

Communicating Climate

A Seminar for the Graduate Program in Climate and Society
Columbia University, Earth and Environmental Sciences

Instructor: Tara DePorte

Contact: tara@lesecolgycenter.org
(212) 477-4022 Daytime: Tues, Wed, Thursday
Cellular (646) 932-4283 All other times

Time: Thursday, May 29, 2008
2:00pm-5:00pm

Location: Columbia University, Schermerhorn Extension Room 963

Seminar Objective:

This seminar will help familiarize students with the biases in the “popular press” concerning climate change, including: sourcing of data, “spins” on the story, differences and similarities in journalistic coverage, etc. Students will learn to succinctly point out flaws or omissions in sourcing information, analyzing the use of experts and other components of climate-related journalism. Students will also present 2-minute presentations of climate-related issues (no preparation necessary!) to be critiqued under peer review.

Preparation & Required Reading:

Students should find **two articles on climate change issues from popular press** (i.e. not from scientific journals or academic papers): one which supports IPCC findings and human contribution to climate change, the other disputing these findings and/or other related issues surrounding climate change, needs for mitigation, and adaptation strategies. Students should read each article in depth, noting the style of argumentation used, sources/experts cited, or other journalistic coverage notes.

Students will then be asked to write a half-page response/follow-up to each of their articles outlining weaknesses and strengths in the conclusions of each article. This exercise should be addressed to the “general public” as if the students were actually trying to show reasons for believing the articles, quotes, sources used, etc¹. You may want to go as far as looking at the funding of various research agencies, or other roles experts may play. **Students should email their article retorts AND accompanying articles to Tara@LESEcologyCenter.org and should be sure to bring notes concerning their articles (or the actual articles) to class with them for discussion.**

Seminar Description

During the seminar, time will be allotted to discuss the findings and the “diversity in journalistic coverage” of climate change. Students will be asked to share their findings and compare/contrast the type of coverage available, sources, etc. Furthermore, students will brainstorm recommendations they would have to scientists, journalists and others to influence with the reporting on climate change issues (40 minutes).

¹ With student’s permission, selected of these exercises will actually be distributed to climate change educators for use in curbing the impact of doubt-producing media.

Remaining time will be allocated to students making **2 minute presentations** on specific concepts within climate change. Students will be given a slide describing a certain scientific component of climate change, climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions, and will be expected to do “off-the-cuff” explanation, as if to the general public or describing to politicians, etc (i.e. assuming limited knowledge of audience). Fellow students will critique the presentations of their classmates and will pose 1 “tough questions” following the presentation. Time limit will be strict! This exercise will mimic responses to questions/arguments about climate change that students will come across in their work—from the general public, private, and/or government sectors! (80 minutes)