your time well and engage your audience?
- **Slides:** Are your slides clear, readable, and well designed? Are they free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling? Do you credit the source of borrowed ideas, statements, and/or images appropriately?

Please Note: I will award only whole letter grades (not “plus” or “minus” grades) for the final project using the following scale: A (190 points), B (170 points), C (150 points), D (130 points), F (0 points). Outstanding final projects may result in a higher overall final grade, as they are meant to demonstrate your learning throughout the semester.

5. Learning Assessments (25 points)

Three smaller assignments (formatted as Canvas quizzes) help me understand how I can create the most effective environment to help you learn throughout our course:

a. Initial Assessment (5 points): At the beginning of our course, I will ask you five questions:

- how did you learn about the course, and why did you decide to take it?
- what are your fears and concerns (if any) about the course?
- what do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses as a learner?
- what barriers (if any) to effective learning do you face this semester?
- anything else I should know?

b. Mid-semester Reflection (5 points): Halfway through the semester, I will ask you to complete a mid-semester reflection, evaluating the course, your participation in it, and anything you can do to improve your learning.

c. Self-evaluation (15 points): 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, and I will take this self-evaluation into account when assigning final grades.

Course Schedule

How is this course structured to develop your knowledge, understanding, and abilities?

This schedule is subject to change, so if you miss a class you should check with a classmate for the most current information. Readings, assignments, lecture notes, and handouts are all available on our Canvas site. All readings should be read before the class on the day they appear.

1. Environmental Discourse in 2026: Disinformation & Distraction

1/20	Week 1.1	Welcome
1/22	Week 1.2	No class
1/27	Week 2.1	Lies & Disinformation: Is Our Public Discourse Irretrievably Broken? Joselow, “Park Service Erases Climate Facts at Fort Sumter, Where the Civil War Began” Save Our Signs (SOS) Lynch, “The Value of Truth”

- 1/29 Week 2.2 **Is the Problem in Our Hands? Smartphones and the Extinction of Experience**
 Lightman, "This Is No Way to Be Human"
 Take the "Connectedness to Nature" quiz
 Collee, "The Great Offline"
 DUE: Reading Response #1 (by 9 a.m.)
 Initial Assessment (by 11:15 a.m.)

2. Biodiversity Loss, Environmental Justice & Memoir

- 2/3 Week 3.1 **Keywords: Nature, Environment, Biodiversity, Sustainability, Justice**
 Video: "Nature Is Speaking – Julia Roberts is Mother Nature"
 Monbiot, "Forget 'the Environment': We Need New Words to Convey Life's Wonders"
 Dobson, "Biodiversity"
 Butman, "Against 'Sustainability'"
 NRDC, "The Environmental Justice Movement"
- 2/5 Week 3.2 **Indigenous Perspectives & Final Project Discussion**
 Kimmerer, "Windigo Footprints"
 Marchese, "You Don't Have to Be Complicit in Our Culture of Destruction"
 Optional readings on Indigenuity and environmental justice
 DUE: Reading Response #2 (by 9 a.m.)
- 2/10 Week 4.1 **Growing Up White in Wisconsin**
 Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (focus on chapters 2, 3 & 6)
 Robbins and Moore, "Return of the Repressed"
 Optional readings on and from the Sierra Club social justice crisis
- 2/12 Week 4.2 **Birding While Black**
 Lanham, "Birding While Black"
 Lanham, "What Do We Do About John James Audubon?"
 Optional readings about the Black birder Christian Cooper, the Audubon Society debate, the "Nature Equity Gap," and local BIPOC outdoors people
 DUE: Reading Response #3 (by 9 a.m.)

3. Toxicity, Public Health & Science Writing

- 2/17 Week 5.1 **How Did *Silent Spring* Become the Template for "Toxic Discourse"?**
 Carson, *Silent Spring* (excerpts)
 Buell, "Toxic Discourse" (optional)
 DUE: Environmental Memoir
- 2/19 Week 5.2 **Rachel Carson's Legacy**
 Stoll, "Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a Book that Changed the World"
 Culver, Mauch, and Ritson, *Rachel Carson's Silent Spring: Encounters and Legacies*
 MacBride, "This Book Helped Save the Planet—but Created a Very Harmful Myth"
 DUE: Reading Response #4 (by 9 a.m.)
 Mid-semester reflection

- 2/24 Week 6.1 **Telling the Story of PFAS: Upstream Production**
 Lerner, "How 3M Executives Convinced a Scientist the Forever Chemicals She Found in Human Blood Were Safe"
 PFAS: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (optional)
 Environmental Working Group PFAS map (optional)
 DUE: Final Project Proposal and Annotated Bibliography
- 2/26 Week 6.2 **Telling the Story of PFAS: Downstream Consumption**
 Articles about PFAS in consumer products and foods
 DUE: Reading Response #5 (by 9 a.m.)
- 3/3 Week 7.1 **Film Discussion: *Dark Waters* (2019)**
 Rich, "The Lawyer Who Became DuPont's Worst Nightmare"
- 3/5 Week 7.2 **Public Discourse on Public Health: Science, Values, and Crunchy Cons**
 Miller, "How the Right Claimed 'Crunchy'"
 DUE: Reading Response #6 (by 9 a.m.)
- 3/10-12 Week 8 **Spring Break: No class**

4. Climate Change, Violence & Activist Discourse

- 3/17 Week 9.1 **How Bad is Climate Change, and What Should We Do about It?**
 AAAS, "What We Know: The Reality, Risks, and Response to Climate Change" (2014)
 AAAS, "How We Respond: Community Responses to Climate Change" (2019)
 Dibaginjigaadeg Anishinaabe Ezhitwaad: A Tribal Climate Adaptation Menu (2019)
 Marris, "How to Stop Freaking Out and Tackle Climate Change" (2020)
 DUE: Science Story Pitch
- 3/19 Week 9.2 **Should We Be at "War" with Climate Change?**
 McKibben, "A World at War"
 Godoy and Jaffe, "We Don't Need a 'War' on Climate Change"
 Scranton, "Climate Change Is Not World War"
 Optional Articles on Bill McKibben's climate rhetoric
 DUE: Reading Response #7 (by 9 a.m.)
- 3/24 Week 10.1 **How Should We Tell Climate Change Stories on Screen?**
 Nixon, "Slow Violence and Environmental Storytelling"
 Schneider-Mayerson, et al., "The Climate Reality Check"
 Schneider-Mayerson, "Ted Lasso Is an Unexpected Masterclass in Environmental Storytelling"
 Svoboda, "Cli-fi Movies: A Guide for Socially-distanced Viewers" (optional)
 The Psychology of Climate Change Communication (CRED Guide, optional)
 DUE: Climate Journal #1
- 3/26 Week 10.2 **How Should We Illustrate Climate Change Stories?**
 Monastersky and Sousania, "The Fragile Framework"
 Thompson Writing Program (Duke), "Writing About Comics and Graphic Novels"
 Spin Weave and Cut (Nick Sousanis web site)
 DUE: Reading Response #8 (by 9 a.m.)

- 3/31 Week 11.1 **Film Discussion: *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* (2022)**
 Marchese, "How This Climate Activist Justifies Political Violence"
 Wolfe, "The Rise and Fall of America's Environmentalist Underground" (optional)
 DUE: Final Project Progress Report
- 4/2 Week 11.2 **Bringing It All Together: Discourses of Justice, Toxicity & Climate around Wild Rice**
 MPR, "Finding Manoomin: A Search for the Spirit of Wild Rice"
 Hyatt and Hollingsworth, "Rights for wild rice" (optional)
 DUE: Reading Response #9 (by 9 a.m.)
- 4/7 Week 12.1 **TBD**
- 4/9 Week 12.2 **TBD**
 DUE: Reading Response #10 (by 9 a.m.)

5. Final Project Presentations

- 4/14 Week 13.1 **Final Project Work Day**
- 4/16 Week 13.2 Group 1 (6-7 students)
 DUE: Climate Journal #2
- 4/21 Week 14.1 Group 2 (6-7 students) - *Happy Earth Day tomorrow!*
- 4/23 Week 14.2 Group 3 (6-7 students)
- 4/28 Week 15.1 Group 4 (6-7 students)
- 4/30 Week 15.2 Last class and Remaining Presentations
- 5/4 Monday Self-evaluations due by 11:59 p.m.
- 5/18 Monday Final grades due by 11:59 p.m.