

Environmental Integration III: Interpreting and Communicating Information

Lecture: TTh 10:30-11:50 Seelye 302

Office Hours: T 2:30-3:30pm and W 3-4pm in my office (Seelye 305)

Learning Objectives

This course is designed to improve your skills in communicating complex environmental information to a wide variety of audiences. By the end of the course, you should be able to

- Read, understand, and summarize research from a variety of disciplines
- Locate relevant and credible research
- Assess credibility of research
- Assess the needs and motivation of your audience
- Identify decision makers who can move issues forward
- Identify an argument to which a particular audience might be receptive
- Articulate your argument forcefully
- Provide evidence in support of your argument
- Communicate points clearly and concisely

The class activities and assignments are designed to improve your skills in each of these areas. Throughout the course, we will be moving forward on two tracks simultaneously. First, we will be working as a group to understand and contribute to current debates about state level carbon tax proposals. Working together on a single issue lets us practice skills and techniques together on a common set of information. Second, each of you will be applying these skills to a topic of your own choosing. Early assignments on this track are designed to help you prepare for the final course project.

Assignments

The assignments in the course can be divided into two groups based on how they will be assessed.

Graded assignments

There are six graded assignments with the following weights:

- 5% Annotated bibliography
- 10% Article critique
- 10% Article presentation
- 10% Policy history paper
- 15% Regional carbon tax policy recommendation
- 5% Interest group analysis
- 15% Policy project
- 30% Final project

Completion assignments

The emphasis in this class is on developing communication skills. The only effective way to improve your communication skills is practice. As a result, we will engage in numerous class activities and small writing assignments to build your skills. Your participation in these activities is essential. I will ask you to regularly turn in small assignments and to complete activities in class and share the results with me. These will be marked only for completion. I will generally read through all the submissions and pull out one or two particularly strong examples and use one or two examples to demonstrate areas for improvement.

As long as you complete at least 90% of the activities/assignments on time your course grade will be the weighted average of your graded assignments. The following downward adjustments will be made if you complete fewer assignments/activities:

- 85%-90%: 1/3 grade step reduction (eg. A- to B+)
- 80%-85%: 2/3 grade step reduction (eg. A- to B)
- 70%-80%: 1 letter grade reduction
- Below 70%: 2 letter grade reduction

Final Course Project

Each of you will be completing a final course project on a topic of your own choosing. You have considerable latitude in deciding the topic and format of this project. The main requirements are:

- You produce a substantial communication project that has a clearly defined message and audience.
- Your message has a clear connection with environmental policy in some fashion.
- The communication is needed in that the intended audience is either not aware of or not already in agreement with your message.

While you do not need to make a final decision about your topic or message until later in the semester, I urge you to think about areas of potential interest early on. You have a choice of topic on three earlier assignments in the course: an annotated bibliography due on Sept 26, an article presentation on Oct 3 or 5, and an interest group analysis due on Nov 9. Although it is not strictly required, the intent is that these assignments will be in a single area, and will help narrow your focus and build toward your final project.

Course Policies

Disclaimer: The policies in this syllabus are subject to change. Any changes will be announced to the class and posted on Moodle.

Electronic Files

All written assignments will be turned in on Moodle electronically and I will provide electronic feedback. Files are to be uploaded to Moodle in PDF format only (with the exception of slides for presentations). Plan ahead when working on your documents and make sure you know how to convert into PDF. **Assignments are not considered submitted until a PDF is uploaded.**

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be assessed a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade for each 12 hours or portion thereof late (a smaller penalty will apply if a non-PDF file is uploaded by the original deadline). I do not generally grant extensions; if a truly unusual situation comes up, please contact me in advance. Barring extreme emergency, extension requests within a day of the deadline will not be granted. Presentations must be given on time.

Email

I encourage you to email me at ssayre@smith.edu with questions. I will make every effort to respond to your emails within one business day (i.e. within 24 hours during the week and by the end of the day Monday for emails received over the weekend). I generally will not answer detailed conceptual questions in emails but will ask you to make an appointment to come by my office.

Class Attendance

Regular attendance is expected and missing more than a couple classes in the semester will lower your course grade. If you miss class on a day we are discussing a reading, I will expect you to complete a short response paper on the readings (details to be arranged on a case by case basis) and consult a classmate for notes about what we did in class. If you miss class on a day we have a guest speaker or workshop, the material is not easily replaced. The dates for these events are not yet finalized, but once they are, please notify me immediately if you have an unavoidable conflict.

Sharing of work

We will be working together as a group to improve everyone's communication skills. A key element of our work will be providing feedback and suggestions on each other's work. This includes peer review of completed assignments as well as me sharing examples from submitted work with the class. We will discuss as a group early in the course what guidelines we want to set for sharing of work. Important questions to consider include whether I should share examples anonymously or with attribution, whether and under what circumstances student should be able to request that a particular item not be shared, and any other concerns you may have.

Technology in class

Please make sure that all mobile devices are silenced before class. If you have an emergency, quietly leave the classroom and take your call in the hallway. I find that students using laptop computers in class is distracting to me and other students, in part because the temptation to take "just a second" to check email or web updates is hard to resist. Moreover, research demonstrates that students using a laptop to take notes typically retain less information than those taking notes by hand. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me. Otherwise, keep your laptop turned off and stowed away during class, unless you are using it during one of our workshop style sessions.

Academic Honesty

As in any other course at Smith, you are required to adhere to the provisions of the Honor Code. I take academic honesty very seriously and will report any suspected violations of the Honor Code to the Honor Board.

Due Dates of Major Assignments

- Sept 26** Annotated bibliography
- 28** Article critique
- Oct 3 or 5** Article presentation
- 12** Environmental policy history
- 31** Carbon tax policy recommendation
- Nov 9** Interest group analysis
- 21** Policy project
- 28** Discuss *Don't Be Such A Scientist*
- Dec 5** Communication plan for final project
- 18** Final projects due

Tentative Schedule

Specific readings will be posted on Moodle.

- Sept 7** Introduction
- 12** Economics of pollution taxes
- 14** Reading a difficult article
- 19** Claims and evidence
- 21** Statistical evidence
- 26** Critiquing statistics in research articles
- 28** Critically assessing research
- Oct 3** Article Presentations I
- 5** Article Presentations II
- 10** *No class - Fall Break*
- 12** Framing
- 17** Theories of Persuasion
- 19** Guest speaker: Lora Sandhusen
- 24** Targeting your message: the message box
- 26** Communicating about risk
- 31** Guest speaker: Mary Ellen Hannibal
- Nov 2** Revising sentences and paragraphs
- 7** Writing workshop
- 9** Communicating with Maps
- 14** Mapping workshop
- 16** What makes a good graph?
- 21** Graphing workshop
- 23** *No class - Thanksgiving Break*
- 28** Discuss *Don't Be Such A Scientist*
- 30** Role of science in the policy process
- Dec 5** Final project communication plan draft/workshop
- 7** Science and the Community: Lessons from Flint, MI
- 12** Conflict resolution role-playing game I
- 14** Conflict resolution role-playing game II

ENV 311 Catalog Description, Fall 2017

This course focuses on the interpretation and communication of environmental issues and solutions from multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives. Using contemporary environmental topics as a foundation, this course emphasizes careful assessment of both message and audience to design effective communication strategies for complex topics. Students develop the ability to read, interpret, and critique environmental research from a variety of disciplines; to consider the needs and motivation of their audience; to develop evidence-based arguments tailored to a particular audience; and to articulate those arguments clearly and concisely. Prerequisite: one semester of statistics. 101 and 201/202 are strongly recommended.

Enrollment limited to 25. {N}{S}