

Rhetoric, Nature and Environmentalism

COMM 377/EVST 377

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Course Description and Objectives

Especially since the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, environmental issues have become increasingly prominent subjects of US public discourse. A glance at any day's *Missoulian* shows that this is especially true in Montana. Not only environmental groups, but also scientists, industry spokespersons, government officials, and interested citizens attempt to influence attitudes and actions, personal opinions and public decisions through the production of persuasive public discourse. The power of these discourses is generated to a significant degree by the way they appeal to cultural and ideological assumptions about <nature> and <progress>, and how they come to be articulated in relationship to the ever-shifting category of "environmentalism."

This course, then, is intended to help students understand the rhetorical dynamics of public discourse about nature and environmentalism. **The course has two primary objectives. First, it is intended to introduce students to the range of texts that constitute "environmental rhetoric" within a US context.** The course takes as its object of study public discourse that attempts to influence meaning and action with regard to the environment. The course begins by looking at forms of discourse that attempt to shape public understanding of "nature," and then moves into more explicit, traditional forms of rhetoric such as advocacy literature produced by environmental movement organizations, press releases and public statements produced by industries, advocacy by citizens and government officials at public meetings, and protest rhetoric by marginalized voices. The course intends to help students see how their own beliefs, attitudes and values regarding nature and environmentalism are influenced by these texts.

A second objective of the course is to improve students' writing abilities in the context of rhetorical analysis. The course will introduce you to a broadly conceived rhetorical perspective on discourse, a perspective which takes seriously the role that symbols, arguments, narratives, metaphors, audiences, identities and ideologies play in influencing attitude and action. Over the course of the term, we will write read and write essays that bring those concepts to bear on various environmental texts. As a result, your writing ability should improve, as should your ability to analyze public discourse.

Formats

The course involves four basic formats: lecture, discussion, field trip and workshop. The lecture and discussion are intended to help students understand basic concepts of rhetoric and to show how those concepts might be used to illuminate the meanings of environmental rhetoric. Field trips are intended to engage environmental rhetoric that relies heavily on its situatedness. The workshops, along with continual feedback from the instructor, are intended to give focused attention to the skills need to write critical essays. **Because of the focused attention on writing throughout the course, COMM majors may use this course to fulfill their upper-division writing requirement.**

Texts

The texts for this course are almost exclusively academic articles or book chapters, available on ERES or hard-copy in the library. You will save considerable \$\$ by copying the articles yourself, rather than paying through the nose for FacPac. The ERES password is COMM377 (no spaces).

Requirements and Evaluation

Since this course fulfills the writing requirement for COMM majors, a significant portion of your work for this class is based on writing. You will have two major essays for the term, and you will revise one of them based on my feedback at the end of the semester. In addition, I will assign short

writing assignments that I call “engagement essays.” They may ask you to engage the readings for the week, or to engage a current environmental issue, or to respond to some text or event or speech that occurs during the semester. Expect to have three or four of those during the term. They will be short (one page single-spaced) and are designed to encourage thoughtful reflection and improve your writing.

Each component of the course contributes equally to your final grade:

Critical Analysis 1:	20%
Critical Analysis 2:	20%
Revision:	20%
Engagement Essays:	20%
Class Participation:	<u>20%</u>
	100%

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 your unique contributions and characteristics and replaces them with a disfigured, false ideal.

In this course, it is primarily a matter of conducting scholarship ethically: giving credit to others for their ideas, and fairly and accurately gathering and representing the discourse of others (your “data”). It results in an ‘F’ on the particular piece of work and, in cases of willful disregard for the rules, a permanent ‘F’ on your course transcript. Bottom line: don’t do it.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability which may require modification of some element of the course, please obtain the appropriate documentation and then see me so we can make arrangements.

Expectations

Those of you in COMM know that mine are high. Beyond that, I need to say a few things specific to this course. First, while it is a writing course, I suspect the bigger challenge will be the fact that it is reading-intensive. To get something out of our class time, You HAVE to do the reading and you HAVE to stay on top of it. Get out your daily planners, start blocking off the hours, and stick to it. We’ll discuss how to read the academic articles efficiently, too, in order to make your intellectual labor satisfying. Taking notes, having a dictionary by your side (and perhaps your notes from COMM 250, if you haven’t already donated them to the Smithsonian or used them to line your birdcage), and writing down questions and connections as you go will help to make the readings meaningful for you.

Also, it is to your benefit to start reading about environmental issues on your own. You can do this on the cheap if you make use of the internet and keep your eyes open around campus and town (it is Missoula MT, after all). The main articles from the *Missoulian* each day are online, the *Independent* is free every Thursday, and there are several online environmental news services that can send you daily emails. Several environmental organizations have offices in Missoula, and I bet they would love to have you drop by and pick up (and read) their stuff. Further, take 10 seconds to scan the bulletin boards around campus and you’ll find several talks, meetings, films, etc. around town that address environmental issues. It’s all rhetoric, my friends, and we have plenty of it here.

As far as classroom expectations: this is an undergrad-only course, but it is upper-division and therefore it is fair to expect you to be able to do more than sit in the back of the room and take notes. I don’t like to say I’m in a business, but when it comes right down to it I’m in the citizen-production business, so I want to produce thoughtful articulate citizens. That means we will engage in serious intellectual activity—reading serious thinkers, writing and speaking seriously—about serious matters. As many of you know, I believe we can engage in serious intellectual activity *and* enjoy it too, so I

don't mean to give the wrong impression. I do mean to say that you must be willing to come to class ready to engage every day, and if you are not then you might want to reconsider your options.

On a different note: for some odd reason, people get hot under the collar pretty quickly about environmental issues. (I will argue that that reason is called "ideology," and we'll discuss that idea throughout the semester). This can translate into some rather unproductive communicative patterns in the classroom, so I want to call attention to that now and encourage you to remember that what we're trying to do here is not attack people, win battles, or practice soapbox oratory. We are trying to understand environmental rhetoric. That means that often, you will need to bracket your initial impulses and fundamental beliefs. Rather than reject some position immediately, I will encourage you first to understand that position as it functions rhetorically—in relation to situation, purpose, audience. You may choose to proceed to criticism, but only after you have done the hard work of understanding the rhetorical dynamics of a particular piece of discourse. This holds for environmental rhetoric, academic essays about environmental rhetoric, and your colleague's arguments about environmental rhetoric.

There are good interpersonal reasons for doing all of this, but just as important are the personal reasons. One by-product of studying environmental rhetoric is that you, hopefully, will start to see how your own beliefs, attitudes and values have ALREADY been shaped by rhetorical discourse. You will consistently hear me ask, "Why do you think that," or "What's your evidence for that?" These questions are intended to get you to think more carefully about the positions you take, how you've come to take them, and why you respond to environmental rhetoric in certain ways. You may even come to change your mind as a result of our investigations throughout the semester. There's nothing wrong with that, by the way. Ultimately, that's what a liberal arts education is intended to enable—your ability to make sound judgments rather than knee-jerk reactions based on unexamined assumptions.

I say all of this because I enjoy teaching this course, and I want us to get started on the right foot and be mindful of opportunities and hazards as we go. Please keep me informed as to how the class is going for you and what we can do to enhance your learning.

Rhetoric, Nature and Environmentalism

Course Schedule

Introduction to Rhetoric

Sept. 3 Course Introduction
Lecture on Rhetoric

Sept. 10 Why Symbols Matter
Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "A Rhetorical Perspective"
Murray Edelman, "Political Language"
"The Luntz Memo"

Rhetoric and the Constitution of Nature

Sept. 17 Discourses of Nature
Readings: William Cronon, "In Search of Nature"
Jack Turner, "Economic Nature"
Due: *Engagement Essay*

Sept. 24 Constituting Sublime Nature
Readings: 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"
Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, "Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism."

Oct. 1 Writing Rhetorical Criticism
Readings: Malcolm Sillars and Bruce Gronbeck, from "Communication Criticism: Rhetoric, Social Codes and Cultural Studies"
Sample Essays
Due: *Bring draft of Critical Analysis 1 to class for workshopping*
Due: *Critical Analysis 1 Due Friday Oct. 3, 2pm*

Rhetoric and Environmental Advocacy

Oct. 8 Mapping the Terrain: Dominant Themes in US Environmental Advocacy
Readings: Mark Dowie, from "Losing Ground"
Michael Spangle and David Knapp, "Ways We Talk about the Earth: An Exploration of Persuasive Tactics and Appeals in Environmental Discourse"
Aldo Leopold, from "A Sand County Almanac"
Rachel Carson, from "Silent Spring"

Oct. 15 Modes of Appeal: Constituting Authority, Rationality and Emotion
Readings: M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer, "The Discourse of 'Environmental Hysteria.'"
Frank Fischer, from "Citizens, Experts and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge"
Due: *Engagement Essay*

<u>Oct. 22</u>	<u>Rhetorical Strategies and Tactics</u>
<i>Readings:</i>	Jonathan Lange, "The Logic of Competing Information Campaigns: Conflict over Old Growth and the Spotted Owl" Marilyn Cooper, "Environmental Rhetoric in the Age of Hegemonic Politics: Earth First! and The Nature Conservancy" Brant Short, Earth First! and the Rhetoric of Moral Confrontation"
<u>Oct. 29</u>	<u>Tropes: Metaphor, Synecdoche, and Irony</u>
<i>Readings:</i>	Mark P. Moore, "Making Sense of Salmon: Synecdoche and Irony in a Natural Resource Crisis" Cheryl Glotfelty, "Cold War, <i>Silent Spring</i> : The Trope of War in Modern Environmentalism"
<i>Due:</i>	<i>Engagement Essay</i>
<u>Nov. 5</u>	<u>Melodrama and the Moral Framing of Environmental Issues</u>
<i>Readings:</i>	Steve Schwarze, "Juxtaposition and the Exposure of Environmental Hazards: Asbestos Contamination in Libby, Montana" Andrew Schneider, "A Town Left to Die"
<i>Screenings:</i>	Bill Moyers, "Trade Secrets" or Michael Brown, "Dust to Dust"
<u>Nov. 12</u>	<u>Image Events: Attention-Getters or Meaning-Makers?</u>
<i>Readings:</i>	Kevin DeLuca, from "Image Events: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism" <i>The Missoulian</i> , "Yahoo factor doesn't help anyone's cause" Steve Schwarze, "'Theatrics' have their place in environmental debate" Guest Speaker: TBA
<u>Nov. 19*</u>	<u>Rhetorical Analysis Workshop</u>
<i>Readings:</i>	Andrea Lunsford, from "The Everyday Writer" *This date needs to be renegotiated, as I will be attending a national conference.
<i>Due:</i>	<i>Bring draft of essay to class</i>
<i>Due:</i>	<i>Turn in essay before leaving for Thanksgiving Break</i>
<u>Nov. 26</u>	<u>Thanksgiving Break, no class</u>
<u>Dec. 3</u>	<u>Topic TBA based on class discussion</u>
<u>Dec. 10</u>	<u>Course Wrap-Up, Evaluation, and Workshop of Revised Critical Analysis</u>
<i>Due:</i>	<i>Bring new draft to class for workshopping</i>
<u>Finals Week</u>	<i>Revised Critical Analysis due.</i> I will accept papers between Friday, Dec. 12, and 5 pm Dec. 16 (Tuesday). Our final course meeting is at 1:10 pm, Thursday Dec. 18.