

Environmental Integration III: Interpreting and Communicating Information

Meets: TTh 9:25-10:50 in Burton 101

Office Hours: T 2:45-3:45pm and W 1:30-2:30 in my office (Wright 219)

Course Description

How do we talk, write, and share information about the environment? This course is designed to help you gain theoretical understanding and hands-on practice in the emerging transdiscipline of environmental communication. We will interrogate and explore how to create bridges between scientists, the public, policy-makers and stakeholders in an era of partisan divides and a complex media landscape.

This course focuses primarily on the public and policy spheres, relying on the expectation that your discipline-specific training in other courses has prepared you to communicate with others with similar training. Here, we focus on reaching those with general knowledge rather than in-depth scholarly expertise. Specifically, the course aims to improve your ability to:

- Read, assess, and summarize research from a variety of disciplines
- Understand your audience and develop messages that consider their needs and motivation
- Select an effective format to reach your audience
- Articulate your arguments and the evidence supporting them clearly, concisely, and forcefully

Texts

There are two required texts for the course. Copies of both will be available in the bookstore and both are available on Amazon as well.

- *Going public: A guide for social scientists* by Arlene Stein and Jessie Daniels
- *Writing Public Policy: A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy Making Process* by Catherine Smith

Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following percentages:

- 15% Twitter
- 20% Stakeholder engagement plan
- 20% Policy position paper
- 25% Final project including communication plan
- 20% Participation

Due Dates

Sept 19 Twitter influencers list

Sept 25 Tweetstorm draft

Oct 1 Final tweetstorm

Oct 29 Stakeholder engagement plan

Nov 11 Draft position paper

Nov 20 Final position paper due

Dec 5 Draft communication plan

Dec 20 Final project and communication plan due

Twitter

This two-part assignment will engage with communication via social media by focusing on discussion of research via Twitter. You will

- Work with others to develop a list of media influencers actively writing about your beat of interest on Twitter (20%)
- Write your own tweetstorm and include a list of sources and a description of the goal of your tweetstorm (80%)

Stakeholder engagement plan

Working with an assigned group you will

- produce a 1000-word brief that:
 - defines an issue or problem within your beat of contemporary interest
 - defines each group of stakeholders and their position
 - proposes a way to engage those stakeholders and to collaboratively develop a solution with their input
- include a separate list of sources you consulted
- present your proposal in a short group presentation in class

Policy position paper

You will take on the role of a staffer for a particular politician. You are encouraged but not required to build on the issue explored in your group stakeholder engagement plan. You will

- produce a 1200-1500 word position that advises your boss on what position to take on a particular issue of relevance to your beat
- briefly present your argument to the class

Final Course Project

You will complete a final course project on a topic of your own choosing within your beat. You have considerable latitude in deciding the specific 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, i.e. the intended audience is either not aware of or not already in agreement with your message
- You clearly articulate the rationale for your project and why your choices of format, content, and message are appropriate to achieve your goal

Participation

You are expected to come to class regularly and promptly, to complete assigned readings, to be prepared to contribute to class discussions, and to actively participate in class activities including minipresentations, peer feedback, and a role-playing negotiation exercise. Since this is a course in communication, we will practice several techniques to improve your ability to connect with others in conversation and more formal oral presentations and you will frequently be asked to do small oral presentations.

Assuming that you complete these activities in good faith and miss no more than a couple classes, your participation grade will be the average of your remaining assignments. Students who regularly miss class, arrive late or unprepared, or fail to participate meaningfully in class activities may receive few or no points in the participation category. Students who regularly go above and beyond in class activities may receive a participation grade above their course average.

Note: I recognize that there are many ways to participate meaningfully in class and have structured our class activities to offer multiple ways to contribute. If you find speaking up in full class discussions challenging, I encourage you to adopt a specific challenge goal for yourself based on your own comfort level in participation (e.g. I will make one comment in a full class discussion each week) and to focus on participating actively in our smaller group activities. If you are comfortable speaking up in class discussions, I encourage you to consider ways that you can help bring your classmates into the discussion, including building constructively on their contributions in full class discussions, highlighting contributions made by classmates in smaller groups, or consciously leaving space for others to participate.

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. Written assignments are to be uploaded to Moodle in PDF format only. 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 may ask 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 presentations, a guest speaker, or a specific in-class activity (e.g. peer review, negotiation game) the material is not easily replaced. Please notify me immediately if you have an unavoidable conflict with a date like this.

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 social media 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. That said, if you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other class-related purposes, please make a special effort to minimize the distraction your use may cause for others and limit your use to class-related activities.

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. If you have any questions about what would constitute a Honor Code violation in the context of this course, please come talk to me before the assignment is due.