

University of Toronto, School of the Environment  
**ENV 464: Communicating Climate Change**  
Fall 2024: Dr. Hanna E. Morris  
Wednesday 12:00PM – 2:00PM (Eastern time zone)

**Contact Information for Professor:**

Dr. Hanna E. Morris, email: [hanna.morris@utoronto.ca](mailto:hanna.morris@utoronto.ca)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:00pm-5:00pm. **Please email me ahead of time to arrange an appointment time during my office hours so I can accommodate as many student meetings as possible.**

**Contact Information for Teaching Assistant:**

Anna Renken, email: [anna.renken@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:anna.renken@mail.utoronto.ca)

**Class Meetings:**

Wednesdays 12pm - 2pm, First class is on September 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Course Overview:**

**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.

Crucially, this course will challenge students to put theory-into-action. Via the final project, students will work throughout the semester on developing, designing, and producing their own climate media production. The goal isn't perfection, but thoughtful experimentation. Students will be assessed based on their process and the application of key themes and concepts from class in the production of their creative media projects. Through work-in-progress workshops with peers, students will also learn how to offer and receive constructive feedback. Ultimately, students will leave with improved critical thinking skills and writing capabilities as well as hands-on media-making experience.

Readings and case studies will draw upon journalistic reporting, film, photography, visual art, longform non-fiction, and popular public scholarship.

Topics to be covered include:

- 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.
- How/in what ways media-makers are currently trying to improve their engagement with and representation of climate change and climate justice.

These topics will underscore how a diversity of accounts is required to understand the multivariate impacts of climate change and to develop equitable recovery and response. To this end, climate media-makers will be invited to share their perspectives and experiences with students as well as offer advice and tips for communicating climate change. Ultimately, through guest talks, case studies, and critical reflections on various forms of climate change media, students will gain insights on the challenges and opportunities for doing meaningful climate communication work.

**Required Texts:** There is no set text for this course. PDFs of all readings are available on the Quercus course site.

**Course Evaluation:**

Grading Component	Due Date	Weighting
Climate Media Review	October 2	10%
Final Project Proposal	October 16	25%
Final Project Progress Report Presentation	November 6 <sup>th</sup> , 13 <sup>th</sup> , or 20 <sup>th</sup> (as assigned)	15%
Final Project & Media-Maker Statement	December 11	35%
Attendance & Participation	Weekly	15%

## **Coursework Assignments**

*Climate Media Review:* See the end of the syllabus for full assignment instructions. Please submit a Word Doc or PDF of your 5-page double spaced assignment via Quercus on the due date.

*Final Project Proposal:* See the end of the syllabus for full assignment instructions. Please submit a Word Doc or PDF of your 10-page double spaced final project proposal via Quercus on the due date.

*Final Project Progress Report Presentation:* See the end of the syllabus for full assignment instructions. Please prepare and present a 5-minute presentation with slides on the date you are assigned. No written component needs to be turned in for this assignment.

*Final Project & Media-Maker Statement:* See the end of the syllabus for full assignment instructions. Please submit a Word Doc or PDF of your 6-page double spaced media-maker statement via Quercus on the due date. Please also submit your final project via Quercus, or if the file-type you are submitting (e.g., a video file or link, etc.) cannot be uploaded via Quercus, email your final project to Dr. Morris at [hanna.morris@utoronto.ca](mailto:hanna.morris@utoronto.ca)

*Class Attendance & Participation:* Please be prepared for, actively contribute to, and participate in classes by taking notes, engaging in discussions and class activities, and actively listening to your professor and peers.

## **Submitting Coursework**

All written assignments should be submitted through Quercus saved as a Word Doc preferably, but PDFs are also acceptable. The final project should also be submitted through Quercus but if the file type cannot be submitted via Quercus (for example, if your project is a video and the video file or link isn't possible to upload) then please email the final project to Dr. Morris at [hanna.morris@utoronto.ca](mailto:hanna.morris@utoronto.ca)

All written assignments should be double spaced, using 12 point font, and numbered pages. Attach a cover page with the following information:

- 1) Your name;
- 2) Your student ID;
- 3) Title of assignment;
- 4) Instructor's name;
- 5) Course title & number;
- 6) Date

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>)

### **Class Policies:**

***Late penalty for assignments:*** If you are having difficulty completing your work for any reason, please discuss this with Dr. Morris **before** the due date, to arrange an alternative schedule. If you have not agreed to an alternative plan prior to the due date, work submitted up to one week late will be penalized 10% per day late for up to 7 days; after this, it will not be accepted. Note: If you are unavoidably absent from the university, please self-declare in ACORN and contact Dr. Morris as soon as you return to discuss the situation.

**If you are unable to attend a class meeting,** please complete the ACORN self-declaration form and send your TA and Dr. Morris a screenshot.

**Requests to re-mark an assignment** must be submitted in writing to your TA and Dr. Morris and clearly state the reason for your request. Your TA or Dr. Morris will respond within a week as to whether your assignment will be remarked. Your assignment will be remarked by either your TA or Dr. Morris.

***AI policy:*** The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools is strictly prohibited in all course assessments unless explicitly stated otherwise by the professor. This includes, but is not limited to, ChatGPT, GitHub Microsoft Copilot, AI Tutor and Teacher's Assistant Pro, and open-source models that you have trained and/or deployed yourself. You may not interact with, nor copy, paraphrase, or adapt any content from any generative AI for the purpose of completing assignments in this course unless in consultation with and approved by the professor. Use of generative AI without the professor's approval will be considered use of an unauthorized aid, which is a form of academic misconduct under the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#).

This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to ensure that our evaluations are a fair and accurate assessment of your learning. Though it may be tempting to use generative AI to assist you when completing your written assignments, this will simply inhibit your learning. You should aim to understand course content at a level that far exceeds what an automated tool can achieve. If you have questions, please come to office hours.

***Announcement and email policy:*** We will use Quercus for all announcements about the course, and to respond to questions outside of class time. You may also email Dr. Morris and your TA with questions. Dr. Morris and your TA will respond to substantial questions within 24 hours (except on weekends where you can expect a response on Monday). *Exception: do not expect responses to last minute questions about assignments within 24 hours of the due date. Please contact your professor or TA **well in advance** with assignment questions.*

**Academic integrity:**

Very few of us have truly original ideas – we almost always build on ideas and information provided by others. However, it is a serious offense to represent someone else’s words as your own, or to submit work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program. Assignments, reading summaries and projects will be reviewed for evidence of these infractions. Penalties for these offences can be severe and can be recorded on your transcript. Trust your own ability to think and write and make use of the resources available at U of T that can help you do so (e.g. professors, TAs, writing centres). See the U of T writing website, especially the “How Not To Plagiarize” document at <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/> and the website of the Office of Student Academic Integrity <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity>

The following is a list of examples (not complete) of what constitutes an academic offence:

- Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Copying material word-for-word from *any* source (including lecture and study group notes) without quotation marks and a citation for the author/source
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor
- Making up sources or facts, including references to sources that you did not use.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including:
  - Working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
  - Having someone rewrite or add material to your work while “editing”
- Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission
- Misrepresentation:
  - Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including doctor’s notes
  - Falsifying institutional documents or grades

**Communication:**

We all need to communicate respectfully. “The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another’s differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.”

**Privacy rights and appropriate use of course material:**

Course content and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other source depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright. In this course, you are permitted to download course materials for your own academic use, but you should not copy, share, or use them for any other purpose without the explicit permission of the instructor.

***Technology requirements:***

Please see <https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/covid-19/tech-requirements-onlinelearning/Links>

***Accommodation:***

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

[accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca) or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>

***Additional services and support:***

The following are some important links to help you with academic and/or technical service and support:

- General student services and resources at [Student Life](#)
- Full library service through [University of Toronto Libraries](#)
- Resources on conducting online research through [University Libraries Research](#)
- Resources on academic support from the [Academic Success Centre](#)
- Learner support at the [Writing Centre](#)
- Information for [Technical Support/Quercus Support](#)

## Course Schedule: Topics and Reading Assignments

### SEPTEMBER 4: INTRODUCTION

**critical questions for this week:** What is media criticism for? What is the relationship between climate communication and climate action? How can we assess if a particular climate media “text” is “impactful”?

### SEPTEMBER 11: GUEST TALK, Dr. Emma Frances Bloomfield – Associate Professor at UNLV

Readings due:

- (1) Bloomfield, E.F. (2024) Introduction. In *Science v. Story: Narrative Strategies for Science Communicators*. University of California Press, pp. 1-31.

### SEPTEMBER 18: GUEST TALK, Mara Mahmud – Toronto-based filmmaker, photographer, and researcher

Readings due:

- (1) *Climate Migration and the Urban Environment*, photo essay by Mara Mahmud (2023)

### SEPTEMBER 25: ROOTS AND RAMIFICATIONS OF DOMINANT MODES OF CLIMATE COMMUNICATION

**critical questions for this week:** What are the major discursive themes and representational tropes employed by media-makers to cover global warming/climate change/climate crisis? How have these themes and tropes changed and/or remained the same throughout/across different historical time periods?

Readings due:

- (1) Cronon, W. (1996). The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature. *Environmental History*, 1(1), 7–28.
- (2) Kashwan, P. (2020, September 2). American environmentalism’s racist roots have shaped global thinking about conservation. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/american-environmentalisms-racist-roots-have-shaped-global-thinking-about-conservation-143783>
- (3) Ray, S.J. (2021, March 21). Climate Anxiety is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-climate-anxiety/>

OCTOBER 2: GUEST TALK, Emma McIntosh – Journalist at *The Narwhal*

**ASSIGNMENT DUE: Climate Media Review**

Readings due:

- (1) McIntosh, E. (2023, December 19). The year of the Greenbelt: How Doug Ford's bid to build housing on protected land backfired. *The Narwhal*.  
<https://thenarwhal.ca/ontario-greenbelt-scandal/>
- (2) McIntosh, E. (2024, May 21). Bald eagles nearly died out. What can we learn from their return to the southern Great Lakes? *The Narwhal*.  
<https://thenarwhal.ca/southern-ontario-bald-eagles/>
- (3) McIntosh, E. (2024, April 24). Can these far northern First Nations protect the world's Breathing Lands? *The Narwhal*. <https://thenarwhal.ca/mushkegowuk-james-bay-indigenous-conservation/>

October 9: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE ACTIVISTS

and GUEST TALK, Erin Mackey – UofT alumna, activist, and a leader of Climate Justice UofT

**critical questions for this week:** What is "climate justice"? How are climate justice activists often reported on in mainstream media and to what consequence / impact? How are climate justice activists countering these mainstream representations and creating their own media and narratives?

Readings due:

- (1) Muncie, E. (2019). 'Peaceful protesters' and 'dangerous criminals': the framing and reframing of anti-fracking activists in the UK. *Social Movement Studies*, 19(4), 464–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1708309>
- (2) Lakhani, N., Gayle, D. and Taylor, M. (2023, October 12) How criminalisation is being used to silence climate activists across the world. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/12/how-criminalisation-is-being-used-to-silence-climate-activists-across-the-world>
- (3) Parrish, W., and Brown, A. (2020, February 12). A Canadian Energy Company Bought an Oregon Sheriff's Unit. *The Intercept*.  
<https://theintercept.com/2020/02/12/jordan-cove-oregon-pembina-pipeline/>



OCTOBER 16: THE TROUBLE WITH "CRISIS" DISCOURSE

**ASSIGNMENT DUE: Final Project Proposal**

**critical questions for this week:** Whose perspectives are often elevated in North American and "global" climate discourse? And whose perspectives are often erased or ignored? To what impact / consequence?

Readings due:

- (1) Whyte, K. (2021). Against Crisis Epistemology. In *Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies*, pp. 52-64.
- (2) Schneider-Mayerson, M. (2013). From politics to prophecy: environmental quiescence and the 'peak-oil' movement. *Environmental Politics*, 22(5), 866–882.
- (3) Farbotko, C. and Lazrus, H. (2012). The first climate refugees? Contesting global narratives of climate change in Tuvalu. *Global Environmental Change*, (22), 382-390.

OCTOBER 23: MEDIA JUSTICE, DECOLONIZATION, AND RADICAL FUTURISMS

**critical question for this week:** What is decolonization? What would a decolonized mode of climate communication / media entail? What would a "just transition" and "just climate future" look like? How are climate journalists and other climate media-makers seeking to improve reporting and production practices? What is "media justice"?

Readings due:

- (1) How Céline Semaan Evolved Slow Factory Into a Hub for Digital Advocacy. <https://www.wmagazine.com/culture/slow-factory-celine-semaan-digital-activism-instagram-interview>
- (2) Decolonize This Place (2021). *Decolonial Operations Manual*.

OCTOBER 30: **READING WEEK, NO CLASS MEETING**

NOVEMBER 6: **FINAL PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT PRESENTATIONS**

NOVEMBER 13: **FINAL PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT PRESENTATIONS**

NOVEMBER 20: **FINAL PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT PRESENTATIONS**

NOVEMBER 27: **FREE TIME FOR INDEPENDENT PROJECT WORK**

***FINAL PROJECT & MEDIA-MAKER STATEMENT DUE BY 11:59PM EST ON DECEMBER 11<sup>th</sup>***

## CLIMATE MEDIA REVIEW

Due: October 2<sup>nd</sup> by 11:59PM EST

Length: ~5 page double-spaced paper, 12 point font

Citation Style: You can choose either APA, MLA, or Harvard but the citation style you choose must be consistent throughout the paper. Please use in-text citations instead of endnotes or footnotes. And include a full bibliography at the end of the paper.

Please note: **You must cite at least TWO course readings.** You are not required to reference any outside texts but may do so if additional sources will contribute to your review's analysis and argument.

Instructions: For this assignment, imagine you are a journalist tasked with the job of writing a media review/spotlight that features a local Toronto artist or media-maker's work that engages with climate change issues / themes. (If you'd like to expand out of Toronto and focus on the work of an artist or media-maker based in another Canadian city, you may do so).

- (1) Identify and choose a local media-maker to spotlight (could be an artist, filmmaker, journalist, writer, podcaster, photographer, etc.).
- (2) Peruse their corpus of work and select a particular piece / exhibition / series / article / book, etc. that you want to review.
- (3) Write a photography / art / film / book / podcast, etc. review (depending on what you choose to review). Please write your review in the style of a feature spotlight that could be published by a news publication or blog. I recommend checking out the reviews published on the blog *Hyperallergic* for some examples that could help guide your writing. This blog could also help you identify a local media-maker whose work you could review for this assignment: <https://hyperallergic.com/>

Grading criteria:

- Clear application of key themes and concepts from course readings and class discussions
- Development of a clear, coherent, and well-structured argument with an easy-to-follow writing style
- Addressed all aspects of the above prompt

**FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL**

Due: October 16 by 11:59PM EST

Length: ~10 page double-spaced paper, 12 point font

Citation Style: You can choose either APA, MLA, or Harvard but the citation style you choose must be consistent throughout the paper. Please use in-text citations instead of endnotes or footnotes. And include a full bibliography at the end of the paper.

Please note: **You must cite at least THREE course readings, and at least TWO outside texts.**

Instructions: The final project for this course is an opportunity to develop your creative communication skills and to explore a topic related to climate change that you are particularly interested in. Instead of an assigned essay question or prompt, I want you to have the opportunity to choose what communication format you'd like to pursue. This open-endedness can be an intimidating task and this Final Project Proposal assignment is meant to help! For this assignment, I want you to take the time to think through your final project plan. What has been most interesting for you so far in the course? What would you like to explore in more depth? What medium and format are you most interested in learning more about and developing skills in – film, photography, journalism, fiction writing, podcasts, etc.?

**Please address the following in your proposal:**

1. What is the goal of your project? Elaborate on why this is your goal. (e.g., your goal could be communicating a particular idea through your work, inspiring others to political action or personal reflection, investigating a controversy, and/or critiquing an idea [e.g., the idea of “untouched wilderness” discussed in week four, etc.]).
2. What medium and format will you be working with? (e.g., your medium could be: film, photography, audio, writing, etc.; and your format could be: short video, time-lapse photo series, podcast episode, investigative news report, etc.). Why have you selected this medium and format?
3. What inspiration are you drawing upon to formulate your project? Elaborate on your:
  - a. Stylistic inspiration
    - i. Explain what communication style(s) most resonate with you (e.g., humorous juxtapositions, emotional first-person accounts, etc.) and cite at least one example of an existing media work (it does not necessarily need to be explicitly climate-related) that you are drawing upon for stylistic inspiration and explain how / in what ways this particular work is influencing your project's stylistic approach

- b. Theoretical inspiration
  - i. What course texts (cite at least three) and class discussions have inspired you? Explain why and elaborate on how your project will engage with and integrate key themes and concepts from these texts and class discussions
  - ii. What outside texts (cite at least two) have inspired you? Explain why and elaborate on how your project will engage with and integrate key themes and concepts from these texts
  
- c. Conceptual inspiration
  - i. Has a particular current event inspired you? A personal experience? Explain why and elaborate on how your project will engage with this event or experience

Grading criteria:

- A clearly articulated explanation of how key themes and concepts from course readings and class discussions will be engaged with and integrated into the project
- A well-developed final project plan that is creative and original
- Addressed all aspects of the above prompt

## **FINAL PROJECT**

Due: December 11<sup>th</sup> by 11:59PM EST

Instructions: In addition to your media production, **you must also complete a short ~6 page double spaced, 12-point font write-up (i.e., a “Media-Maker Statement”) that clearly articulates: (1) the goal of your project and if you think you achieved this goal, (2) what you found most challenging about the production process, (3) how your project engaged with and integrated core themes and concepts from course readings and class discussions, (4) how you would seek to improve your project moving forward.** You must cite **at least THREE course readings** from the syllabus. You can choose either APA, MLA, or Harvard but the citation style you choose must be consistent throughout the paper. Please use in-text citations instead of endnotes or footnotes. And include a full bibliography at the end of the document.

Grading criteria:

- Creativity and originality
- Incorporation of the professor’s and peers’ feedback from the Final Project Progress Report Presentation
- A well-developed and thoughtful reflection on the production process including possible areas for improvement in the Media-Maker Statement
- A clearly articulated explanation of how the project engaged with and integrated key themes and concepts from course readings and class discussions in the Media-Maker Statement

## **FINAL PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT PRESENTATION**

These oral presentations **will take place in class on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> as assigned.** You must prepare slides and a **5-minute presentation**. No written materials need to be turned in. Following your presentation, there will be time for feedback from peers and the professor to help you further develop your project.

Grading criteria:

- The presentation is well-structured, clearly organized, and well-prepared/practiced
- Thoughtful engagement with student feedback during the Q&A