

Communication 120A

Environmental Communication

Spring 2009

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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs, 12:15-1:15 PM and by appointment

Class Meeting: Tues/Thurs, 9:55-11:40 AM, Kenna 212

Course Description

The natural environment exists independently of how we think and talk about it, but we can only know it in human terms through our discourse about it. Our understanding of the environment is unavoidably constructed through the symbols we use to depict it in public discourse. Through scientific studies, media coverage, government hearings and other forums, we define the environment and our relation to nature through speech, writing, and images. And the ways in which we depict nature have profound consequences for what we do to it, through individual acts of consumption or conservation, and social acts of policy making, pollution, and protest. Given the power of our symbol making for the fate of life on the earth, students of the environment can benefit from understanding the tools and theories of public communication. Because all life, including ours, depends on the health of natural systems, students of communication must pay attention to the environment.

The course introduces you to tools for analyzing and engaging in public discourse about the environment. We will use framing analysis, rhetorical theory, social constructionism, and discourse theory to examine the treatment of environmental issues in the mass media and other forms of public communication. These tools may be used to analyze public discourse on other issues as well in your future course work. They will also be helpful to you as professionals and citizens who engage in environmental communication.

The course will also introduce you to a number of environmental issues, including diverse views of environmentalism, the unequal burdens of environmental harms, the environmental impact of computers and cell phones, and fair methods for calculating environmental and health risks.

Finally, the course helps students make well-informed contributions to environmental communication. For your final projects, you will work in groups, either to publish recommendations for improving environmental communication or to create an example of it yourself.

This five credit course counts as an upper division Communication elective (List A) and for the Environmental Science and Environmental Studies majors.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

This course will help you learn to:

1. Understand the diversity of organizations that shape the contemporary U.S. environmental movement (through papers).
2. Locate your own views within this diversity of environmental perspectives (through papers and the final project).
3. Apply tools for analyzing the environmental discourse of government, corporations, and environmental organizations (through papers, class participation, and the final project).
4. Develop and support with evidence your own views on the appropriate role of these environmental actors in several controversial issues (through papers, class participation, and the final project)
5. Work cooperatively with other students in class to analyze examples of environmental discourse (through class participation) and contribute to it (through the final project).
6. Work with civic organizations beyond the walls of the university, when feasible (through your final project).

Last revised: March 26, 2009

Schedule

Readings: Click on the links to readings below.

Reading guide: Click on links to the title of each class session to see key concepts in the reading for that day. All readings should be completed *before* the class for which they are assigned.

Lecture notes: Click on the link to "Lecture" next to the title of each class for lecture notes.

Tools: Framing/Schema Analysis
Issue: Environmental Movements

3/31 – [Nature of Public Discourse](#) | [Lecture](#)

Class: Introduction, role of discourse in constructing environmental issues, rhetoric and the public sphere, self-assessment of environmental views

Due: First journal posting

4/2 – [Framing and Information Processing](#) | [Lecture](#)

Read: [Entman](#), 51-58; [Graber](#), 103-106

Class: Locate frames in media examples, identify schemata they trigger in you

4/7 – [Environmental Frames: Conservation, Preservation, Human Welfare, Animal Liberation, Eco-centrism](#) | [Lecture](#)

Read: [Eckersley](#), 7-48

Class: Distinguishing these frames in examples of public discourse, final project sign-up

4/9 – [Frames: Environmental Justice](#) | [Lecture](#)

Read: [Pastor](#), 1-5 only; [Bullard interview](#); [Kokmen](#)

Class: Identifying EJ frames in public discourse; analyze [Principles of Environmental Justice](#); compare to [Preamble to U.S. Constitution](#); discuss first paper assignment

4/14 – [Frames: Eco-Capitalism - Green Business and Consumerism](#) | [Lecture](#)

Read: [Cox](#), 367-410

Class: Identifying market frames

4/16 – [Frames across the U.S. Environmental Movement](#)

Class: Mapping the U.S. environmental movement; Discuss your initial self-assessment of your environmental views, locate them within environmental frames, discuss any changes to your views

Due: [Paper 1 - Framing the Environment](#) - via email by 5 PM on 4/17

Due: Second journal posting by 4/20

4/21 - Final Project Planning

Read: Independent research on final project plans

Class: Meet in groups to plan projects and write proposal

Due: Project plan via email by 11:59 PM tonight

Tools: Argumentation
Issue: Toxics

4/23 – [Argumentation](#) | [Lecture](#) | [Example Argument](#)

Read: [Brockriede & Ehninger](#), 44-53

Class: Use Toulmin's model to analyze arguments

4/28 – [Argumentation: Visual Arguments and Fallacies](#)

Read: [Delicath & DeLuca](#), 315-333 and [Fallacies](#)

Class: Use D&D's model to analyze visual arguments; identify fallacies in examples

4/30 – [Analyzing Arguments: Hazardous Facilities Siting](#)

Read: [Mazmanian and Morell](#), 233-249 and op-ed TBA

Class: Analyze environmental justice, corporate and government frames on toxic waste siting

5/5 – Analyzing Arguments: Environmental Policy, Toxics, and Race

Read: [Heiman](#) and op-ed TBA

Class: Analyze environmental justice, corporate and government frames on toxic waste siting

5/7 – Analyzing Arguments: Case Study TBA

Read: TBA

Class: Discuss case study controversy; uses and limits of argumentation

Due: Paper 2 - Arguing Toxics - via email by 11:59 PM on 5/10

Due: Third journal posting by 5/11

Tools: Social Construction
Issue: Electronic Waste (Ewaste)

5/9 - Toxic Tour of Silicon Valley with Ted Smith, 1:30-4 PM

Meet in Kenna Hall 216 (different classroom)

5/12 – E-Waste and Social Construction

Read: [Hannigan](#), 32-57

Class: View *Exporting Harm* video, use social construction to analyze growth of public issues

5/14 – News Coverage of the Environment

Read: [Hannigan](#), 58-75

Class: Analyze role of news media in framing environmental issues

5/19 – Constructing Claims about Ewaste and Framing News about Ewaste

Read: [Raphael & Smith](#), 1-11; TBA

Class: Apply Hannigan's tasks in constructing environmental problems (assembling, presenting, contesting claims) to ewaste story, Hannigan's factors for winning environmental campaigns to ewaste story; uses and limits of social construction

Tools: Discourse Theory

Issue: Expert and Grassroots Knowledge of the Environment

5/21 – Discourse Theory

Read: Raphael, [Discourse Theory](#)

Class: Discourse, discursive formations, discourse coalitions (vs. class, race, etc.); structure and agency, linking discourses and institutions; putting discourse theory to use

Due: Paper 3 - Social Construction of E-waste Crisis - via email by 11:59 PM on 5/24

Due: Third journal posting by 5/25

5/26 – Expert Discourse: Scientific Claims-Making

No Class Meeting

Read: [Hannigan](#), 76-91

5/28 – Critiques of Risk Assessment/Risk Communication

Virtual class - post to this blog

Read: Montague, "[Ethical Hazards of Risk Assessment](#)"; Montague, "[The Precautionary Principle](#)"; Montague, "[Why We Need the Precautionary Principle](#)"; Montague, "[Getting Beyond Risk Assessment](#)"

6/2 – Improving Risk Assessment/Risk Communication

Read: [Grabill & Simmons](#), 415-441

Class: Examine critiques of risk assessment and alternatives to it

6/4 – Meetings on Final Project Presentations

Due: Paper 4 - Risk Assessment as a Discourse - via email by 11:59 PM on 6/5

Due: Fourth journal posting by 6/6

6/11, 1:30 to 4:30 – Final Project Presentations, Arts & Sciences 102 (Wiegand Room, off of the lobby on the first floor)

Note: Everyone must be present for all presentations, so plan to be here the whole time. This date and time are assigned by the university and cannot be changed.

Due: Final journal posting by 6/12

Assignments

Grade Breakdown

Class Participation including Journal	15%
Four Papers	60%
Final Project	25%

[Academic Honesty & Disability Accommodation](#)

Class Participation

This is a seminar, so your attendance and participation are especially important. Class should be a place to experiment with new ideas, where it is safe to disagree with others openly, and where we respect all students' rights to form and express their views of the material. Agreement or disagreement with the professor's views will not affect your grade positively or negatively.

Because a significant part of the learning process takes place in class, if you miss more than three classes for any reasons other than documented medical or family emergencies, expect it to affect your grade. If you are habitually late, expect it to affect your grade. The following are not legitimate reasons for missing class, so please avoid using them: finishing another class assignment (e.g., a paper), job-related appointments, any other appointments that could be scheduled at a different time. If you have a medical or family emergency that will keep you from attending several classes, you should contact me about this. If you are on a sports team, turn in your forms stating when your team is traveling.

Grading Criteria

Your grade is not simply based on quantity (how many times you attend or speak in class.) The quality of your participation matters also.

A range = excellent attendance; contributes to full class discussion each week; demonstrates the ability to grasp and apply the course readings; helps facilitate small group work well

B range = excellent or consistent attendance; less frequent contributions to class discussion; applies course readings well most of the time; contributes to group work but tends to leave it to others to facilitate that work

C range = inconsistent attendance; or makes few or no contributions to full class discussion; or does not show regular evidence of having done the readings; or makes few contributions to group work

D = inconsistent attendance; distracting oneself and others from in-class work

Journal

You will keep a course journal, which will be private from others (except your trusty professor). Here, you'll reflect on how your views of environmental communication change, evolve, or deepen throughout the course, in response to questions I'll pose to you. Submit each journal entry to the appropriate Drop Box on the Lessons page of the course Angel site. If you have trouble uploading a file to Angel, send it to me by deadline as an email attachment at craphael@scu.edu.

Short Papers

These are the main assignments in which you will apply the analytic tools we learn in the class to examples of public discourse about environmental issues from a range of organizations.

Papers should be about 5-7 pages, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. Your task will often be to boil down your ideas and express them in the most clear and economic writing possible. Submit each paper to the appropriate Drop Box on the Lessons page of the course Angel site. If you have trouble uploading a file to Angel, send it to me by deadline as an email attachment at craphael@scu.edu.

Late papers will generally be graded down one-third of a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day they are overdue. Late papers receive a grade but not comments.

Paper topics will be listed here as we progress through the course.

Grading Criteria

- Depth of understanding of tools for analyzing discourse
 - Depth of understanding of environmental issue and organizations' roles in it
 - Clarity and quality of evidence for your position on the issue
 - Clarity and accuracy of writing (including spelling, grammar, punctuation, [ability to cite sources](#))
-

Final Project

There are two kinds of final projects in this class:

- ***Develop recommendations for environmental communication.*** Research, develop, present to the class, and publish (or submit for publication) a set of policy solutions for how public communication about the environment could be more ethical and effective. You should focus on improving communication by a particular institution, such as:
 - government agencies (e.g., how they could best consult and communicate with citizens in public hearings, reports, statements, or regulatory decisions in any medium)
 - nonprofit service or advocacy groups (e.g., in public hearings, meetings, the organization's web site, demonstrations, campaign materials)
 - media organizations (e.g., how journalists might cover environmental issues better;

- how entertainment television or film producers could do so)
 - corporations (e.g., in public relations, advertising, regulatory forums, negotiations with advocacy groups)
 - universities (e.g., in campus policies and public relations)
 - religious institutions (e.g., in teachings about the environment as a spiritual and/or practical problem)
- ***Create an example of public environmental communication.*** Research, create, present to the class, and publish (or submit for publication) an example of environmental communication for a real-world organization, such as:
 - submitting a video to a contest run by an environmental organization;
 - testing messages or media examples for an advocacy group through focus groups or a survey (e.g., administered to college students);
 - adapting and or translating an environmental group's materials for a specific audience (e.g., Spanish-speaking immigrants);
 - creating an episode of a radio program on environmental issues (e.g., for KSCU radio);
 - writing an enterprise or feature story on an environmental issue (e.g., for *The Santa Clara*);
 - creating a public education campaign on an environmental issue (e.g., for the SCU campus).

And I'm open to other ideas. I will work with you to support your projects by recommending readings and publishing outlets. It will be your responsibility to define and carry out a feasible project that is likely to be published in a public forum. Therefore, you should:

- Take advantage of existing connections you already have, such as your involvement with the Green Club, or your position at the school newspaper, or your internship with an environmental organization;
- Take advantage of existing media skills you already have, such as video production, journalism, or public relations;
- Take advantage of existing research skills you have used, such as interviewing or conducting a focus group;
- Devise recommendations or create a media example relevant to your career goals (as film/television producers, journalists, public relations professionals, environmental scientists and professionals, teachers, and so on).

Grading criteria

- Quality of your research
- Depth of your understanding of relevant environmental communication issues
- Sophistication of your policy recommendations or media example
 - Quality of recommendations: clarity, creativity, depth, feasibility
 - Quality of media example: technical proficiency, clarity, creativity; if you are producing this for an outside campaign, another criterion will be goodness of fit between the campaign's goals and your message, channel, sources, and targets
- Quality of your class presentation: technical proficiency and quality of your PowerPoint design (using design tips discussed in class); oral presentation skills (clarity, volume, pacing, energy); equal participation by all students in presentation.
- Successful (or likely) publication in a public forum (the Internet, school newspaper, etc.)

Academic Honesty

Here is Santa Clara University's [policy on academic integrity](#):

"The University is committed to academic excellence and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work and to cite any sources they use. A student who is guilty of a dishonest act in an examination, paper, or other work required for a course, or who assists others in such an act, may, at the discretion of the instructor, receive a grade of "F" for the course. In addition, a student found guilty of a dishonest act may be subject to sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the University, as a result of the student judicial process as described in the Student Handbook. A student who violates copyright laws, including those covering the copying of software programs, or who knowingly alters official academic records from this or any other institution is subject to similar disciplinary action."

Because plagiarism is one of the most common areas of academic dishonesty, some clarifications about how to properly attribute others' ideas or materials are mentioned below.

When to Cite Sources

You need to cite your sources whenever you use someone else's:

1. Ideas

- e.g., Online communities could help us rebuild connections with our fellow citizens that were severed by television, suburbs, cars and malls (Rheingold, 1993).

2. Words, including paraphrasing

- e.g., Howard Rheingold writes that entering a virtual community is "very similar to the feeling of peeking into the café" (1993, 26).
- e.g., The experience of entering an internet chat room has been likened to walking into a community gathering place, such as a coffee shop (Rheingold, 1993).

3. Statistics

- e.g., By 1993, an estimated sixty thousand computer bulletin board systems operated in the United States (Rheingold, 1993, 9).

Quoting and Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means expressing someone else's ideas in your own words, and you still need to attribute those ideas to your source (e.g., Marshall McLuhan argued that the form of a medium is more important than any content conveyed by it.) You should quote someone directly if you find that you're using three or more consecutive words that they've written, or if you're using a unique phrase that they coined (e.g., McLuhan said that "the medium is the message.")

Citation Style

Please use APA style to cite sources. This style is used in the Robert Entman article on framing,

which we read early in the course. A full [online handout on APA style](#) is available. Pay attention to the section entitled "How to Handle Quotations in Your Text." You should also have a page at the end of your paper called "References" in which you give the full bibliographical citations for each source you cited. See this example [References](#) page, which contains the full bibliography for this class, and from which you can copy citations to paste into the Reference sections of your papers.

Collaboration

Your papers are individual assignments, not group work. You may not show drafts or the final version of your papers to other students or draft your papers in collaboration with each other. If someone asks you to do this they are putting you at risk by asking you to take part in an act that violates expectations for academic honesty in this course. Both parties involved will face grade penalties or may be failed for the course.

Further Questions

Most acts of academic dishonesty can be avoided if the rules are clear, and we take responsibility for our actions. If you have any questions or uncertainty about citing sources and ensuring that the work you hand in is your own, you should contact me ***before*** turning in your work.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION POLICY

Here is Santa Clara University's disability accommodation policy:

"To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact the Disabilities Resources Office (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide appropriate documentation to that office prior to receiving accommodations."

Paper Topics

Links to these will be added as we progress through the course.

Paper 1 - [Framing the Environment](#)

Paper 2 - Analyzing Arguments About Toxics

Paper 3 - Social Construction and Ewaste

Paper 4 - Risk Assessment as a Discourse

Note: for each paper, cite sources in [APA style](#). For a reminder on how to cite sources in the body of your paper, use the [Entman](#) article as a model. Give full citations to each source cited (and no additional sources) using the [references listed here](#), which you can cut and paste into your paper (be careful to preserve the formatting, such as italicized titles of books).

Paper 1

Framing the Environment

This paper is designed to have you apply the tools for analyzing discourse that we've encountered so far to theories of environmentalism and to your initial thoughts on the environment. It is due by 5 PM on 4/17 via email to craphael@scu.edu. There is a follow-up journal entry due by 4/20.

Assignment

1. Global warming, or climate change, may be the most significant environmental challenge that you will face in your lifetime. Compare and contrast how three recent calls to action on global warming frame this issue:

- The Wilderness Society, [Global Warming and U.S. Public Lands](#)
- Sierra Club, [Global Warming and Environmental Justice](#)
- Al Gore, [The Climate for Change](#)

In each document, you will likely see evidence of more than one frame we've studied (conservation, preservation, human welfare, animal liberation, ecocentrism, environmental justice, eco-capitalism). However, your job is to identify and discuss the primary frame that appears most frequently in each document; do not discuss all of the frames that you see, just the primary frame in each document. Explain how each document employs the primary frame's ways of defining problems, causes, moral treatments, and solutions ([Entman, 1993](#)). Quote brief passages from each report as evidence of the primary frames you found. (This section should be at least 2 pages).

2. Now, pick an environmental frame that you *don't* see prominently featured in either report and write about how it might discuss the problems, causes, moral treatments, and solutions differently than these three documents. (This section should be at least 1 page).

3. Then, analyze your statement of your environmental views, which you wrote on the first day of this course. What is the primary environmental frame (or frames, if there are more than one) that you see in what you wrote? Quote brief passages from your statement that best illustrate the main frame(s) you used. (This section should be at least 3/4 of a page).

4. What does your initial framing reveal about your schema? What sorts of experiences and media messages does [Graber](#) think can influence one's schema? Which of these experiences and media messages do you think helped form your schema in ways that are especially important to how you framed the environment? Identify specific examples from your own experiences and media messages that have been most influential on you. (This section should be at least 1 page).

5. After your paper is due, post a journal entry to our Angel site in which you discuss how this first part of the course has reinforced or changed your initial environmental views. Write it in a word processing program and save it to your computer. The journal entry should be about a page long, double-spaced. Then go to the **Lessons** link at the top of the page and click on the link to **Journal Entry 2**. Click on my **Post** and then on **Reply** (below the post) and then paste your response. When you're done, click **Save**.

Ground Rules

Academic Honesty: see the information on the [Assignments](#) page. Each part of this assignment must be entirely your own work. This is an individual assignment, so you may not show drafts of your work to other students or ask to look at drafts of their work. If you are using three or more consecutive words from another source, put those words in quote marks and cite the source.

Citing Sources: Cite your sources in APA style. For a brief guide on when to cite sources, see the [Assignments](#) page. For an example article that uses APA style see the Entman article we read for the second class. You can cut and paste full citations for readings into your reference list at the end of your document from this [references page](#). For a full guide to APA style, which you will only need if you are citing sources not assigned for this class, see [this link](#).

Length: 5-7 pages, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. Your task will often be to boil down your ideas and express them in the most clear and economic writing possible. Email your paper to craphael@scu.edu - you don't need to print it out and bring it to class.

Grading criteria: 1) understanding of tools (framing, schemata); 2) understanding of environmental frames; 3) depth of your thinking about the examples of discourse you are analyzing; 4) clarity and accuracy of writing (including spelling, grammar, punctuation, and ability to cite sources).

Late papers will generally be graded down one-third of a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day they are overdue. Late papers receive a grade but not comments.

Paper 2

Analyzing Arguments About Toxics

This paper is designed to have you apply the tools of argumentation to an example of public discourse about toxics.

1. Read the articles on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste storage debate that I emailed to you to familiarize yourself with this issue. This is probably the highest profile debate over hazardous waste storage in the USA right now.

2. Closely analyze the argument in the *Columbus Dispatch* editorial entitled "Nuclear Waste Games: Setback for Nevada's NIMBYism is progress for rest of America" (**not** the other *Dispatch* editorial entitled "Nattering No-Nuke NIMBYs," which is also in the packet of readings I gave you on this issue). Identify and chart the main claims, the data that support them, the warrants and backings, rebuttals and qualifiers. This should be a *very* close reading of the argument, sentence by sentence. Try to begin from a standpoint that assumes *nothing* about this issue is self-evident or obvious. This should help you recognize each element of the argument. Use [this table](#) to create your chart.

3. Are there any enthymemes relied on here? What are they?

4. Which of the arguments about toxics that we have read is the *Columbus Dispatch* editorial closest to: Mazmanian & Morell, Field, Bullard, or Friedman? Support your interpretation by citing three similar uses of data, warrants, backing, qualifiers, rebuttals, **or** claims between the *Dispatch* editorial and the argument you find most similar from our readings.

5. Using the "Fallacies" handout I gave you in class, explain whether you see any fallacious arguments here, what kind of fallacies they are, and why they are fallacious. In thinking about this, you'll want to take into account information and arguments in the other articles on the Yucca Mountain issue, as well as relevant arguments from Mazmanian & Morell, Field, Bullard, Friedman, and even *The Strand in the Web* video we saw in class.

6. Give your overall assessment of whether the *Dispatch* editorial's claims are persuasive to you and why. Do you agree or disagree with them? If you agree with some claims but disagree with others, explain what claims you agree with and what claims you disagree with, and say why.

Ground Rules

Academic Honesty: see the information on the [Assignments](#) page about acceptable and unacceptable forms of collaboration.

Citing Sources: Cite your sources in APA style. For a brief guide on when to cite sources, see the [Assignments](#) page. For a full guide to APA style, see [this link](#). For an example article that uses APA style see the Entman article in the course packet. References for all readings in the course are [here](#).

Length: 4-5 pages including chart, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. No covers, binders, or folders please -- just stapled paper. Your task will often be to boil down your ideas and express them in the most clear and economic writing possible.

Late papers will generally be graded down one-third of a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day they are overdue. Late papers receive a grade but not comments.

Grading criteria: 1) Understanding of tools (argumentation chart, enthymemes, fallacies); 2) Understanding of environmental issue (approaches to siting toxic facilities); 3) Depth of your thinking about the example of discourse (*Columbus Dispatch* editorial); 4) Clarity and accuracy of writing (including spelling, grammar,

punctuation, ability to cite sources in correct APA style)

Paper 4

Social Construction of E-waste

This paper is designed to have you apply the tools of social construction to debates over electronic waste.

1. Compare (the similarities) and contrast (the differences) in the executive summaries of the reports by [Greenpeace](#) and [Basel Action Network](#), which we read for class, by discussing the "elements of winning environmental claims" identified by Hannigan in each report, including:

- Resonating with existing culture, beliefs
- Articulated at least in part through established authorities (government, science, etc.)
- Having social drama (victims, villains, heroes)
- Having impact on present, not just distant future
- Having clear agenda for action, problem-solving

Use quotes and examples from the two reports as evidence of how they draw on these elements of winning environmental claims.

2. Discuss the similarities between how each report incorporates the elements it does and how the Computer Take-Back Campaign (CTBC), of which Basel Action Network is a member, has done so (see the Raphael & Smith reading). Again, use brief quotes and examples.

3. The Basel Action Network report got more news coverage than the Greenpeace report. What might explain this, given the *differences between the reports and patterns in how the news media cover environmental issues* (see Hannigan, 58-75).

4. Suggest ways that you might rewrite the Greenpeace report to take better advantage of the "elements of winning environmental claims" mentioned by Hannigan and get more news coverage.

Ground Rules

Academic Honesty: see the information on the [Assignments](#) page about acceptable and unacceptable forms of collaboration.

Citing Sources: Cite your sources in APA style. For a brief guide on when to cite sources, see the [Assignments](#) page. For a full guide to APA style, see [this link](#). For an example article that uses APA style see the Entman article in the course packet. References for all readings in the course are [here](#).

Length: About 5 pages, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. No covers, binders, or folders please -- just stapled paper. Your task will often be to boil down your ideas and express them in the most clear and economic writing possible.

Late papers will generally be graded down one-third of a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day they are overdue. Late papers receive a grade but not comments.

Grading criteria: 1) Understanding of tools (elements of winning claims; patterns in news media coverage of environmental issues); 2) Understanding of environmental issue (e-waste); 3) Depth of your thinking about the example of discourse (BAN and Greenpeace reports); 4) Clarity and accuracy of writing (including spelling, grammar, punctuation, ability to cite sources in correct APA style)

Paper 5

Risk Assessment as a Discourse

This paper is designed to have you apply the tools of discourse theory to environmental risk assessment.

Draw on the [lecture notes](#) on discourse theory, and readings by Hannigan, Di Chiro and Montague to answer the following questions:

- What *subject positions* does risk assessment offer to those who engage in this discourse? To put it another way, who are the typical actors in this policy discourse? How do their subject positions shape what they can say and do in the risk assessment process, for example at a public hearing? (See especially Hannigan, 92-108.)
- How do the *categories* used in risk assessment enable and constrain our thinking? In particular, consider:
 - categories of knowledge: expertise (scientific, professional) versus experience (public, community) (see especially Hannigan, 92-108)
 - standards of proof: calculating risks of individual substances (reductionism) versus cumulative effects of substances (holism); risks to "average person" vs risks to most vulnerable groups (see especially Montague and Di Chiro)
- What is the *discursive style* of risk assessment?
 - How does it establish the authority and power of scientists and bureaucrats? Consider Hannigan's discussion of public hearings on risk assessment.
 - How can technical claims about risk include or conceal commitments to particular *values*, such as "acceptable" levels of risk (see especially Di Chiro)?
- What have been the *discursive challenges* to risk assessment? How have environmentalists, community members, and some scientists rejected, or tried to transform the rules of risk assessment. Discuss:
 - "Popular science" or "popular epidemiology" (Di Chiro)
 - The "Precautionary Principle" (Montague)
 - How does the risk assessment approach account for why American regulators have not taken action against diesel fuel, as discussed by Montague? How would regulators have reacted to studies of diesel if they had used the precautionary principle?
- What do you think about the *ethics* of risk assessment, and the discursive challenges to it? Would you support changes to risk assessment, or not? Why, or why not?

Ground Rules

Academic Honesty: see the information on the [Assignments](#) page about acceptable and unacceptable forms of collaboration.

Citing Sources: Cite your sources in APA style. For a brief guide on when to cite sources, see the [Assignments](#) page. For a full guide to APA style, see [this link](#). For an example article that uses APA style see the Entman article in the course packet. References for all readings in the course are [here](#).

Length: About 5 pages, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. No covers, binders, or folders please -- just stapled paper. Your task will often be to boil down your ideas and express them in the most clear and economic writing possible.

Late papers will generally be graded down one-third of a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day they are overdue. Late papers receive a grade but not comments.

Grading criteria: 1) Understanding of tools (discourse theory); 2) Understanding of environmental issue (risk assessment); 3) Clarity and accuracy of writing (including spelling, grammar, punctuation, ability to cite sources in correct APA style)