COURSE OVERVIEW

In this class we will work on developing your writing and communication skills while adding to your rhetorical knowledge. We will investigate the choices speakers and writers make and build on your ability to interpret and write various forms of writing. Our topic for the semester is environmental sustainability: we’ll look at some of the rhetoric involved with environmentalism and consider sustainability issues from various perspectives.

We’ll watch three documentary films for the course and read weekly essays on sustainability concerns. You’ll write five papers for a grade with at least two drafts of each. I will also ask you to do response papers that you’ll upload to our D2L Dropbox in which you’ll reflect on course ideas or pursue a class discussion. You’ll also do two class presentations. Through the readings and writings, you’ll get an idea of the range, requirements, and possibilities of professional communications while examining the vast topic of environmental sustainability. You will be engaging with your colleagues and me regularly, and you’ll frequently do reading quizzes and worksheets. I’ll also ask you to do an outdoor service event, about which you’ll write a narrative.

CORE AND OTHER CRITERIA

This course fulfills the Arts and Sciences core curriculum for written communication at CU-Boulder. This course also addresses the key criteria for an upper-division core course as specified by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and by the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR).

Rhetorical Knowledge: In this course, we will review and develop your understanding of the power and prevalence of rhetoric. Being rhetorically savvy is useful, for we encounter rhetorical situations and strategies every day in what we hear, read, and see (movies, TV, Web). And we use rhetorical approaches all the time, even if we don’t consciously choose to do so. As we’ll discover, examining sustainability issues is a particularly effective way of understanding the power of rhetoric.

Writing Process: This course offers one of your last opportunities while in college to work intensively on your communication skills and receive substantive feedback on your writing from others. By now, you know that good writing requires more than a single draft; it requires thought and revision and, if possible, input from others. Good writing also requires that you understand the rhetorical situation in any writing task. We’ll also consider the abundant writing resources now available through multiple technologies: print, film, online, etc.

Critical Thinking: Reading, analysis, and discussion develop and exercise your critical thinking abilities. Thus we’ll be reading and examining complex issues and considering these issues from multiple points of view. You’ll work on discerning the difference between thoughtful responses and kneejerk reactions, criticism from critique, discourse from ranting, and more.
Genres: Different situations require different forms of writing. To address this fact of the work world and everywhere else, you'll write various types of essays for this course (summary, analysis, literature review, proposal, and narrative).

Conventions: As you write these papers, we'll consider the conventions, grammatical and stylistic, of upper-level writing.

Effective Communication and Presentation: Our goal overall is to understand different approaches and possibilities when it comes to writing, speaking, and presenting for varied audiences. We'll work on easy readability and comprehensible meaning—these are always vital, whether you're writing an email or putting together a press release or giving a presentation to your boss.

Effective Learning: I'll also ask you to examine your own learning and thinking processes to figure out what learning methods work best for you. We'll also work on skills that will transfer to every piece of writing you ever do in your entire life. Really.

TEXTS
1) Brooke Rollins and Lee Bauknight, eds., Green, (2010)
2) Diana Hacker, A Writer's Reference (Bedford Press, 6th edition)
3) Many articles on D2L Web site
4) Writing and rhetoric Web sites: writing@CSU (http://writing.colostate.edu/index.cfm); Silva Rhetoricae (http://rhetoric.byu.edu/); the Purdue OWL. (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/)

FILMS
We’ll rhetorically examine three sustainability-related films this semester: Ramin Bahrani’s Plastic Bag (2009), Aaron Woolf’s King Corn (2007), and Robert Kenner’s Food, Inc. (2008). You are required to see all the films; there will be a quiz on them. I will be showing the films at various times at the beginning of the semester. We will see Plastic Bag (20 minutes long) in class.

WORK and GRADING BREAKDOWN (in percentages)
I use CU’s recommended grading scale, which is based on percentages: 72.6-77.5 = C; 77.6-79.5 = C+; 79.6-82.5 = B-; 82.6-87.5 = B; etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Film summary</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability Presentation project</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Outdoor service event narrative</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Grant proposal</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>Presentation on readings—lead discussion</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance at service learning event</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading quizzes, worksheets, and reading responses</td>
<td>15 (averaged)</td>
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<td>Critiques of your colleagues' papers and general participation</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>3 (see attendance policy below)</td>
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<td>TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE</td>
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Dr. Dickson’s Course Policies

ATTENDANCE: If you don’t attend class regularly, you won’t get much from the course and you’ll likely get a disappointing grade. So I have an attendance policy: Each absence after 3 ABSENCES will drop your attendance score. If you miss 6 times, you will receive a zero for attendance. If you miss 7 times or more, you will receive a 0 for participation and attendance (so you would receive a 0 for 8 percent of your grade). If you are absent, you are responsible for finding out what you missed. Note that this attendance score does not include attendance at the extracurricular service event. Please be aware that you’ll lose even more points if you miss that.

DRAFTING PROCESS AND WORKSHOP FORMAT: On each of the five graded essays that you’ll write in this class, you’ll receive feedback from me and your colleagues. Because multiple drafts lead to better writing, you must give me at least two versions of an essay in order for you to receive a grade on that paper. (I do not need to see two versions of your response papers.) Please keep all drafts of your papers with my comments on them; you or I may want to refer back to them. Every paper or essay you hand in should be typed and double-spaced.

ON PROJECTS THAT WILL BE GRADED: I reserve the right not to accept late projects that have no documented reason for being late. If I do accept your late project that has no documented reason for being late, your grade will drop one full letter for each CU class day it is overdue. You will receive a grade only on the final draft of each project, but you will be earning participation points as we work on each stage of a project.
ELECTRONICS: Because the various electronic gadgets that we all use can be very distracting, please leave your cell phones, pads, laptops, iPods, and other screened devices stowed in your bag and turned off from the moment class begins until it ends. If your use of electronics is particularly rude and noticeable, I'll ask you, in class or after class, to have some self-control in regard to your device. This would be embarrassing for you and me so I hope it does not happen. If you do genuinely have an urgent situation going on and someone might need to contact you while you are in class, please let me know. But let's be honest: it's a rare day that you or I must be on call for anyone.

See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

ON CHEATING: Academic Honesty and CU's Honor Code
All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include cheating, plagiarism, abetting others' academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303/735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.

The policy for cheating and plagiarism in this course: If I discover that you have plagiarized any part of a paper, you will receive an F for that paper. If 50 percent or more of a paper is plagiarized (e.g., an essay downloaded from the Web or if somebody else writes half or more of your paper for you, for pay or for free), you will flunk the course. If I discover you are cheating on a quiz, you will flunk the quiz. I will report all cheaters, whether they flunk the course or not, to CU’s Honor Code Council. Please remember: ALL OF YOUR PAPERS WILL GO THROUGH TURNITIN.COM'S DATABASE, AND IT WORKS VERY, VERY WELL—it even catches students who recycle something they themselves wrote for another class. We will discuss cheating and plagiarism in class. If you miss any of these discussions, please see me.

PLEASE NOTE: I will likely ask you to read other articles or to do worksheets, writings, or quizzes that are not listed here. Reading quizzes will be given at the beginning of class—you cannot take them at another time without an awfully good excuse. Also, I reserve the right to change the Semester Calendar as necessary.

CU Policies
Learning Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (during the first two weeks of the course, if possible) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, and http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see guidelines at http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html.

Religious Holidays
Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. I am happy to comply with this policy. Please let me know if you will miss class because of a religious observance and we will adjust your due dates for quizzes and essays accordingly. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.

Classroom Behavior
Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities.

Discrimination and Harassment
The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment or discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh
MORE INFORMATION ON THE COURSE
Sustainability: Environmental Conservation, Human Well-Being, Our Economy—and Rhetoric

It’s easy to see how sustainability, environmental conservation, human well-being, and our economy are interrelated. But rhetoric may not appear to fit well here. You likely went over rhetoric’s definitions if you took a first-year writing class at CU, and you likely learned that in some senses, “rhetorical strategy” is nearly synonymous with “persuasive strategy.” And this is true: a study of rhetoric is often about the study of persuasion.

You probably also learned in your first-year writing course that there is a “what” that a piece of writing or communication conveys—this refers to what is being said, the content. But there is also a “how” to any communication. Rhetorical analyses look at how effective a given method of communication is.

In this upper-level sustainability-based course, we’ll be examining rhetoric from a more particular perspective—we’ll examine some big rhetorics at work. Let’s start with some basics about our environment. As far as humanity currently knows, there is only one fit place in the universe for human beings to live, and we call it Earth. Even if there are multiple planets where we could live, any such planet is impossibly far away, given humanity’s current technology. So we have one home, and yet we humans are not kind to our Earth. Seventy percent of Americans say that they are concerned about the health of the environment, and yet year after year we pollute and poison and destroy habitat on our finite planet. And even though we know—personally, viscerally, and scientifically—that our world is getting hotter because of human activities, year after year climate change legislation does not happen in any meaningful way, nationally or internationally. Why? In part because fossil fuels have made for comfortable lifestyles—fossil fuels make modern life possible and sit at the center of our economy. We can’t divorce fossil fuels easily. But we also have not moved on climate change because some powerful entities are using overt and extremely clever rhetorical strategies to block change.

There is no better way to understand and analyze the power of rhetoric than by looking at the reams of print and ads and Web sites and media reports in regard to sustainability issues. King Coal and Big Oil prevail, year after year, even though we know the dangers and failings of each. And every American is dependent on these industries. This is no small issue. Fossil fuels are so central to the American and global economies that it’s easy for the fossil fuel industries to rhetorically attack any attack on fossil fuels.

Sometimes a rhetoric can be very successful and we don’t even know it. When it is, rhetoric can become a vital part of enculturation. Consider these sayings, each created by an advertising company working for a large corporation: “You deserve a break today.” “Supersize me.” “Where’s the beef?” “It’s the real thing.” All of the products advertised with these jingoes are heavily reliant on fossil fuels, and they didn’t exist 150 years ago. Another example: we all expect that gasoline will be cheap in the US and it should be that way, yes? Consciously or unconsciously, many Americans believe we have a right to cheap gasoline. And each of knows how to drive and we all know that a car is a symbol of adulthood and one’s personal success. Who taught us this? Our parents, our movies, our TV shows, our TV ads, our politicians, our bosses and corporate CEOs, our teachers, our grandparents, our friends, our neighbors—and they can’t be wrong. The importance of cars in America is something we just know, and we’ve known it since we were toddlers. That’s a mark of a powerful rhetoric: when you can’t pinpoint how you “know” something that everyone around you “knows” as well, likely some powerful cultural rhetoric is at work. (And it helps that cars are also convenient, useful things.)

When the world’s leading nation and largest economy and number two carbon emitter must face up to practices that are not in the long term sustainable, environmentally or economically, the conversation is going to become heated. In this class our goal is to examine this rhetoric and its effectiveness and write about it in an informed way. In doing this, you will practice skills that will help prepare you for the writing and communication you’ll be doing as a college graduate.

So we’ll be examining big rhetorics (pro and anti-texts on environmental concerns) and smaller rhetorics (methods of communicating in our readings and in your writings and presentations). On top of this, we’ll work on writing conventions and organization and style.

HEADS UP: This class requires some unique extracurricular work.
Please note that the narrative paper is a two-part project that requires that you engage in an outdoor service event in which you do something physical (e.g., plant trees, do erosion control, pull weeds, etc.) There will be several opportunities this semester to engage in these projects. Please attend one of these by April, when you’ll write a paper—5-6 pages—on the activity.
THE MAJOR TEXTS WE’LL READ

*Green* (2010): In this you’ll read various writings by writers with opinions about the environment. We’ll be readings articles by E.O. Wilson, Naomi Klein, Alan Weisman, and others.

Readings available at our course D2L Web site by Max Boykoff, Elizabeth Kolbert, Michael Pollan, Richard Manning, Leah Ceccarelli, and more. See our D2L site under “Content” then “General Readings”

ASSIGNMENTS

Presentation and Leading of Discussion on Readings
As we move through our readings, I would like each of you to lead discussion on an essay or article. In this short presentation, you should give us some information on the writer and their influence (if any). You should also lead discussion of the reading by summarizing its main points and asking relevant questions about it. Some questions to consider addressing: What issues does the article bring up? What did you learn from it or find particularly interesting? Why do you think the writer thought the issue worth discussing? Why do you think an editor found it worth publishing? And don’t forget the rhetorical questions: What is the writer’s purpose? Who is the writer’s audience? How does the writer approach/appeal to that audience? Did the writing approach work for you?

This presentation is worth 3 percent of your overall grade.

Film Summary
Summarizing is a skill that gets used a lot in the professional workplace. For this short paper, you will summarize ONE of the documentaries we watch in 500 words. The task is to briefly convey the essentials of your chosen film—you’ll describe what it’s about, its general approach, its thesis, etc. This paper is worth 6 percent of your overall grade.

Film Rhetorical Analysis
In this paper, you’ll consider the way one of the films works rhetorically. I’ll ask you to examine one small piece of the film—even a one-minute segment is chock-full of material and purpose. (Please do not try to analyze all that the film addresses.) Each of these films covers a lot of territory and uses multiple rhetorical techniques, so part of the task with this paper is to pick a doable topic. Typically, writers need 5-6 pages to write a cogent analysis of a film. This paper is worth 12 percent of your overall grade.

A Sustainability Presentation Project
This is a project that involves some sort of electronic presentation: PowerPoint or a video or a Web site—that’s up to you. The point is to hunt down some interesting information or problem that is sustainability-related and present it to the class. Maybe you’d like to approach a professional involved in sustainability issues in some way—you could speak to CU’s Sustainability Officer Mo Tabrizi about how his office is working to address climate change. You could even film this person (with their written permission, of course!). Or you could take a tour of XCEL’s Valmont Power Plant, Boulder’s coal-burning facility that produces electricity. The topics are endless, but you need to start planning for this early in the semester. You will work with a several other students on this presentation. This project is worth 12 percent of your overall grade.

Service Learning Narrative
Once you’ve done your outdoor service event, write up your thoughts and impressions of it in narrative form. Was it fun? Was it hard? Was it both? Did it feel useful, or just like another assignment? Did you like working with your colleagues? Did you like being outside? Etc. The narrative essay is worth 7 percent of your overall grade.

Grant Proposal
For this paper, you will find a grant to apply for, either local on campus or state-wide or national. Ideally, you’ll actually be applying for this grant, or perhaps you want a practice run before applying for the same grant in the future. In any case, this should be focused on an issue you care about and see yourself perhaps pursuing at a later date. You should choose this grant proposal early in the semester so you can be preparing for it and gathering research all semester. This paper is worth 18 percent of your overall grade.

Literature Review
For this paper, you’ll pick a sustainability topic of interest to you and investigate and report on the research associated with it. You should choose your topic early in the semester so you can get started collecting your research for the lit review. We will review research methods using the Web as you write this paper. Your literature review should be related to your grant proposal topic (see above). This paper is worth 17 percent of your overall grade.
SEMESTER CALENDAR
1/15 introduction to the course and sustainability concerns
1/17 more introduction; first essay assignment; communication expectations & college grads; “Benefits of Reading” and “Multitasking Is Bad News”; “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” and “Is Google Making Us Smarter?”

1/22 “Rhetoric Basics from Knowing Words”; James Glanz Web power consumption articles; writing and rhetoric and sustainability; how to write or analyze anything; fossil fuels and you; sample writing
1/24 E.O. Wilson, “For the Love of Life”; watch & discuss Ramin Bahrani’s Plastic Bag; how to write a summary

1/29 SUMMARY DRAFT DUE; quiz on films; discuss films
1/31 Boykoff & Boykoff, “Journalistic Balance as... Bias”

By this week, you should be thinking about what to do with your sustainability presentation project.
2/5 workshop summaries; Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math” “Conversion of a Climate Change Skeptic” and “Exxon CEO acknowledges climate change; says we’ll adapt”
2/7 plagiarism discussion; Revising Prose video; wordiness and style exercises

By this week, you should be working on your sustainability presentation project.
2/12 SUMMARY DUE; close analysis assignment; grammar quiz and English language mini-lecture
2/14 Richard Manning, “The Oil We Eat”; sign up for Sustainability presentation

2/19 FILM RHETORICAL ANALYSIS DRAFTS DUE; Elizabeth Kolbert’s “Unconventional Crude”; thesis workshop
2/21 workshop rhetorical analyses; Persuasion: Coca-cola, Fox News, Stephen Colbert, Jim White; curse words and you; Peter Maass, “The Breaking Point”

Monday, 10/8: revised rhetorical analyses due 10 am on Google Docs and you should be far along with your presentation
2/26 rhetorical analysis workshop; quiz & discussion of Naomi Klein, “A Hole in the World”
2/28 rhetorical analysis workshop; to tax soda pop or not to tax; Mark Bittman, “Why Do Stars Sell Soda?”

3/5 DOCUMENTARY RHETORICAL ANALYSIS DUE; Sustainability presentation project
3/7 Michael Pollan, “Power Steer”; UPDATE ON SUSTAINABILITY PRESENTATION PROJECT

By this week, you need to have a grant proposal project in mind. You should also be thinking about your lit review.
3/12 Leah Ceccarelli, “Manufactured Scientific Controversy”; OUTDOOR SERVICE NARRATIVE DRAFT DUE
3/14 Dan Barry, “Mountaintops Fall, Town Vanishes” SUSTAINABILITY PRESENTATIONS

3/19 SUSTAINABILITY presentations; OUTDOOR SERVICE EVENT NARRATIVES DUE
3/21 SUSTAINABILITY presentations; Janisse Ray, “Ecology of a Cracker Childhood”

3/25-3/29—Spring break

4/2 SUSTAINABILITY presentations; discuss grant proposal and literature review assignment
4/4 small groups: workshop grant proposal and literature reviews

4/9 small groups: workshop grant proposal and literature reviews
4/11 rough drafts of grant proposals due; Colin Beavin (“No Impact Man”), “Life After the Year Without Toilet Paper”

4/16 Barry Lopez, Polar Bears; GRANT PROPOSAL DRAFTS DUE
4/18 workshop grant proposals

4/23 Paul Krugman, “Building a Green Economy”; workshop grant proposals
4/26 FRIDAY: LITERATURE REVIEW DRAFTS DUE

4/30 workshop grant proposals; Alan Weisman, “Earth Without People”
5/2 Courtney Martin, “The Population Debate Gets Personal” and tying it all together;
5/3 FRIDAY: LITERATURE REVIEWS DUE