Environmental Communication

SEA 3032 (3 credits)

Course Contact Hours: 45.

Instructor: Professor Jeff Wescott. jwescott@sea.edu

Course Footprint:

Component	Duration	Location
Shore	Jan 5 – Feb 18	Woods Hole, MA
Sea	Feb 18 – Mar 29	SSV *Corwith Cramer* with port stops in US Virgin Islands, Dominica, and Anguilla

Course Philosophy and Approach:

In this course, students will explore methods for communicating environmental issues and information to a broad audience of stakeholder groups, including the general public. The course will focus on three primary themes: strategies for conveying scientific data; the role of storytelling in environmental communication; and building a powerful and cohesive narrative through teamwork. Coursework will consist primarily of seminars, skill-building workshops, and in-class discussions.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Understand key strategies in the field of environmental communication.
2. Learn how to synthesize scientific data, policy, and storytelling techniques to craft persuasive messages for a range of target audiences.
3. Develop skills that lead to further participation in environmental research and outreach.

Evaluation:

Environmental dialogue:	20%
Video Storyboard	20%
Video Project	40%
Project Review Essay	10%
Participation	10%

Assignments:

<u>The environmental dialogue</u>

In Week 1, each team will receive a prompt, a statement about some aspect of ocean conservation that requires bridging marine and climate science with stakeholder engagement.

As a team, you will design a conversation to address the prompt. A *dialogue* is not a series of isolated commentaries, nor is it a formal debate. People in a dialogue listen to each other. They respond to what others have said. They may disagree, but they do so respectfully. It is up to you whether you agree with the prompt, and with each other.

You must do some research, pulling information from academic journals and books, legitimate news outlets, and so forth. List your sources—minimum five per team. Provide the authors' names and titles of the articles, books, news sources, etc. If the source is a chapter in an edited volume, provide the name of the book and its editors. Lastly, provide page numbers and years of publication. Provide this information at the end of your documents, following the written dialogue. You do not have to use a formal bibliographic format, but please be consistent.

The deliverable: A typed transcript, about six pages, double-spaced. Identify who is speaking. Include your names and your assigned prompt at the top of the first page. If you quote someone, keep it brief and mention their names (e.g., "As Bill McKibben said...") rather than parenthetically, as you would in a research paper (e.g., McKibben 2017, p. 44).

All assignments will have a file title in the form of Lastnames_Dialogue_EC.docx. Send one copy per team via email to jwescott@sea.edu. No pdfs, please.

This assignment is due Friday, January 23 at 2200.

<u>The video storyboard and project</u>
In teams, you will choose a topic that focuses on ocean conservation, such as biodiversity, climate change, food security, environmental or cultural sustainability, or a similar topic as approved by the instructor. Your team will design a storyboard that outlines your video's basic narrative, then write a script that will guide video production. We will discuss ways to convey effectively scientific data and other information in narrative form and will cover editing and other technical considerations. All videos will be five to seven minutes in length. The instructor will provide a detailed FAQs page.

Here is the rubric for the <u>Video Storyboard</u>:
Follow the guidelines that we will establish during our storyboard production practice in class during Week 2. Please use the easel paper, markers, and colored pencils provided in the classroom. An effective storyboard should have between six and twelve frames, with the frame borders drawn with a straight edge. It must illustrate how your video will introduce your chosen topic, the visuals that your team will use to tell the story (e.g., locations, actors and interviewees), and "the three I's" – how you plan to inform, inspire, and involve your viewers.

Include any text that will appear on the final video, except for endnotes (e.g., works cited, thank you messages). Take a photo of your completed storyboard and email it to jwescott@sea.edu. The due date for this assignment is Monday, January 26.

Here is the rubric for the Video Project:
Know your audience. It will be clear who the intended viewers are.

Present the data. Your team will select data that are topic-relevant, well-synthesized, and presented in ways that are comprehensible to your intended viewers.

Tell a compelling story. Does the narrative proceed logically? Did your team introduce the problem, explain the importance of addressing the problem, and find creative ways to lead viewers from question to answer? Remember to aim for description, not prescription.

Edit carefully. Are the video edits smooth? Are the audio tracks (narration, music, incidental sound) placed in ways that serve the story?

Share the effort. Everyone will write a brief description of the specific work they contribute to their team's project (Project Review Essay). You will submit these papers directly to the instructor; they will remain confidential.

Final videos will have a file title in the form of Lastnames_video (plus your video file extension). Please send me a link to a Google File, as videos will be too long to submit via email. Send one copy per team.

This assignment is due Thursday, February 12 at 2200.

Project Review Essay
This is an individual assignment, submitted by each student and not shared with anyone except the instructor. In 250-300 words, explain your contributions to the team video project. This may include writing, designing and creating the storyboard, contributing acting or narration, editing, and so forth. The goal is to help your course instructor determine how well your team shared the effort, per the above rubric. The Project Review Essay is worth 10% of your course grade.

This assignment is due Saturday, February 14 at 2200.

Participation
This course features several in-class exercises, each of which requires completing the assigned readings and contributing as a team member in the planning and completion of the exercises. The participation grade, which counts for 10% of your total course grade, is based on (1) your attendance, (2) your contributions to the exercises, and (3) the support and positive feedback your provide to your fellow students. Your instructor understands that there are many different ways to contribute, and will work with you and your teammates to identify the roles that best match your own particular skills and interests. If you anticipate that you will be unable to attend class or contribute to class work, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:
SEA expects all students to actively participate in program discussions and activities. Punctual attendance is required at every class meeting and watch session. **Late assignment submissions are not accepted** – please speak with your instructor in advance if you anticipate a concern.

The policy on academic accuracy below will be strictly followed in this class. The assignments that you submit in this course are expected to be your original work. You must take care to distinguish your own ideas and knowledge from wording or substantive information that you derive from one of your sources. The term "sources" includes not only published primary and secondary material, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people and text that you cut and paste from any site on the Internet.

The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with you. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from your reading and research, the sources must be indicated.

A word about AI:
One important observation in this course is that each student brings their own skills to the act of communication. While AI offers an array of applications for communicators, it cannot (yet!) simulate the spark of originality that human creativity produces through our unique experiences, perspectives, interests, and *imperfections*. Let's use our time in this course to develop as storytellers in our own right. Work together, be adventurous, and worry less about "getting it right."

Inclusivity and Classroom Culture:
Our SEA community embraces diversity of age, background, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and other visible and nonvisible categories. We expect each one of you (and you should expect the same from us) to contribute to a respectful, welcoming. and inclusive environment. If you feel that you are not being welcomed, included, or accepted here, please reach out to one of your teachers or one of the deans at SEA to share your concern.

Land and cultural heritage acknowledgement
We in Falmouth are on the traditional homeland of the Wampanoag people who live and continue to thrive here for thousands of years. As well, we will be studying the traditional islands of the Arawak, Taino, and Kalinago people. We acknowledge the painful history of colonization that has enacted forced assimilation, enslavement, genocide, violent support of plantation regimes, and efforts by many to eliminate Indigenous cultures. We respect and honor the Indigenous people and the descendants of forced migrants still connected to these lands and are eager to learn from their ways of life. We also recognize these words are not enough and need to be followed with action steps.

Course Readings:

Beland, Amanda. Local Indigenous communities are reclaiming their food sovereignty. WBUR Boston. November 26, 2024. https://www.wbur.org/news/2024/11/26/local-indigenous-communities-food-sovereignty

Buck, Holly Jean. 2015. On the possibilities of a charming Anthropocene. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105(2): 369-377.

Cairo, Alberto. 2012. The Functional Art: An introduction to information graphics and visualization. New Riders.

CARICOM. 2025. Caribbean Community Environment and Natural Resources Policy Framework 2022-2032. 88 pp.

Christiansen, Jen. Tip Sheet: Designing Science Graphics. February 7, 2023. https://www.theopennotebook.com/2023/02/07/tip-sheet-designing-science-graphics/

Gastropod Podcast. A Tale to Warm the Cockles of Your Heart. April 7, 2020. https://gastropod.com/a-tale-to-warm-the-cockles-of-your-heart/

Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica. n.d. The National Resilience Development Strategy. 156 pp.

GRAVY podcast. Reclaiming Native Ground. February 9, 2017. https://www.southernfoodways.org/gravy/reclaiming-native-ground/

Huang, Tianle, and Will J. Grant. 2020. A good story well told: Storytelling components that impact science video popularity on YouTube. *Frontiers in Communication* 5:581349. doi:10.3389/fcomm.2020.581349.

Maibach, Edward W., Sri Saahitya Uppalapati, Margaret Orr, and Jagadish Thaker. 2023. Harnessing the power of communication and behavior science. *Annual Review of Earth and Planet Sciences* 51:53–77.

McCormack, C.M., J.K. Martin, and K.J.H. Williams. 2021. The full story: Understanding how films affect environmental change through the lens of narrative persuasion. *People and Nature* 3:1193-1204.

Shamsie, Kamila. 2012. The storytellers of empire. *Guernica*, February 1, 2012. https://www.guernicamag.com/shamsie_02_01_2012/

Singh, Vandana. Imagination, climate futures, and the politics of "positivity." *Antariksh Yatra.* August 18, 2021. https://vandanasingh.wordpress.com/2021/08/18/imagination-climate-futures-and-the-politics-of-positivity/

Course Calendar:

Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
Week 1	
Wed, Jan 7 (0900-1000)**:** Introduction to the themes and expectations for the course; Introduction to projects **Thu, Jan 8** (1030-1200)**:** Topic revision and project planning	**Readings:** Prepare for Week 2 **Due Sun 11** (2200)**:** Team video topic selection
Week 2	
Mon, Jan 12 (0900-1015)**:** Writing stories that inform, inspire, and involve, Part 1 (storyboard exercise) **Thu, Jan 15** (0900-1200)**:** Writing stories that inform, inspire, and involve, Part 2 (podcast exercise)	**Reading for Mon:** Huang and Grant 2020. A Good Story Well Told. **Listen and Watch for Thu:** Beland 2024. Local Indigenous communities are reclaiming their food sovereignty. (Read and listen) Link GRAVY podcast. Reclaiming Native Ground. February 9, 2017. Link Gastropod Podcast. A Tale to Warm the Cockles of Your Heart. April 7, 2020. Link
Week 3	
Sun, Jan 18 (1830-2100): Env. film roundtable 1 **Tue, Jan 20** (1330-1600)**:** Communication and cognition **Thu, Jan 22** (1100-1230)**:** Communicating the science of climate change, at Woodwell Climate Research Center	**Reading for Thu:** Maibach et al 2023. Harnessing the power of communication and behavior science. **Due Fri:** Environmental dialogue
Week 4	
Sun, Jan 25 (1830-2100): Env. film roundtable 2	**Due Mon:** Project storyboard **Readings:** Read in the following order:

Tue, Jan 27 (1400-1600)**:** Information design and data visualization, Part 1, with Skye Morét **Thu, Jan 29** (1400-1600)**:** Information design and data visualization, Part 2, with Skye Morét	1. Cairo. The Functional Art. 2. Christiansen. Tip Sheet: Designing Science Graphics. Link Optional readings posted in Blackbaud
Week 5	
Sun, Feb 1 (1830-2100): Env. film roundtable 3 **Mon, Feb 2** (0900-1015): Project updates and troubleshooting **Tue, Feb 3** (1330-1600)**:** Breaking out of storytelling boxes: Speculative fiction **Thu, Feb 5** (1030-1200): Video production workshop	**Readings:** Singh 2021. Imagination, climate futures, and the politics of "positivity." Link Buck 2015. A charming Anthropocene. Recommended: Shamsie 2012. The storytellers of empire. Link
Week 6	
Sun, Feb 8 (1830-2100): Env. film roundtable 4 **Mon, Feb 9** (0900-1015): Video editing workshop **Tue, Feb 10** (1330-1600): Film narrative discussion **Thu, Feb 12** (1030-1145): Video presentations	**Reading:** McCormack et al 2021. Understanding how films affect environmental change. **Due Thu**: Team video project **Due Sat**: Project review essay
Week 7 At sea aboard SSV *Corwith Cramer*	
No assignments or readings	
Week 8	
Discussion of CARICOM document	**Reading:** CARICOM 2022
Week 9	
Discussion of Dominica Resilience Strategy, Part 1	**Reading:** Dominica 2030 Strategy
Week 10	
Discussion of Dominica Resilience Strategy, Part 2	**Reading:** Dominica 2030 Strategy
Week 11/12	
Discussion of Dominica Resilience Strategy, Part 3	**Reading:** Dominica 2030 Strategy