

# Media, Culture and The Environment

## COMM 6400 - Wednesday, 12:45-3:15

### Syllabus and Course Schedule

Instructor: Andy Opel, Ph.D

Office: 340 Diffenbaugh

E-mail: [aopel@fsu.edu](mailto:aopel@fsu.edu)

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:30 – 5:30. Additional hours by appointment.

Phone: (W) 644-8768

(H) 322-3349

**Course Website:** <http://comm2.fsu.edu/faculty/comm/opel/Com6400/home.html>

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

From global warming to species extinction, our planet is facing large scale environmental change. These ecological concerns are often in direct conflict with modern industrialization. At the same time that our scientific understanding of the global environment is increasingly detailed and complex, we are progressively dependent on mediated information for our opinions and public policy decisions. News and entertainment media play a significant role in negotiating the tension between ecological sustainability and rising consumption and resource depletion.

This course will explore our mediated relationship with the natural world. Reading work from a range of theoretical perspectives - social science to post-structuralist – this graduate seminar will address the following questions: What do we mean by the terms “nature” and “environment?” How do we come to know about the natural world? What does the news media tell us about our global environment? What does commercial culture tell us? What do environmental groups tell us and how do they get their message out? How is our relationship to the natural world shaped by these representations?

*Media, Culture and The Environment* will explore how media influences culture and in turn how cultural practices regulate our use of natural resources. This course will address specific three content areas: 1) Current research on news media coverage of environmental issues, 2) Commercial culture’s relationship to the environment from green washing to green marketing, and 3) Media and communication strategies of environmental groups. In addition, this course will attempt to touch on the major themes currently debated within the sphere of “environmental communication.” This seminar will emphasize and encourage engaged scholarship that aims to understand and address this issue of global significance.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To increase understanding of how language shapes our perception of the natural world
- To critically examine the structures and implications of environmental representation

- To analyze the ways in which environmental issues are framed by the news media.
- To understand the complex relationship between the environment and consumer culture
- To gain a broad understanding of the area of “environmental communication” – what are the current debates, where do these debates take place and how to take part in these debates through the creation of environmental communication scholarship.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- Anderson, Alison (1997). *Media, Culture and The Environment*. London: UCL Press.
- Shanahan, James & McComas, Katherine (1999). *Nature Stories: Depictions of The Environment and Their Effects*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Smith, Toby M. (1998). *The Myth of Green Marketing: Tending Our Goats At the Edge of the Apocalypse*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Deluca, Kevin M. (1999). *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. New York: Guilford.
- Davis, Susan (1997). *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

NOTE: Other readings will be available in a folder outside my office, Diffenbaugh 340.

## COURSE WORK

Each week you will have a set of readings. Given that this is a seminar and NOT a lecture class, discussion is a central component. Your preparation and participation will make this class a rich and rewarding experience (or a slow, silent class). Each week I ask that you engage the readings and be prepared to address at least one particular argument, form an opinion on this argument and support your position with evidence from the readings. I expect that you will formulate arguments based on the readings and anticipate objections, just as you might do when presenting a research paper.

Each week one or two people will be the discussion leader(s). This job includes providing a summary handout of the issues raised by the readings as well as preparing discussion questions and leadership.

**There will be a one day field trip on Saturday, April 2nd. Details Forthcoming.**

You will also have a series of writing assignments and a final term paper research project.

**Environmental News Assignment:** Find a current environmental story in the news media. This can be a magazine article, newspaper story, TV show or Internet based story. Write a 2-3 page (500 word) analysis of the news coverage,

drawing on class readings and your own insights and be prepared to make a short presentation to the class about your findings. **Due: Jan. 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Book/Documentary Review:** Choose a book (or documentary, list forthcoming) from the list at the end of the syllabus and write a critical review of the work. You might want to consider the social/cultural impact (or lack) of the book; the method used to collect and analyze the data to make the argument; the theoretical foundations of the argument; and/or the assumptions that underpin the argument. Do not merely summarize the work. This should be a critical review that reveals your understanding of the work and its contributions/limitations. The result should be a 4-5 page (1000-1200 words) paper. Please provide a hard copy to me and email a copy to your colleagues in the class. **Due: Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Environment and Popular Culture Assignment:** Find a cultural product that is based on an environmental theme. This can be any type of product, from an advertisement to a food product or any type of consumer product. Write a 2-3 page (500 word) analysis of this product drawing on class reading and your own insights, bring the item to class and be prepared to make a short presentation to the class about your findings. **Due: Feb. 23<sup>th</sup>**

**Local Environmental Group Assignment:** Find a local (Florida based) environmental group and examine their visual and rhetorical strategies. How do they present themselves? How do they present their arguments? How do they reach their audience? Write a 3-4 page (750-1000 word) analysis of the environmental communication of this group, drawing on class reading and your own insights and be prepared to share your findings with the class. **Due: March 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Final Term Paper:** This paper may come out of one of the previous assignments or may be a new idea. For doctoral students, this should be an original piece of scholarship that can be submitted to an academic conference of your choice. Master's students will have a choice between a paper and a project.

\*Paper topics are **Due March 2<sup>nd</sup>**.

\*Introduction, Lit. Review, Method and Research Questions are **Due March 23<sup>th</sup>**

\*Final Paper is **Due the last day of class: April 20<sup>th</sup>**

## **LATE WORK**

Late work will only be accepted when special arrangements have been made prior to the day any assignment is due.

## **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

All written assignments should be well edited with clear, concise writing.

## ADA STATEMENT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations must:

- 1) Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disabilities Resource Center (SDRC).
- 2) Bring a letter to me from the SDRC indicating your needed accommodations. This must be done within the first two weeks of class.

## HONOR CODE

Students are expected to uphold the academic honor code published in the *Florida State University Bulletin* and the *Student Handbook*. The academic honor system of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility to:

- (1) Uphold the highest standards of integrity in your work
- (2) Refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community.
- (3) Foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community.

## GRADING SCALE

Class Participation/Discussion Presentation: 15%  
Environmental News Assignment: 10%  
Book/Documentary Review: 15%  
Environmental and Popular Culture Assignment: 10%  
Local Environmental Group Assignment: 15%  
Final Paper/Project: 35%

100-94 = A	76-74 = C
93-90 = A-	73-70 = C-
89-87 = B+	69-67 = D+
86-84 = B	66-64 = D
83-80 = B-	63-60 = D-
79-77 = C+	59-0 = F

**Note On Grades:** Education is not about grades but about learning. Part of the learning process involves feedback and one form of feedback is a grade. Each grade will also be accompanied with written and verbal feedback that will often be more helpful to your learning than the letter/number grade. If you are not happy with your grade, I encourage you to rework and resubmit your assignment. Also, because learning is a process, I strongly encourage you to give me feedback about the class as we proceed through the semester.

## Class Schedule - Media, Culture and The Environment

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on their due date.

**Week One - 1/5** Course Introduction: State of The World

**Readings:**

Syllabus

Williams, R. (1983). *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*.  
London:Oxford, p. 219-224

Shaw, J. (2002). *The Great Global Experiment*, Harvard Magazine, v105 n2.

**Week Two - 1/12** Language, News Media and the Environment

**Readings:**

Williams, R. (1980). *Problems in materialism and culture*. London:Verso. p. 67-85, 103-124

Cronon, W. (1996). Foreword to the paperback edition, and Introduction In  
Cronon, W. (Ed.), *Uncommon ground: Rethinking the human place in nature* (pp. 19-56)

Anderson, Intro, Chaps. 2, 4, 5.

**Week Three - 1/19** Tensions in Green News

Retzinger, Jean P. (2001) *Setting the agenda – and setting the table – for genetically modified foods in the press*. 2001 COCE Proceedings

Henderson & Edwards (2000). *Can we trust the media on the environment?*  
The Ecologist, v. 30, n4.

Crandon & Singletary (1999). *Framing the News: A case study of two newspapers coverage of an environmental/economic story*. Paper presented to the AEJMC Southeast Colloquium.

Knight, J. (2000). *The National Geographic Magazine and Environmental Coverage*. Paper presented to the AEJMC National Convention, Pheonix, AZ.

Curtin, P. & Rhodenbaugh, E. (2001). *Building the news media agenda on the environment: a comparison of public relations and journalistic sources*.  
Public Relations Review, v27, n2.

Lacy, S. (2000). *Comparative Case Study: Newspaper source use on the environmental beat*. Newspaper Research Journal, v21. n1.

**Week Four - 1/26** Green News 2005

**Readings:**

**ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ASSIGNMENT DUE**

Friedman, S. (2004). *And the Beat Goes On: The Third Decade of Environmental Journalism*, in “The Environmental Communication Yearbook” edited by Sue Seneach, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Nitz, M., & West, H. (2004). *Framing of Newspaper News Stories During a Presidential Campaign News Cycle: The Case of Bush-Gore in Election 2000*. in "The Environmental Communication Yearbook" edited by Sue Seneach, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Also, look through these environmental news websites:

<http://www.mediachannel.org/atissue/environment/>

<http://www.emagazine.com/>

<http://www.truthout.org/environment.shtml>

<http://www.worldwatch.org/>

<http://www.sej.org/>

**Week Five - 2/2**      News Media and Green Narrative

**Readings:**

Shanahan & McComas – Whole book, esp. Chap 1, 3, 4, 6, 7.

Meister, M. (2001). *Climate Change in the press 1999-2001: From Scientific to Narrative Ambiguity*. 2001 COCE Proceedings.

**Week Six - 2/9**      Green Marketing

**Readings:**

**BOOK REVIEWS DUE**

Smith, T. M. (1998). - The whole book.

**Week Seven - 2/16**      Environment and Advertising

**Readings:**

Williams, J. (1978). *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London: Marion Boyers. p. 97-138

Anderson, R. (2000). *Road to ruin: the cultural mythology of the SUV*, in "Critical Studies in Media Commercialism," edited by Anderson, R. & Strate, L., London:Oxford.

Jhally, S. (2000). *Advertising at the edge of the apocalypse*. in "Critical Studies in Media Commercialism," edited by Anderson, R. & Strate, L., London:Oxford.

Film: Affluenza

**Week Eight - 2/23**      Nature and Spectacle

**Readings:      ENVIRONMENT AND POPULAR CULTURE ASSIGNMENT DUE**

Debord, G. (1967, reprinted 1994). *The society of the spectacle*, New York:Zone, p. 11-34

Davis, S. (1997) *Spectacular Nature*. – Whole book with particular attention to Intro., & Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, Conclusion.

**Week Nine - 3/2** Environment and Popular Culture

**Readings:**

**1-PAGE PAPER TOPICS DUE**

- Meister, M. & Japp, P.M. (2002). *Introduction: a rationale for studying environmental rhetoric and popular culture*, in “Enviropop: Studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture,” Meister, M. and Japp, P.M. Eds., Westport:Greenwood.
- Todd, A.M. (2002). *Prime-time subversion: The environmental rhetoric of the Simpsons*, in “Enviropop: Studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture,” Meister, M. and Japp, P.M. Eds., Westport:Greenwood.
- Rehling, D.L. (2002). *When Hallmark calls upon nature: images of nature in greeting cards*. in “Enviropop: Studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture,” Meister, M. and Japp, P.M. Eds., Westport:Greenwood.
- Opel, A. (2002). *Monopoly the National Parks Edition: Reading Neo-Liberal Simulacra*, in “Enviropop: Studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture,” Meister, M. and Japp, P.M. Eds., Westport:Greenwood.

**Week Ten - 3/9**

SPRING BREAK

**Week Eleven - 3/16**

Background on the Environmental Movement

**Readings:**

- Brulle, R. J. (1996). *Environmental Discourse and Social Movement Organizations: A historical and rhetorical perspective on the developments of U.S. Environmental Organizations*, Sociological Inquiry, v66 n1.
- Brulle, R. J. (2000). *Agency, Democracy and Nature: The U.S. environmental movement from a critical theory perspective*. Cambridge:MIT Press. Chapters 1 & 2.
- Buttel, F.H. (1992). *Environmentalization: origins, Processes, and implications for rural social change*, Rural Sociology, v57 n1.
- Luke, T. (1997). *Ecocritique: Contesting the politics of nature, economy and Culture*. Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press. Chapters 1, 2 & 4.

**Week Twelve - 3/23**

Media Images and Environmental Activism

**Readings:**

**FINAL PAPER INTRO, LIT. REVIEW DUE**

Deluca - The Whole Book

**Week Thirteen – 3/30**

Communication and Environmental Justice

**Readings:**

**LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP ASSIGNMENT DUE**

- Harvey, D. (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* Oxford:Blackwell. p. 19-45, 366-402.
- Szasz, A. (1994). “The Toxics movement: from NYMBYism to radical environmental populism,” in *Ecopolulism: Toxic waste and the movement*

*for environmental justice.* Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press.  
p.69-99.

Pezzullo, Phaedra C. (2000). *Resisting "National Breast Cancer Awareness Month:" The rhetoric of toxic politics and finding a feminist counterpublic voice.* Unpublished paper.

Cox, R. (2004). *Golden Tropes and Democratic Betrayals: Prospects for Environmental Justice in Neoliberal "Free Trade" Agreements.* 2004 NCA paper presented to the Environmental Communication Commission.

#### **Week Fourteen - 4/6**

Post-Structuralism, Environmental Communication  
and Political Ecology

#### **Readings:**

Luke, T. (1999). *Slow Burn, Fast Detonation, Killer Fragments: Rereading the Unibomber Manifesto in "Capitalism, Democracy, and Ecology"* Chicago: University Of Illinois Press.

Escobar, A. (1999). *After Nature: Steps toward an anti-essentialist political ecology,* Current Anthropology, v40 n1.

O'Conner, J. (1998). *Natural Causes: essays in ecological Marxism.* New York:Guilford. Chapters 1, 3, 20.

Johnston, B. R. (2003). *The Political Ecology of Water: An Introduction.* Capitalism, Nature, Socialism 14(3).

#### **Week Fifteen - 4/14**

Feminism, Ecology and Technology

#### **Readings:**

Haraway, D. (1989). *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, technology and socialist feminism in the 1980s.*

Adbusters response to Haraway.

Haraway, D. (1997). *Modest\_Witness@second\_millennium.*

*FemaleMan©\_meets\_Oncomouse™.* New York:Routledge. pgs. 1-49.

Luke, T. (2001). *Reconstructing Nature: How the new informatics are rewriting the environment and society as bitspace,* Capitalism Nature Socialism: A Journal of Socialist Ecology, v12 n3.

Clark, N. (1997). *Panic Ecology: Nature in the age of superconductivity,* Theory, Culture & Society, v14 n1.

#### **Week Sixteen - 4/20**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE**

Student presentation of final research projects.

## Book Review Possibilities

Age of Missing Information or The End of Nature by Bill Mckibben  
Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic by John De Graaf, et al  
Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution by Paul Hawken, et al  
The Case Against the Global Economy: And for a Turn Toward the Local by Jerry Mander (Editor), Edward Goldsmith (Editor)  
Remaking Reality Nature at the Millenium Edited by: Bruce Braun, Noel Castree  
The Tainted Desert: Environmental and Social Ruin in the American West. Valerie L. Kuletz  
The Corporate Planet: Ecology and Politics in the age of globalization. Joshua Karliner  
Ecology of a Cracker Childhood by Janisse Ray  
Shell, Greenpeace and the Brent Spar by A. G. Jordan, Grant Jordan  
Ecopolitism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice (Social Movements, Protest, and Contention, Vol 1) by Andrew Szasz  
In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations by Jerry Mander  
Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television by Jerry Mander  
Ashes of the Moon: Environment and Evil in the Amazon by C. Fred Alford  
Science and the Revenge of Nature: Marcuse and Habermas by C. Fred Alford  
How Like a Leaf : An Interview with Donna Haraway -- by Thyrsa Nichols Goodeve, Donna Jeanne Haraway  
Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature -- by Donna J. Haraway  
Modest-Witness, Second-Millennium: Femaleman Meets Oncomouse: Feminism and Technoscience -- by Donna J. Haraway, Lynn M. Randolph  
Ecology and the World-System (Contributions in Economics and Economic History, 211) by Walter L. Goldfrank (Editor), David Goodman (Editor), Andrew Szasz (Editor)  
The Abstract Wild by Jack Turner  
A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold  
Silent Spring by Rachel Carson  
Encounters With the Archdruid by John A. McPhee