

ENV464H1 Communicating Climate Change: Detailed Course Description

Calendar Description

Climate change is an urgent yet complex problem to communicate. Curiously, many young activists are still using the same messages and images that have been around for decades (i.e., burning globes and apocalyptic scenarios). How did these methods of climate communication emerge? And to what impact in terms of both public perception and policy? In this course, students will examine the historical development of climate communication from its origins in the Cold War to present day. In addition to learning how climate change is discussed and visualized, students will work together to produce creative projects and develop improved communication methods.

Topics Covered

The major discursive themes and representational tropes employed by media-makers to cover global warming/climate change/climate crisis in North America; The challenges and obstacles these major themes and tropes pose for recognizing and resolving climate injustices and inequities; The meaning and importance of "slow violence" and "climate justice" and why these issues matter for understanding, representing, and addressing the climate crisis; Critical theories of discourse, power, media, and social change; How/in what ways media-makers are currently trying to improve their engagement with and representation of the climate crisis; Practical media-making skills for producing inclusive, thoughtful, and informed climate media. Readings and case studies will draw upon journalistic reporting, film, photography, visual art, longform non-fiction, and popular public scholarship. Students will learn how climate change is discussed, visualized, and reported and develop possible means and methods for improvement.

Methods of Assessment

- Participation (attendance and meaningful engagement in class discussions and/or the online discussion forums on Quercus)
- Short writing assignments (two critical media analyses)
- Reading responses (weekly, except for the first and last week of class for a total of 10 reading responses)
- Individual or group creative media project (students will have the choice to pursue a creative project on their own, or with a small group of 1-3 other students from the class. Students will also have the option to either work independently in development of their project or be matched with a community partner to produce a creative deliverable that can contribute to a community partner's blog, social media campaign, etc.)
- Critical reflection essay (written reflection on the process of producing a creative media project and how course themes informed the project)