

EcoCulture: Humans and “the Environment”

Communication & Journalism 512

Autumn 2008

8-Week Course: October 21-December 16

Tuesdays, 4 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. in C&J 121

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By Appointment

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**“Of our environment,
what we say is what we
see.”**

**– James Cantrill & Christine
Oravec, *The Symbolic Earth***

Course Scope & Learning Objectives:

Course Scope: This course explores cultural and communicative ways that humanity informs, shapes, and shifts relations with “the environment.” Following extant scholarship, the course situates human-nature relations as both actively socially constructed and as deeply and materially experienced. As learners, through readings, discussion, fieldstudy, and research, we will explore how:

- 1) *Cultural and communication processes and contexts* inform, construct, and produce perceptions of and actions toward nature;
- 2) *Cultural and communication research can be used to deconstruct* and critically investigate dominant and alternative understandings of nature

The course will lead to a deeper understanding of culture, communication, and the human relationship with nature. The learning focus in this course is on student-driven creative and critical exploration and discussion, as well as out-of-the-classroom group field experiences.

Course Learning Objectives: Our class is a *reading-intensive graduate seminar*. This course is essentially discussion-based with a weekend field study component. To have successful learning, prepare yourselves by carefully *and* critically reading all material before class, and actively participate in discussion, exercises, and outings.

By the end of this course, you will have increased your ability to:

1. Define and discuss key concepts linking culture, communication, and human relations with nature and explain the value of these concepts and their integration to diverse audiences;
2. show in discussion and writing how you apply and connect theories and research about culture, communication, and human-nature relations to power, knowledge, and society;
3. analyze how components of your cultural identities and positioning, as well as the contexts and institutions in which you live, shape and have shaped your own relations with nature and your orientation to ecoculture research;
4. apply and connect theories and research about culture, communication, and human-nature relations in your research to demonstrate your understanding and to explore your particular questions;

5. produce an academic research paper suitable for conference paper submission or a research-informed creative project suitable for graduate-level presentation.

Required texts:

1. C&J 512 Course Reader – *On EReserves for this course (password: lobo512)*
 2. Books: Available at UNM Bookstore
- Rodriguez, S. (2006). *Acequia: Water Sharing, Sanctity, and Place*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Abram, D. (1997). *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. Boston: South End Press.

“We cannot solve the problems that we have created with the same thinking that created them.”
Albert Einstein

Course Requirements: Field Study Reflection Paper, Participation (discussion, class presentations, critical reading reflections), Final Project Proposal & Final Project

In an effort to reduce paper use in this class, all assignments will be turned in before class on their due date on WebCT except when otherwise noted.

Field Study Reflection Paper, due before class on 11/18 on WebCT (10% of final grade):

The required weekend field study trip will provide you with an opportunity to engage your learning in the course with your own direct observations and reflections. During our field study weekend, local guides and I will provide a loose framework for engaging in the site – such as through tours, questions, signage, silence, talking to experts, brochures, self reflection, etc. **Bring a notebook** to jot down observations and ideas to inform your paper. Your paper is meant for you to creatively and critically reflect on your field experience as it relates to your own discovery process surrounding the readings and themes in this course. Papers should put your *personal* reflection (your own observations and interpretations within the field site) *in interaction with five or more class readings* to explore cultural and communicative contexts and ramifications. Choose to apply class readings that especially help you interpret, reflect upon, and analyze our field experience. The observations and ideas you write in your notebook will provide grounded reflections to explore in your paper. *Papers must be typed, double spaced, and 5-7 pages.*

Grading criteria for the Field Experience Reflection Paper:

- 1.) Originality – I expect and appreciate creative approaches to these papers;
- 2.) Depth of Critical Thinking – Use evidence to support your claims, develop your ideas in depth and explain the implications of your ideas;
- 3) Accuracy of Analysis – Use helpful concepts from class readings accurately and do not repeat what authors or others say, but reveal your own ideas and thoughts as you engage with concepts to analyze your own experience;
- 4) Organization of thoughts – your papers should exhibit focus and a clear

flow of thought. A thesis statement and a preview of the structure of the ideas in the entry will help here, as will a conclusion; 5) Grammar/Spelling – edit carefully to show you fully respect your work and to be certain your work, in turn, receives the respect and consideration it deserves.

Participation (50% of final grade): Your participation is crucial in this class as our learning will be based on active, engaged discussion. Participation will always be noted. Students missing class will also miss the chance to participate on these days. As such, regular attendance of class will be necessary to successfully complete the course. Please keep in mind that you, the student, are responsible for all information and material presented in class whether or not you attend.

Discussion: I will evaluate participation in discussions based on your thoughtful contributions, encouraging of others to participate, asking follow-up and clarification questions of others, and active listening (taking notes on others' comments, building on group discussion, and not repeating comments or dominating discussions).

Class presentations: Each of you will be responsible for at least 2 class presentations of weekly readings designed to provoke and facilitate discussion. Class size will determine whether this is done individually or collectively in small groups. Rather than provide an overview of the week's readings, presentations should be concise and conceptually oriented. You should clarify key arguments, critically engage readings, pose questions that open up material for discussion, and possibly introduce activities that engage and apply readings.

Weekly critical written commentary on readings: Each week before class, by *no later than 5 p.m. on Sunday*, you will post on Web CT a 3-page written commentary on the weekly readings. These commentaries are not summaries or descriptive overviews. Rather, they should put your readings for the week in conversation with each other (if there is more than one reading that week) or in conversation with other ideas/theories/readings from class (if there is only one reading that week). These will be evaluated according to how effectively you use these commentaries to analytically and critically engage the readings' central themes, theories, methods, evidence, and politics, and present unresolved questions and conceptual difficulties. We'll discuss this more during our first class meeting. *Important: If you do not post your weekly critical written commentary by Sunday, you should plan on NOT attending class that week (really). These commentaries are a way to make sure you ready to engage and get the most of your attendance.*

Final Proposal and Project (40% of final grade):

Final Project Proposal and Peer Review, due on Web CT on 11/2 (ungraded, but required for final project grade to be considered complete)

Read the next entry on your Course Final Project before reading this section to first get a better idea of what is involved in this project as a whole. I strongly encourage you to discuss your ideas for your final project with me during the first two weeks of class, which will prepare you for this Proposal assignment. This will prepare you to post your proposal for peer review on 11/2 and help you get the most out of class on 11/5 (Week 3) when you discuss your Proposal with other students in class. Your designated peers will

post their feedback in reply on Web CT. In class, you will discuss and take notes on peer feedback. In your final project, you will write about how you went about incorporating peer and professor feedback.

Format Outline for the Proposal:

The final project proposals you post should be typed, follow the outline form below, and be *no more than three pages*. Your proposal should outline in clear language your ideas for your project, state how your project fulfills the learning objectives of the class, give 1-3 annotated outside scholarly references, and provide a clear outline of your planned process of creation. In addition, you should describe how you envision your presentation. (All these points are outlined below.)

Proposal outline:

1. Describe the concept/s of culture/communication/nature you want to engage in the project. Include:
 - A. A brief description of your concept/s – avoid being too general. Your specificity will help focus your project
 - B. An explanation of why this topic is important, for society and scholarship
 - C. Your stance on this topic (analytical, exploratory, critical, advocacy, etc.)
 - D. Your own contributions and limitations in tackling this topic
2. Your goals for understanding: this should take the form of your *research question*
3. A clear and detailed outline of the research or creative process you propose to pursue these goals of understanding
 - A. What exactly will be involved?
 - B. How will these steps address your research question?
4. An explanation of how the project fulfills class learning objectives and your individual goals for the assignment
5. Class sources and 1-3 outside annotated scholarly references (depending on need at this project starting point). Include:
 - A. A brief description of how class material will inform your project (What theoretical concepts or frameworks are you going to use? What specific readings, authors or scholars, and why?)
 - B. 1-3 annotated outside sources, each with a one- to two-sentence description of the content of the article or book and the information's usefulness in your project. Additionally, in summary, assess whether these sources are sufficient for the project you want to do: Do they give you enough information, diversity, points of view, theory, conceptual frameworks, critical thought, etc.? If you think you need to reach your project goals, describe additional kinds of sources you need.
6. How do you envision your final presentation? Include:
 - A. Your vision of structure, design, and content.
 - B. Your goals – describe how this structure, design, and content achieves your presentational and project goals

Course Final Project:

This assignment is designed to encourage you to pursue your individual interests in the themes of the class and represents your unique contribution to the knowledge base of the class. These projects can be in any medium and include any type of engaging process and eventual presentation format and will be developed through consultation with your student peers and me. Conventional scholarly research papers (20-25 pages), as well as project incorporating visual art, street performance, social action, film, interactive events, web sites, service, and other creative approaches are all encouraged. In the end, you should feel you have a much deeper grasp of the specific compelling course topic that you chose. The assignment is designed to be open-ended to allow you to pursue a project that is meaningful to you. The proposal above provides parameters and checkpoints to help you focus your project and reach your goals. Your final project may be in the form of a process or performance outside of class, but all projects will have an end product in the form of a presentation at the end of the term. ***All projects will be presented on Tuesday, Dec. 16, starting at 5:30 p.m. and ending at 7:30 p.m.*** The final presentation of projects will be in a gallery setting where you can present in an interactive atmosphere. This will give you the opportunity to share your work with your classmates and others.

Research: Amount of outside research will vary, but all projects should be informed by information gleaned from seminar readings (if your interest area cannot be found in the readings, we can discuss additional outside sources) *and* at least 3 outside scholarly sources that are informative for your project. If you choose to do a traditional research paper instead of a creative approach, you must have at least 5 appropriate scholarly sources in addition to those you use from class.

Partnerships or groups: Partnerships or group collaborations are encouraged – project scope and intensity will increase to reflect two or more people’s work and will be agreed upon with the instructor at the time of the proposal. When the project is turned in, group members will also turn in evaluations of their own and each other’s contribution, which will factor into the grade.

Presentations: All papers are due posted on Web CT *before the start of presentations* on Dec. 16. If you are doing a creative project instead of a traditional academic paper, you will post a copy of your project (if possible) and a **Creative Statement** on Web CT, as well as a **Three-page Reflection Paper** describing how concepts/readings from the course informed and engaged your project – in addition, a copy of your creative statement should be **posted next to your project during presentations**. The Creative Statement is a 1-paragraph artist-style description of what you did and why you did it, relating these statements to course theory, themes, and learning objectives.

The grading rubric for final projects is as follows: The best projects will reflect or extend the theory and themes of class in new venues. Special attention will be paid to depth of theory/theme engagement and use of medium to communicate your points.

1. Innovation/creativity (sheds new light or builds theory)

2. Clarity (Key concepts linking culture, communication and human-nature relations are clearly explicated and their value and integration clearly communicated for diverse audiences)
3. Academic depth (theories are applied and connected in ways that demonstrate depth of understanding and cogently explore your particular questions; theories of culture, communication, and human-nature relations are related to power, knowledge, and society)
4. Reflexiveness (you exhibit ways your or your topic's specific cultural identities and positioning, as well as the cultural contexts and institutions in which you/your topic/your study participants live, shape and have shaped relations with nature, as well as your orientation toward ecoculture research)
5. Responsiveness to feedback (open to and incorporated peer and professor constructive feedback to help improve project)
6. Presentation (level of clarity, readability, and engagement of audience is high; suitable for conference paper submission or research-informed creative project suitable for graduate-level presentation.)
7. Quality of writing and creative product (sophisticated level of product appearance, organization/readability/grammar/spelling)

Some examples of final projects: Remember, you can do a traditional research approach. However, you also have the option to go less traditional. Below are some ideas I provide merely as a jumpstart to help get creative juices flowing. Also, if you choose an alternative approach, try not to feel limited by these examples; instead, they are intended to give an idea of breadth of possibility. An additional place to go for inspiration on creative approaches: www.ecoartspace.org (check out the “projects” page).

Sample projects (these would obviously need to be much more specific for an actual project):

1. An exploratory example: Explore how nature communicates in the city. *Possible research question* – How does water communicate in an urban environment? Create a video documentary to show the visual, aural and other communication of water in urban interactions. OR Explore how nature as environment might shape communication (e.g., study communication in constructed nature civic space such as Tingley Beach or the Biopark). Create a particular environment for the presentation that people could enter to experience such a shift in communication.
2. A culture jamming example: Find an area of nature-human relationship you would like to change or experiment with and do some culture jamming. (e.g., talk aloud to trees on campus, walk with your dog not using a leash with your dog making the decisions of where to go, get on your stomach to smell the grass at the Duck Pond, talk about your love for nature explicitly and emotionally with urbanite friends, etc.). Document your experiences in an autoethnographic or creative way, observe your own and other people's reactions, interpret your experiences with the help of course theory.
3. A semiotics example: Examine various visual depictions of the global warming crisis (e.g., the government's gallery at www.gfdl.noaa.gov/products/vis/gallery/ or artists' renderings). Do a semiotic analysis of the symbolic discourses involved

- in these images and create your own visual or other sensory depictions that might emanate from different discourses and that you think might have different effects.
4. A participatory action research example: Participate in an environmental movement or industry that seeks to influence cultural and social approaches to nature (e.g., a forest guardian group, a mining company, an urban habitat creation program, a restoration group, or an activist Hispanic community organic garden [e.g., La Plazita Institute in the South Valley]) and observe, analyze, and critique the main communicative elements. Explore the content of these messages and reactions to them. Evaluate whether the communication matches the goals of the movement or the realities of the industry. *Possible research question* – What are the cultural discourses within the movement or industry and are they beneficial for the environment? Explore alternative eco-communication possibilities. Share findings with the movement or group you studied and for the presentation, create a display of existing discourse, your proposal for new messages and meanings, and the group’s responses.
 5. A critical discourse analysis examples: Take a look at a text of mainstream Western cultural discourse about the environment. For instance, analyze Thomas Friedman’s just published 2008 book titled *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution--and How It Can Renew America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux Press). In looking at this mainstream ecocultural discussion, explore which discourses are enacted and whether it is possible to use dominant discourses on economy, industry, and strong nationhood to fundamentally shift human-nature relations in crucial ways.

Grading Scale:

Each student’s final course grade will be determined with respect to the following total-point grading scale:

<u>Field Experience Reflection Papers</u>	10%
<u>Participation:</u>	
Seminar Discussion	10%
Class presentations	15%
Weekly critical written commentary on readings	25%
<u>Final project</u>	40%

<u>Total final grade =</u>	100%

Course Policies:

Late assignments: For late assignments, the highest score possible will be reduced by $\frac{1}{4}$ if the assignment is turned in during the twenty-four hour period following the time due (e.g., a 100 becomes a 75), and reduced by $\frac{1}{2}$ for the second 24-hour period (e.g., a 100 becomes a 50). *Past 48 hours, no late assignments of any kind will be accepted.* If you have a documented personal or family emergency that is unforeseen, you may negotiate for a time to turn in an assignment after it is due. In these cases, you must make a good faith effort to notify the instructor (for example, by email) before or immediately following your absence. Computer trouble, having a paper or exam due in another course, forgetting the assignment is due, not having access to a computer, having minor car trouble, and being out of town on business/vacation are not considered emergencies.

Professionalism: Work produced should be polished. Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments turned in for a grade must be typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, stapled, and must conform to standard rules of English grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Assignments that seriously depart from these rules (due to sloppiness and not deliberate and careful creative effort) or the required format described in the assignment will be returned un-graded and counted as a zero/F.

Maintaining a Positive Learning Environment: Out of respect for your and others' learning experience please exhibit positive, respectful, and mature behavior while in class. All cell phones should be turned off or put on vibrate during class time. If you receive an urgent call, please leave the room quietly without drawing undue attention. Audiotape, digital, or video recording of the seminar is generally prohibited unless first cleared with the instructor.

Constructive Feedback: Please feel free to offer suggestions, comments, etc. to help improve the course and course structure. The topic of environmental culture and communication is constantly changing—I hope this course will reflect and embrace that change. I encourage you to give me feedback throughout the course. You will also have opportunities during and at the end of the course to give more formal feedback.

Ethics: The course emphasizes ethical practices and perspectives. Above all, both students and the teaching team should strive to communicate and act, both in class interactions and in assigned coursework, in a manner directed by personal integrity, honesty, and respect for self and others. Included in this focus is the need for academic honesty by students as stated by the UNM Pathfinder. Students need to do original work and properly cite sources. For example, be aware of plagiarism—directly copying more than 3 or 4 words from another author without quoting (not just citing) the author is plagiarism. If you are unclear about the definition of plagiarism, please talk to the professor. Further, course content will encourage the ethical practices and analysis of communication.

Diversity: This course encourages different perspectives related to such factors as gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and other relevant

cultural identities. The course seeks to foster understanding and inclusiveness related to such diverse perspectives and ways of communicating.

ADA accessibility: Qualified students with disabilities needing appropriate academic adjustments should contact me as soon as possible to ensure your needs are met in a timely manner. Handouts are available in alternative accessible formats upon request.

WEEKLY COURSE AND READING SCHEDULE

Class meets from October 21 through December 9/Final project presentations Dec. 16

Week 1: Culture-Nature

T 10/21

Due: Fieldstudy fee to Tema in class

Williams, R. (1980/1972). Ideas of Nature. In *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso. 67-85.

Escobar, A. (1999). After Nature: Steps to an Antiessentialist Political Ecology. *Current Anthropology*, 40(1), 1-30.

Week 2: Culture-Nature

T 10/28

Merchant, C. (1996). Reinventing Eden: Western culture as a recovery narrative. In W. Cronon (Ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (pp. 132-170). New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Plumwood, V. (1997). Androcentrism and anthropocentrism: Parallels and politics. In K. J. Warren (Ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (pp. 327-355). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Evans, M. M. (2002). "Nature" and environmental justice. In J. Adamson, M. M. Evans & R. Stein (Eds.), *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (pp. 181-193). Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Week 3: Regional study: Southwest U.S.

T 11/4

BOOK: Rodriguez, S. (2006). *Acequia: Water Sharing, Sanctity, and Place*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.

Recommended:

FOR OPTIONAL SOLO TIME ON SUNDAY MORNING OF FIELDSTUDY: Excerpts from Brown, T., & Morgan, B. (1983). *Tom Brown's Field Guide to Nature Observation and Tracking*. New York: Berkley Books.

E-Book available via UNM library on-line catalog:

DeBuys, W. E. (1985). *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, NOV. 8 & 9: REQUIRED OVERNIGHT FIELDSTUDY TRIP TO NORTHERN NEW MEXICO. DETAILS DISCUSSED IN CLASS. FEE MUST BE PAID IN ADVANCE ON WEEK 1.

Week 4: Culture-Nature Communication

T 11/11

Milstein, T. (in press for 2010). Environmental communication theories. In S. Littlejohn & K. Foss (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Carbaugh, D. (1996). Naturalizing communication and culture. In J. G. Cantrill & C. L. Oravec (Eds.), *The Symbolic Earth: Discourse and Our Creation of the Environment* (pp. 38-57). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Goatly, A. (2002). The representation of nature on the BBC World Service. *Text*, 22(1), 1-27.

Marafiotte, T., & Plec, E. (2006). From dualisms to dialogism: Hybridity in discourse about the natural world. *The Environmental Communication Yearbook*, 3, 49-75.

Week 5: Culture-Nature Communication

T 11/18

DUE BEFORE CLASS: FIELDSTUDY REFLECTION PAPER (ON WEB CT)

BOOK: Abram, D. (1997). *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books.

Week 6: Cultures of animal-human relations

T 11/25

Guest speaker for first hour and a half: Michael J. Robinson, Center for Biological Diversity, on human-culture-nature relations and wolf reintroduction

- Milstein, T. (2007). Human Communication's Effects on Relationships with Animals. In M. Bekoff (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Human-Animal Relationships: A Global Exploration of Our Connections with Animals* (Vol. 3, pp. 1044-1054). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Kahn, M. (2001). The passive voice of science: Language abuse in the wildlife profession. In A. Fill & P. Muhlhausler (Eds.), *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment* (pp. 241-244). London & New York: Continuum.
- Beardsworth, A., & Bryman, A. (2001). The wild animal in late modernity: The case of the Disneyization of zoos. *Tourist Studies*, 1(1), 83-104.
- Glenn, C. B. (2004). Constructing Consumables and Consent: A Critical Analysis of Factory Farm Industry Discourse. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 28(1), 63-81.
- Recommended further reading in this area if it interests you (for class or for project):*
- Behnke, E. A. (1999). From Merleau-Ponty's concept of nature to an interspecies practice of peace. In H. P. Steeves (Ed.), *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life* (pp. 93-116). Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Haraway, D. (1989). *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge.
- Milstein, T. (2008). When whales "speak for themselves": Communication as a mediating force in wildlife tourism. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, 2(2), 173-192.
- Stibbe, A. (2001). Language, power, and the social construction of animals. *Society and animals*, 9(2), 145-161.

Week 7: Cultural Case Studies and InterEcoCultural Communication

T 12/2

- Valladolid, J., & Apffel-Marglin, F. (2001). Andean cosmovision and the nurturing of biodiversity. In J. A. Grim (Ed.), *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (pp. 639-670). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.
- Armstrong, J. (1995). Keepers of the Earth. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (pp. 316-324). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Stibbe, A. (2004). Environmental education across cultures: Beyond the discourse of shallow environmentalism. *Language & Intercultural Communication*, 4(4), 242-260.

Recommended further reading in this area if it interests you (for class or for project):

Nabhan, G. P. (1995). Cultural parallax in viewing North American habitats. In M. E. Soule & G. Lease (Eds.), *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (pp. 87-101). Washington, DC & Covelo, CA: Island Press.

Week 8: Colonization/Globalization/Environmental Justice

T 12/9

BOOK: Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. Boston: South End Press.

For a close-to-home environmental justice example, read over this blog set up by Navajo activists in response to a proposed coal-fired power plant on Navajo Nation land: <http://www.desert-rock-blog.com/blog>

EXHIBITION OF FINAL PROJECTS: *All projects will be presented gallery-style on Tuesday, Dec. 16, starting at 5:30 p.m. and ending at 7:30 p.m.* The final presentation of projects will likely be in John Sommers Gallery, UNM Art Building Room 202, where you can present your work in an interactive atmosphere. Please feel free to invite friends, colleagues, and family to have an opportunity to share your work. Final paper or creative statement and copy of creative project ***due before start of exhibition*** posted on WebCT.