

Communicating Sustainability

ADV 324/PR 324
Unique Course Number: 06893 and 07588

Spring 2024
HYBRID:
WED: 2:00 – 3:30 in-person in CMB 2.102
AND asynchronous online

PROFESSOR: Dr. Lucy Atkinson
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512-471-6665
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:00–1:00 and by appointment (in-person and Zoom)

READINGS:

Readings will be drawn from books and journals. All readings are posted on Canvas. There is no textbook or reading packet to buy.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the function of communication in shaping attitudes, values and behaviors related to climate change and sustainability
- Understand how we construct “nature” through symbols, both discursive and visual
- Understand the role of worldviews, perceptions, and beliefs in shaping public opinion about climate change and sustainability
- Identify and evaluate mechanisms for communicating about climate science and sustainability
- Learn and apply the principles of communication campaigns and message design
- Gather and critique examples of environmental messages

COURSE OVERVIEW:

From organic chocolate and fair-trade coffee to alternative energy and socially responsible investing: for today’s American consumers, daily life offers countless opportunities to be more environmentally friendly, more socially responsible, more ethically minded. In short: more ways to be more sustainable. It is not surprising, then, that an increasing proportion of Americans report being concerned about the environment and claim a willingness to change their behaviors to more sustainable ways. And yet, despite these environmentally friendly attitudes, there remains a profound attitude–behavior gap, often called the green gap, between what Americans say they value and how they actually behave. Mass communication, both informative and persuasive, can play a vital role in closing this gap.

The class will look closely at the ways mass media can foster, challenge and change attitudes and behaviors as they relate to sustainability. The class will focus on the potential challenges and pitfalls we face in trying to communicate with audiences about issues of sustainability. The focus will be on sustainable consumption, which I define broadly to encompass not only the purchase, use and disposal of sustainable products and services, but also the adoption of lifestyle choices and value orientations that help further sustainable goals. This broad definition encompasses quotidian behaviors, like buying a cup of coffee, but also deeper, ideological issues, like the decision to support green political candidates.

A central premise of this course is that without effective communication campaigns, even the most promising sustainable initiatives will not succeed. In the course of the semester, students will gain the theoretical and practical foundation necessary to understand, evaluate and craft successful media messages to communicate issues of sustainability.

COURSE THEMES

The course is structured around the following themes:

1. What is sustainability?

This segment focuses on the social construction of issues of sustainability and the role played by mass media (both news and advertising/marketing). Students will learn about issue attention cycles, constructionist perspectives and environmental sociology, with a goal of understanding how mass media and communication play an integral role in the formation, definition and significance of sustainability as a social issue.

2. What does the public think about sustainability?

In this segment, we will focus on public opinion about issues of sustainability and the environment. How do we develop opinions about issues of sustainability? What role do mass media play in shaping, challenging and reinforcing different stakeholders' views of sustainability? We will cover important theoretical perspectives as they apply to communication, looking in particular at theories of agenda setting, framing, priming, cultivation theory, and third-person effects.

3. How do we change public opinion about sustainability?

Having explored the foundations of public opinion as it relates to issues of sustainability, we will then focus on ways in which public opinion might be changed. We will pay close attention to theories of persuasion, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model, social judgment theory and consistency theories (cognitive dissonance and balance theory).

4. How do we get the public to act sustainably?

As countless public opinion and consumer polls demonstrate, even those individuals who claim to hold environmental values and favor living more sustainably often fail to follow through on these attitudes. In this segment, students will focus on ways in which mass media can help translate pro-sustainable attitudes into pro-sustainable behaviors. Drawing on theories of behavior change, including the theory of planned behavior, social cognitive theory and social norms theory, students will gain solid grounding in how mass communication might effectively encourage more sustainable lifestyle choices.

COURSE METHOD:

This 15-week course is a hybrid class. So, what does that mean? It means that part of the class is in-person and part of it is online (asynchronous). Of the three hours for this class, 1.5 hours will be spent together, in-person on Wednesday afternoons. The remaining 1.5 hours will be spent going through material (readings, video lectures, assignments, etc.) at your own pace within the week. Essentially, we will use this structure:

- Mondays: You will complete the various tasks as indicated in Canvas. These might be articles or chapters to read, a movie to watch, an assignment to complete. You can do these at your own pace but they must be completed by 11:59 pm on Monday

- Wednesdays: We will then meet in-person on Wednesdays to dive into those issues and topics covered in the Monday tasks. These will be very discussion heavy and include in-class activities and assignments, so it is imperative that you complete the Monday tasks in order to be able to contribute.

Attendance at our in-person meetings is required. The degree and quality of your participation will be reflected in your grade. Learning is not a spectator sport. Fundamentally, the responsibility to learn is yours and yours alone. For learning to happen in any course, you must take an active role in the process. For our class, you are expected to come to class prepared and ready to learn, which requires you to read, watch and study the assigned material before coming to class. Being prepared for class enables you to construct a knowledge base on which subsequent learning rests. During our in-person meetings, we won't spend a lot of time reviewing content covered in the readings and videos. Instead, we will be engaging in applied tasks or extensions of the material.

EVALUATION AND EXPECTATIONS

I have structured the content and the assignments to be incremental, meaning they build on each other from week to week. I have also structured the class so that no single assignment or test can ruin your grade. Instead, you have many opportunities, most of them low stakes, to show us what you're learning and how you're thinking about the material.

Late assignments will not be accepted. There will be no make-up tests or opportunities to re-do (or hand in late) the assignments. If you think you are going to miss an assignment, speak to me BEFORE the due date. There are no excused "absences." I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences or justified and unjustified reasons for not meeting deadlines. It's not my place to decide which excuses are more legitimate or more worthy than others.

ASSIGNMENTS	DUE DATE	POINTS
Survey	Jan. 22	2.5
Environmental Autobiography	Jan. 31	15
Ethical Case Study	Feb. 21	15
Ad analysis	March 27	15
Self-change project	ongoing but due April 3	20
Group Project	ongoing but due April 24	35
Monday tasks (10 @ 2 points)	every Monday by 11:59 pm	20
Wednesday tasks (10 @ 2 points)	every in-person class	20
Required Research	TBD	7.5
	TOTAL	150

GRADING:

To earn an:	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
You must earn this %:	94-100	90-93.9	87-89.9	84-86.9	80-83.9	77-79.9	74-76.9	70-73.9	67-69.9	64-66.9	60-63.9	0-59.9
Points cut off:	141	135	130.5	126	120	115.5	111	105	100.5	96	90	<90

What the letter grades mean:

- A, A-** Earned by work of excellent quality indicating full mastery of the subject; in the case of an A, it indicates extraordinary distinction.
- B+, B, B-** Earned by work that indicates commendable comprehension of the course material and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities.
- C+, C, C-** Earned by work that indicates average and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.
- D+, D, D-** Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
- F** Earned by work that is unsatisfactory and indicates a failure to do minimal passing work

Some Words on Grading:

- I will NOT be rounding up percentage grades or points. So if you earn an 89.6% that translates into a B+ and will not be rounded up to 90% (an A-).
- Any questions or concerns about a grade must be presented in writing within seven (7) days after the grade is announced or posted. I will not discuss grades after this seven-day period.
- When we grade your work, you start with zero points. You earn points based on the quality of the work and the accuracy, appropriateness and detail of your answers. You do not start with 100 percent and then points based on mistakes you might make. Your final points represent the total points earned for that assignment, not the number of points “taken away” for errors or omissions.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS CLASS

First, I want you to do well. If everyone earns an A in this class, I would be VERY happy. But that is ultimately up to you. You will maximize your success by:

Being Prepared. As stated previously, do the readings and any required tasks before class. You will not be able to complete the assignments or join meaningfully in the discussions if you do not. You don't have to understand everything I ask you to read. Coming to class with questions to clarify your confusion is a perfectly acceptable approach!

Being Engaged. During discussions, be ready to contribute your thoughts and ideas. Be expected to articulate and justify your ideas with solid reasons. Be respectful of others but it's OK to disagree. In fact, thoughtful dialog is vital to being an involved human.

Being Reflective. Think about how the content relates to other classes, to your own life, to other people (those you know and don't know personally), etc.

Being Organized. There are a lot of moving parts to classes. This one is no different. Keep track of deadlines and due dates. Be sure to check Canvas regularly for messages, announcements and any changes to the course schedule.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE – THIS IS LIKELY TO CHANGE

WEEK	TOPIC	MONDAYS (DUE BY 11:59 PM)			WEDNESDAYS (DUE BEFORE CLASS)	
		READING	ASSIGNMENTS		READING	
1	Introductions	1/15			1/17	
2	What is climate change?	1/22	READ: Uninhabitable Earth	DO: Article response	1/24	READ: What the Data Says about Americans' Views of Climate Change
3	What is the environment?	1/29	READ: Robbins – Social Construction of Nature Ch 8	DO: Unpacking environmental privilege	1/31	WATCH: America's great white outdoors READ: "The Worst of Human Nature"
4	Environmental Values	2/5	READ: Corbett Ch. 2 (part)	DO: Funpark Fyn	2/7	READ: TBD
5	Environmental Ethics	2/12	READ: Clayton Ch. 3	DO: TBD	2/14	READ: The Spotted Owl Controversy
6	What do we know about climate change?	2/19	READ: Global Warming's Six Americas across age, race/ethnicity, and gender	DO: TBD	2/21	READ: The More Education Republicans Have, the Less They Tend to Believe in Climate Change
7	Environment and the News	2/26	READ: Corbett, News Media (ch. 8)	DO: TBD	2/28	READ: TBD
8	Environment and PR	3/4	WATCH: Merchants of Doubt	DO: TBD	3/6	READ: The audacious PR plot that seeded doubt about climate change
		3/11			3/13	
9	Advertising	3/18	READ: Corbett - A Faint Green Sell	DO: TBD	3/20	READ: TBD
10	Movies	3/25	WATCH: Day After Tomorrow	DO: TBD	3/27	READ: Reconsidering Fictional Films for Communicating Climate Change Issues
11	Celebrity Endorsements	4/1	READ: TBD	DO: TBD	4/3	READ: TBD
12	Sports	4/8	READ: TBD	DO: TBD	4/10	
13	Immersive Media	4/15	READ: TBD	DO: TBD	4/17	
14	Wrap up	4/22			4/24	
15		4/29			5/1	

COURSE FLAGS

This class carries two flags: Independent Inquiry Flag and the Ethics and Leadership Flag.

Ethics Flag

This course carries the Ethics flag. Ethics courses are designed to equip you with skills that are necessary for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments involving ethical issues and the process of applying ethical reasoning to real-life situations.

Independent Inquiry Flag

This course carries the Independent Inquiry flag. Independent Inquiry courses are designed to engage you in the process of inquiry over the course of a semester, providing you with the opportunity for independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to your major. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from the independent investigation and presentation of your own work.

MOODY COLLEGE WRITING SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Moody College Writing Support Program, located in BMC 3.322, <https://moody.utexas.edu/students/moodywriting> offers one-on-one assistance without charge to students seeking to improve their professional writing in all fields of communication. We have specialists in Journalism, RTF, CSD, CMS, and PR and Advertising. In addition, we offer workshops to strengthen core writing skills in each field and to inspire students to strive for excellence. Students may book half-hour appointments on our website or drop in for assistance during all stages of the writing process.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY EXPECTATIONS:

Students who violate University rules on academic misconduct are subject to the student conduct process. A student found responsible for academic misconduct may be assigned both a status sanction and a grade impact for the course. The grade impact could range from a zero on the assignment in question up to a failing grade in the course. A status sanction can range from a written warning, probation, deferred suspension and/or dismissal from the University. To learn more about academic integrity standards, tips for avoiding a potential academic misconduct violation, and the overall conduct process, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct>.

Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT and is subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. To learn more about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, see the [Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial](#) developed by the UT Libraries in partnership with the Writing Flag program and Student Judicial Services.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The creation of artificial intelligence tools for widespread use is an exciting innovation. These tools have both appropriate and inappropriate uses in classwork. The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class is strictly prohibited unless I explicitly state otherwise. This includes using AI to generate ideas, outline an approach, answer questions, solve problems, or create original language. All work in this course must be your own. Using AI writing tools shall constitute a violation of UT Austin's Institutional Rules on academic integrity.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLASS RECORDINGS

Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

GETTING HELP WITH TECHNOLOGY

Students needing help with technology in this course should contact the [ITS Service Desk](#).

SHARING OF COURSE MATERIALS IS PROHIBITED

No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials and review sheets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class without my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials may facilitate cheating. The University is aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in initiation of the student conduct process and include charge(s) for academic misconduct, potentially resulting in sanctions, including a grade impact.

RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence for a religious holy day as far in advance as possible of the date of observance. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence

USE OF E-MAIL FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO STUDENTS

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with university-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week.

DOCUMENTED DISABILITY STATEMENT

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Disability and Access (D&A). Please refer to D&A's website for contact and more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with D&A, deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

BEHAVIOR CONCERNS ADVICE LINE (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If stress, test anxiety, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.

- Visit/Call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): M-F 8-5p | SSB, 5th floor | <512-471-3515> | <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

- CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | [512.471.2255](tel:512.471.2255) | <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html>
- **CARE Counselor** in the Moody College of Communication is: Abby Simpson, LCSW|CMA 4.134 | [512-471-7642](tel:512-471-7642) (Please *leave a message* if she is unavailable)
- **FREE Services** at CMHC:
 - Brief assessments and referral services
 - Mental health & wellness articles - <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html>
 - MindBody Lab - <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html>
 - Classes, workshops, & groups - <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html>

TITLE IX DISCLOSURE

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Education Code, Section 51.252 (formerly known as Senate Bill 212) requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, to report to the [Title IX Office](#) any information regarding incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive information about incidents of this type (including, but not limited to, written forms, applications, one-on-one conversations, class assignments, class discussions, or third-party reports) must report it to the Title IX Coordinator. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, please remember that I will be required to report this information.

Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Education Code, Section 51.252, they are [mandatory reporters](#) under federal Title IX regulations and are required to report [a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct](#), including the types of misconduct covered under Texas Education Code, Section 51.252. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex – including pregnancy and parental status – in educational programs and activities. The Title IX Office has developed supportive ways and compiled campus resources to support all impacted by a Title IX matter.

If you would like to speak with a case manager, who can provide support, resources, or academic accommodations, in the Title IX Office, please email: supportandresources@austin.utexas.edu. Case managers can also provide support, resources, and accommodations for pregnant, nursing, and parenting students.

For more information about reporting options and resources, please visit: <https://titleix.utexas.edu>, contact the Title IX Office via email at: titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419.