COMX 347.01A: Rhetoric, Nature and Environmentalism

Steven J. Schwarze
University of Montana - Missoula, steven.schwarze@umontana.edu
Rhetoric, Nature, and Environmentalism  
COMM 347

Instructor: Steve Schwarze, Ph.D.  
Email: steven.schwarze@umontana.edu  
Office: LA 301  
Phone: 243-4901  
Office Hours: T 11-12, W 12-1 & by appt.

Course Description
The primary purpose of this course is to help students engage thoughtfully with public discourse about environmental issues within a US context. It introduces students to key texts, standard appeals, and recurring strategies of environmental advocacy. The secondary purpose of the course is to improve your writing abilities in the context of rhetorical analysis. The course will introduce you to a broadly conceived rhetorical perspective on discourse, a perspective that takes seriously the role that symbols, images, narratives, metaphors, audiences, identities and ideologies play in influencing attitude and action.

During the course, you will write read and write essays and give speeches that bring those concepts to bear on various environmental texts. You will analyze environmental rhetoric or engage scholarly research about environmental rhetoric, and you also will produce environmental advocacy that is attentive to what we know about rhetorical strategies. Your writing ability should improve, as should your skills of speaking analysis and criticism.

Because of the emphasis on writing throughout the course, this course fulfills the upper-division writing requirement in COMM.

Student Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1) explain how foundational rhetorical artifacts of the US environmental movement have influenced public understanding of nature and progress
2) identify and analyze rhetorical strategies and tactics in environmental discourse
3) make persuasive arguments about environmental issues, both orally and in writing
4) make persuasive critical judgments about environmental rhetoric on the basis of effectiveness, ethical quality, and ecological soundness.

Students also should achieve the following objectives for upper-division writing courses: identify and pursue more sophisticated questions for academic inquiry; find, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information effectively from diverse sources; manage multiple perspectives as appropriate; recognize the purposes and needs of discipline-specific audiences and adopt the academic voice necessary for the chosen discipline; use multiple drafts, revision, and editing in conducting inquiry and preparing written work; follow the conventions of citation, documentation, and formal presentation appropriate to that discipline; develop competence in information technology and digital literacy.

Readings
All course readings will be posted on Moodle, so please insure that you can access it on a regular basis. Other timely material may be circulated via email or distributed in class.

Beyond the required course readings, there are several sources that I would like you to make part of your daily diet of reading. Set aside 20 minutes (or trade a half-hour of crappy TV) for this aspect of environmental citizenship. These sources will help you get up to speed on environmental issues, and we will occasionally items from them.
1. **Mountain West 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 [toxic and otherwise], energy development, endangered species, etc.). You can subscribe at [http://mountainwestnews.org/Subscribe.aspx](http://mountainwestnews.org/Subscribe.aspx)

2. **Grist Magazine**, a Seattle-based, non-profit, online environmental magazine. One of their mottos/slogans is “Gloom and doom with a sense of humor,” so it is not exactly *Newsweek*, and they editorialize pretty freely. Their daily and weekly services sends short, snarky blurbs about news as well as links to original sources and other parts of their website (interviews—which are often quite good, enviro “advice,” commentaries). You can subscribe at: [http://www.grist.org/services/connect/subscribe](http://www.grist.org/services/connect/subscribe)

3. **High Country News**, a twice-monthly news magazine about issues in the Western US. It has more in-depth reporting and usually one long-form piece of journalism in each issue. Some articles are for pay-subscribers only, but many are available at [www.hcn.org](http://www.hcn.org).

4. **Yale Environment 360**, which bills itself as an “online magazine offering opinion, analysis, reporting and debate on global environmental issues.” It gets a wide range of contributors (not just journalists) and addresses an equally wide range of topics. Available at: [http://e360.yale.edu/](http://e360.yale.edu/).

5. **Dot Earth**, a blog by Andrew Revkin, science writer at the *New York Times*. Since everyone wants to influence “the paper of record,” he can stage a good deal of debate on core issues that can’t be addressed adequately in standard journalism. Climate change is one major focus for him. Also has a great “blogroll” of other blogs and websites on enviro issues. Available at: [http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/](http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/)

Around town, of course, pay attention to the *Missoulian*, *The Independent*, and *NewWest.net*. Comparing the coverage among these is a good way to start ridding yourself of flimsy notions of “bias” and replacing them with more nuanced ideas about point-of-view, objectivity vs. neutrality, dramatization, personalization, etc. Finally, bookmark the EVST Events and Announcements page [http://www.cas.umt.edu/evst/events_menu.htm](http://www.cas.umt.edu/evst/events_menu.htm) or subscribe to their weekly email newsletter.

There are many other good line sources for learning about environmental issues and observing environmental rhetoric. I would encourage you to share them with the class.

**Assignments and Grading**

The course will use both written essays and speeches as means for learning. We will likely have a 5-6 page essay due in Sept about discourses of nature; a paired speech and paper about an environmental problem in late October; and a speech and longer revised paper at the end of the semester. There will be a few short writing assignments, mostly one-two pagers, in the form of reading responses or quick-hitting rhetorical analyses. We’ll have a few during the first unit of the course to help you identify strengths and areas for improvement in your own writing, and then a few more that will be preparatory for the major assignments.
“Nature” Essay: 5-6 pages. This essay will examine some text in relation to the discourses of nature we study during the first unit. Late September.

Speech 1: Problem speech. 6-7 minutes. This speech will attempt to shape public consciousness about some environmental issue. It will be based on research about the problem as well as a careful analysis of rhetorical appeals that are adapted to your audience. Mid-late October.

Paper 1: Problem analysis paper. 6-7 pages. This essay will work in tandem with the first speech and will ask you to identify and analyze the rhetorical strategies used by advocates discussing an environmental issue. Mid-late October.

Speech 2: Advocacy speech. 6-7 minutes. This speech will advocate some kind of collective action to address the environmental problem discussed in your first set of the assignments. Depending on overlap of topics in the class, this assignment may take the form of a panel in which you advocate and take questions in connection with others on your topic. December.

Paper 2: Final paper. 12-15 pages. This essay is the culmination of your work in the class. It should substantially revise the first paper by a) responding to instructor feedback on the problem analysis paper, and b) extending your analysis based on additional research and the persuasive speech. December/finals.

Details and due dates will be provided on Moodle and discussed in class. The contribution of these assignments to your final grade is:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature essay</td>
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<td>Problem Speech</td>
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<td>Problem Paper</td>
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<td>Advocacy Speech</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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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.

For this class, 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. Go to the UM Student Life web page and read all about it. Although I handle instances on a case-by-case basis, plagiarism usually results in an ‘F’ on the particular piece of work and, in some cases, an ‘F’ on your course transcript. Bottom line: don’t do it.

Deadlines
I have found that deadlines tend to promote health and well-being, 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 unusual circumstances.
Rhetoric, Nature and Environmentalism
Fall 2013 – Tentative schedule

Rhetoric and the Constitution of <Nature>

Aug. 27/29 Discourses of Nature
William Cronon, Intro to Uncommon Ground

Sept. 3/5 Nature I: Preservationism and Conservationism
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”
Christine Oravec, “Conservationism v. Preservationism: The ‘Public Interest’ in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy”

Nature II: The Environment and Human Health
Rachel Carson, from “Silent Spring”
Cheryl Glotfelty, “Cold War, Silent Spring: The Trope of War in Modern Environmentalism”
Sandra Steingraber, “The Whole Fracking Enchilada” and “The Fracking of Rachel Carson”

Sept. 10/12 Nature III: Environmental Justice
Ft. Belknap article
Steve Schwarze, “Silences and Possibilities of Asbestos Activism: Tales from Libby and Beyond”
NOTE: No class Thursday 9/12

Sept. 17/19 Nature IV: Ecological Modernization
Ross Singer, “Neoliberal Style, the American Re-generation, and Ecological Jeremiad in Thomas Friedman’s ‘Code Green.’”

Sept. 24/26 Workshop Week
Building arguments about rhetoric; working with sources and citations; workshop with drafts; paper due Sept. 26

Rhetorical Appeals and Environmental “Movement”
Oct. 1/3 The Dynamics of Environmental Conflict
Jonathan Lange, “The Logic of Competing Information Campaigns: Conflict over Old Growth and the Spotted Owl”
Brant Short, Earth First! and the Rhetoric of Moral Confrontation
Steve Schwarze, “Environmental Melodrama”
Oct. 8/10 Prophetic Rhetoric
J. Robert Cox, “The Die is Cast: Topical and Ontological Dimensions of the Locus of the Irreparable,”
Thomas Rosteck and Thomas S. Frentz, “Myth and Multiple Readings in Environmental Rhetoric: The Case of An Inconvenient Truth,”
M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer, “Millenial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from Silent Spring to Global Warming”

Oct. 15/17 Images and Image Events
Kevin DeLuca, from Image Events: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism
Jennifer Peeples, “Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes”
Phaedra Pezzullo, “Resisting ‘National Breast Cancer Awareness Month’: The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and their Cultural Performances”

Oct. 22/24 Workshop Week
Paper and speech development in class; readings TBA

Oct. 29/31 Speeches

Nov. 5

Nov. 7 Resistance to Environmental Movement
Pete Bsumek, et al, “Corporate Ventriloquism: Corporate Advocacy, the Coal Industry, and the Appropriation of Voice”
Jennifer Peeples et al, “Under Pressure: Industrial Apocalyptic Rhetoric in a Burlesque Frame”
Emily Plec and Mary Pettenger, “Greenwashing Consumption: The Didactic Framing of Exxon Mobil’s Energy Solutions.”

Nov. 12/14 Thinking Strategically about Environmental Advocacy
Craig Waddell, “Perils of a Modern Cassandra: Rhetorical Aspects of Public Indifference to the Population Explosion”
Robert Cox, “Advocacy Campaigns and Message Construction”
Additional readings TBA

Nov. 19/21/26 Inventing and Organizing Persuasive Speeches
Steve Schwarze, excerpts from Speaking in the Public Sphere
Note: No class Nov. 21

Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 3/6 Final Speeches

Finals Week
Monday 12/9 papers due
Thursday 12/12 last meeting, 10:10 am