

COMM 575/EVST 575: Rhetoric and Environmental Controversy

Instructor: Steve Schwarze, Ph.D.
Office: LA 358 Phone: 243-4901

Email: steven.schwarze@umontana.edu
Hours: W 11-1, and by appt

“Despite the growing importance of urban and industrial issues in the agendas of most environmental groups, there remained during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, disjointed and at times contradictory elaborations of what can be called *environmental discourse*. These elaborations were reflected in the use of language and presentation of ideas and concepts about the environment, much of which still assumed the long-standing separation of the social from the ecological.

“These disputes over discourse have also been reflected in the divergent pathways and discordant messages of environmentalism in the last three decades, despite the movement’s successful appeal. The significance of these disputes over environmental discourse should not be underestimated. Since discourses, as David Harvey has argued, are ‘manifestations of power...the coded ways available to use for talking about, writing about, and representing the world,’ they also become ways to shape actions as well as perceptions. More than many other social movements, environmentalism has become associated with compelling ideas and images – whether of Nature (the value of wilderness) or Society (the negative association of urban pollution or hazards). These images are made manifest by language and representation. The power of environmental discourse also makes it fair game for varying interpretations and associations. Claims made by different actors, such as the chemical or oil and gas industries, about their commitment to the environment and participation as “environmentalists” often muddies the debate about nature and environment and further underlines the importance of who controls the discourse. Environmental politics should therefore be seen not simply as debates over how to act or what policies to establish. Conflicts of interpretation over the terms of environmental discourse also become debates over how to influence the language that people use in talking about the environment.”

- Robert Gottlieb, Environmentalism Unbound: Exploring New Pathways for Change. MIT Press, 2001.

Course Description and Objectives

This course is a graduate-level seminar in environmental rhetoric. With Gottlieb, the course proceeds from the assumption that discourse itself is a key site of struggle in efforts to influence environmental attitudes, policies and actions. In contrast to a scientific perspective on discourse – one that desires symbols to be transparent representations of the world, and an instrumental perspective – one that perceives symbols as mere tools to achieve pre-determined ends, we embrace a constitutive perspective – one that views symbols as the very medium through which we come to know the world. Our task is to understand how participants in environmental communication struggle for control over discourse: the words, images, and symbols used to depict reality and describe environmental issues. In doing so, we begin to see how the struggle to control this discourse is central to the political and social struggles to achieve a more just and sustainable world.

Because discourse is a site of struggle, *all* players in environmental controversies – not only advocacy groups, but also industry spokespersons, government officials, scientists, journalists, and interested citizens – should be seen as rhetors. All participate in the process of influencing attitudes and actions, personal opinions and public decisions through the generation and dissemination of public discourse. Since the struggle to shape meaning and action is so apparent in this area of public life, environmental rhetoric can be fertile ground for students of communication who wish to gain insight into the art of rhetoric. And since rhetoric constitutes the very means by which environmental issues are described, negotiated, silenced, and transformed, it is essential that students of environmental issues understand the rhetorical dimensions of the discourse that surrounds them.

The course has two basic objectives. First, it intends to **introduce students to a broad rhetorical perspective on public discourse**, a perspective which takes seriously the role that symbols, arguments, narratives, metaphors, audiences, identities and ideologies play in shaping meaning and action. The course will begin by explaining this perspective through lectures, readings and discussions, highlighting some of the more useful theoretical and critical concepts associated with rhetorical analysis.

Second, the course intends to **improve students' ability to engage and explain environmental controversies from a rhetorical perspective**. It will do so by shuttling between primary texts and scholarly literature that can inform our readings of those texts. Thus, there is a transactional relationship between the two objectives of the course: theoretical concepts will shed light on environmental texts, and those texts in turn can help us develop rhetorical theory. Our goal is not to "cover" all environmental controversies – an impossible task – nor is it to become "experts" on environmental issues – although we will become more knowledgeable about different issues by sharing our work with one another. Our primary goal is to develop a more keen eye for the rhetorical strategies and patterns that influence meaning and action on environmental issues.

Developing this keen eye should benefit students of communication, as well as those of you who intend to produce and assess persuasive discourse about environmental issues. This is what a famous dead white male had in mind when he said that rhetoric is "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle). Considering the possibilities for persuasion encourages us to reflect on past and present environmental rhetoric, and can help us generate new rhetorics for negotiating ongoing environmental issues.

Format

In spite of the size of the class, we will still approach it as a seminar. This means that *your* intellectual activity will be the central component of the course. This activity will take the form of oral presentations on scholarly literature; participation in class discussions of scholarly literature and primary texts; oral and written feedback on your colleagues' work; and, presentation of your own work. My role in this is to guide discussions, provide background on rhetorical theory and facilitate the development of your thinking about environmental rhetoric. *In order for this format to be productive, you need to attend and participate in all class sessions.* Extraordinary emergencies and gut-wrenching illness should be the only reasons for missing class.

Texts

The texts for this course (articles and book chapters, and a few primary rhetorical artifacts) will be made available on ERES (password = COMM575). I will also make a hard copy set for circulation among the class. While not as handy as buying a packet, it will be far cheaper for you to make the copies on your own. See the attached syllabus for reading assignments.

Other Texts

All of you can benefit by immersing yourself in environmental texts beyond the formal assignments for the class. This is perfectly in line with an ecological approach to communication, by the way, which suggests that texts can only be understood through their relationship to other texts. For those of you who are new to environmental issues, it is especially important to begin the immersion process. Many of you are already doing this, but I want to underscore a few resources that I find particularly helpful.

First, subscribe to *Headwaters News*, a daily email news service sponsored by UM's Center for the Rocky Mountain West. It is a collection of the day's news about our region, and it is an excellent way of getting familiar with regional environmental issues (public land management, growth and sprawl, waste issues, energy development, endangered species, etc.). You can subscribe at <http://www.headwatersnews.org/HeadwatersSub.html>. Another good regional source is High Country News, a twice-monthly news magazine. Some articles are for pay-subscribers only, but many are available at www.hcn.org. Beyond the region, other environmental news services with free email subscription are www.enn.com, www.envirolink.org, www.alternet.org, www.environmentalhealthnews.org, and on the lighter side, www.grist.org.

Around town, of course, pay attention to the *Missoulian* and *Independent*. Comparing the coverage in the two is a good way to start ridding yourself of the flimsy concept of "bias" and replacing it with more nuanced ideas about point-of-view, objectivity vs. neutrality, dramatization, framing etc. A more recent addition to the local news scene is NewWest, an online news source with reporters in cities across the region: <http://www.newwest.net/missoula/> Finally, bookmark the EVST Events and Announcements page http://www.cas.umt.edu/evst/events_menu.htm or subscribe to their weekly email newsletter.

Requirements and Evaluation

The course requirements fall into three categories:

Class Participation:	25% of final grade
Short Essays:	25%
Final Essay:	50%

The percentages are intended to convey the relative importance of different elements of the course, not a mathematically precise formula for your final grade. Basically, a solid final paper that has benefited from revision is necessary but not sufficient for an A in the course. In general, my take on grades at the graduate level is that their primary function is to signal whether you're meeting the standard of graduate-level engagement. If you are maintaining thoughtful and sustained engagement with the course and write a paper that shows a similar kind of engagement, an A will be the "natural" result. If your participation in class does not reflect engagement with the readings, or you write your papers just to get them done, you will not earn an A.

The short essays will consist of written responses to readings. Each student will compose position papers that respond to the assigned readings for that day or week. I will assign you to either group A or B; the syllabus designates when you are responsible for producing a position paper. The papers should be about three pages, double-spaced. The objectives of this assignment are to give you practice engaging scholarly arguments and to jump-start class discussion.

The final paper will be a tightly crafted essay of approximately 15 pages that analyzes a primary text or set of texts that contribute to some environmental controversy. Plan to submit a complete draft of the essay in November and revise it on the basis of instructor and peer feedback. Ideally, you would work with an eye toward developing a portion of your thesis/dissertation, professional paper, or portfolio. I expect you to negotiate the topic with me in advance, and your grade will take into account the quality of your preliminary work on the paper (proposal, initial draft, oral presentation) as well as the finished product. Details and due dates will be outlined on the syllabus and in class.

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarism, and deliberate interference with the work of others. It is the intellectual equivalent of theft, and the aesthetic equivalent of plastic surgery. Like the former, it ruins the trust necessary for a well-functioning community; like the latter, it mistakenly sacrifices personal uniqueness and replaces it with a disfigured, false ideal.

At the graduate level, it is primarily a matter of conducting scholarship ethically: giving credit to others for their ideas, and providing fair and accurate representations of the discourse of others (your "data"). Go to the UM Student Life web page and read all about it. At the graduate level, there is no excuse for plagiarism; it results in an 'F' on the particular piece of work and, in most cases, a permanent 'F' on your course transcript. Bottom line: don't do it.

Deadlines

I have found that deadlines tend to promote mental health, at least over the long run. Because I am a kind and caring individual, I intend to hold you to them. Incompletes will be given only in the most extreme circumstances.

Autumn 2008 Schedule

I. Rhetoric, Nature, and Environmental Discourse

Aug. 25 Course Introduction

Read the following pieces this week as a follow-up to discussions on Aug. 25:

Robert Cox, "The Study of Environmental Communication" and "Rhetorically Shaping the Environment"

Bob Brulle, "Environmental Discourse and Social Movement Organizations: A Historical and Rhetorical Perspective on the Development of U.S. Environmental Organizations"

Sept. 1 Labor Day, NO CLASS

Sept. 8 The Fundamental Problematic: Nature/Culture, Symbolic/Material (ALL)

William Cronon, "In Search of Nature" from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon

James D. Proctor, "Whose Nature? The Contested Moral Terrain of Ancient Forests" from *Uncommon Ground*

Jenny Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A."

II. Tributaries: Dominant Themes and Touchstone Texts in US Environmental Movements

Sept. 15 "Pristine" Wilderness and the Rhetoric of Preservationism (A)

John Muir, from "The Mountains of California" and "Hetch Hetchy Valley"

Christine Oravec "John Muir, Yosemite, and the Sublime Response: A Study in the Rhetoric of Preservationism" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67.3 (August 1981).

Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, "Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17.3 (September 2000)

- Sept. 22 The Ecological Turn: Leopold and Carson (B)
 Aldo Leopold, from *A Sand County Almanac*
 Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring*
 Cheryl Glotfelty, "Cold War, *Silent Spring*: The Trope of War in Modern Env'ism"
 in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, Ed. Craig
 Waddell.
- Sept. 29 From Environmentalism to Environmental Justice (ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE)
 Robert Bullard, "Dismantling Environmental Racism"
 Giovanna Di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and
 Social Justice" from *Uncommon Ground*
 Jennifer Peeples and Kevin DeLuca, "The Truth of the Matter: Motherhood,
 Community, and Environmental Justice" *Women's Studies in Communication* 29.1
 (Spring 2006)

III. Rhetorical Dimensions of Environmental Controversy

- Oct. 6 Conceptualizing Time: The Irreparable, Apocalpytics, and Tipping Points (B)
 J. Robert Cox, "The Die is Cast: Topical and Ontological Dimensions of the Locus of
 the Irreparable," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982).
 M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer, "Millennial Ecology: The
 Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to Global Warming" from *Green
 Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in America*, Eds. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C.
 Brown
 Frederick Buell, "Crisis History: From Prophecy to Risk, from Apocalypse to
 Dwelling Place," in *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the
 American Century*.
 Chris Russill, "Tipping Point Forewarnings in Climate Change Communication:
 Some Implications of an Emerging Trend," *Environmental Communication: A
 Journal of Nature and Culture*, 2:2 (2008).
- Oct. 13 Reframing Risk: The Rhetorical Appeals of Cultural Rationality (A)
 Frank Fischer, from *Citizens, Experts and the Environment: The Politics of Local
 Knowledge*
 Jennifer Duffield Hamilton, "Exploring Technical and Cultural Appeals in Strategic
 Risk Communication: The Fernald Radium Case," *Risk Analysis* 23.2 (2003).
 Steve Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92.3
 (2006)

- Oct. 20 Negotiating Audience and Purpose: Radical Rhetoric and Its (Alleged) Effects (B)
 Brant Short, "Earth First! and the Rhetoric of Moral Confrontation" *Communication Studies* 42.2 (Summer 1991).
 Marilyn Cooper, "Environmental Rhetoric in the Age of Hegemonic Politics: Earth First! and The Nature Conservancy," in *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in America*, Eds. Herndl and Brown
 Terence Check, "The Framing of Radical Environmental Rhetoric: TV News Coverage of the Earth Liberation Front," Conference on Communication and the Environment, 2003.
- Oct. 27 More Than Words: Image Events and Toxic Tours (A)
 Kevin DeLuca, from *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*
 Phaedra Pezzullo, from *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*
- Nov. 3 The Rhetoric of Reaction: Resistance to Environmentalism (ESSAY DRAFT DUE)
 Jennifer Peeples, "Aggressive Mimicry: The Rhetoric of Wise Use and the Environmental Movement," from *Environmental Communication Yearbook 2* (2005)
 Aaron McCright and Riley Dunlap, "Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem: An Analysis of the Conservative Movement's Counter-Claims." *Social Problems*, 47.4.(Nov 2000).
 Union of Concerned Scientists "Smoke, Mirrors and Hot Air"
- Nov. 10 News and the Framing of Environmental Controversy
 William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology*, 95.1, (1989).
 Michael Karlberg, "News and Conflict: How Adversarial News Frames Limit Public Understanding of Environmental Issues" *Alternatives Journal* 23.1 (1997)
 Maxwell T. Boykoff and Jules M. Boykoff, "Climate change and journalistic norms: A case-study of US mass-media coverage," *Geoforum* 38 (2007).
- Nov. 17 Charting New Paths
 Robert J. Brulle and J. Craig Jenkins, "Decline or Transition? Discourse and Strategy in the U.S. Environmental Movement," ASA conference paper (2005)
 David Schlosberg, and Sara Rinfret, "Ecological modernisation, American style," *Environmental Politics*, 17.2 (2008).
 Paul Hawken, "Immunity," from *Blessed Unrest*
- Nov. 24 Workshop
- Dec. 1 Presentations
- Finals Week Presentations TUESDAY Dec. 9, 1:10-3:10 p.m.