



Environmental Communication Theory: In Principle and Practice

Fall 2021

LA 472/572

Seminar Format

Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:00 -11:20AM

Location: 231 Lawrence Hall

Instructor: David Buckley Borden (he/him/his)
Lawrence Hall, Room 381
dborden4@uoregon.edu

Research Assistant: NA

Curricular Context: Fulfills theory course requirement in BLA and MLA degree programs

Prerequisites: None. All are welcome.

Online Office Hours. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-2pm, or by appointment.

Credits: 4

Our greatest environmental problems are not rooted in ecology, but rather culture. And, all effective cultural solutions grow from our collective communication.



Course Description

This course will explore a range of environmental communication theories across disciplines and practices in and outside of contemporary landscape architecture. Content will draw from a variety of allied fields, with shared environmental interests and ethos, including design, art, education, science, policy, and conservation. A range of disciplines, principals, and theoretical ideas relative to the environment will be interrogated through a diversity of cultural lenses.

Assignments along with in-class discussion and exercises will frame principles and ideas as they relate to landscape architecture and environmental design, both in theory and practice. Readings, writing exercises, in-class discussions, and term projects will revolve around major communication themes and modes of practice.

A series of guest lecturers will ground the theoretical coursework in the context of contemporary practice. As such the class will host a range of practitioners with shared interests in ecology, science-communication, visual art, activism, graphic design, futures, and landscape architecture. Speakers will include specialists ranging from thought-leaders at the MIT Media Lab to landscape architects in practice and academia.

Confirmed Speakers Include:

- Matthew Battles and Keith Hartwig, designers/educators, MetaLAB, Berkman Klein Institute for Internet and Society. Food Futures through community event
- Dr. Aaron Ellison, ecologists, Harvard Forest. Environmental awareness through site-specific landscape installation art
- Diana Fernandez, landscape designer, Sasaki Associates. Diversity and accessibility in landscape architecture communication
- Sands Fish, designer/technologist, MIT Media Lab's Civic Leader Group. Police futures as speculative design
- Robyn Reed, landscape architecture, Louisiana State University. Narrative of place within design process
- Meg Studer, designer/illustrator, Siteations Zoning manuals, picture-books as landscape storytelling.
- Dr. Fred Swanson, scientist, HJ Andrews Experimental Forest, Spring Creek Project. Environmental understanding and inquiry through literature and creative writing.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to demonstrate the following:

- An appreciation of landscape architecture as an environmental communication medium;
- An understanding and working knowledge of environmental communication theories, methods, and practices relative to landscape architecture;
- The ability to situate landscape architecture projects relative to communication principles within the greater cultural discourse;
- The ability to creatively synthesize layered environmental information into design projects;
- The ability to clearly articulate environmental communication theory through effective graphic and written narrative;
- A proficiency in communicating remotely in a professional setting, including project organization, file preparation, and final submission of a quality intellectually rigorous paper;
- An ability to balance the demands of a rigorous course while simultaneously enjoying the learning process; specifically, have fun.



Fall 2020 Student Course Testimonials:

DBB's environmental communication course was a practice and an experiment of communication in of itself. This class was not a lecture – but an open dialogue that will keep you on your toes and engaged. The content of the class gave me the vocabulary to break down and analyze what is really going on when someone creates a drawing, gives a presentation, or simply expresses a thought. DBB's environmental communication class pushed me further along to find my professional identity in the landscape architecture world. This type of engagement and critical thinking may be uncomfortable to some people, but if it is, then it is probably exactly what you need.

-Will Bonner, MLA 2022

The class definition for communication was along the lines of, “communication is the basis for our environmental reality”. This statement really cements how I now approach design thinking and design representation. Design becomes a sort of storytelling and we choose how the story plays out through visuals and presentation. Everything that goes into a design proposal informs how it will be received and understood by an audience. David's class has given me the ability to understand the “why” behind much of the design work I do. I often ask myself how my studio deliverables can best communicate my intended design direction. I think it is important to take a step back and consider the role that each element plays within the design as a whole.

-Evan Kwiecien, BLA 2024



Class Format

This class can be characterized as a seminar and is organized around weekly readings, workshops, class discussions, presentations, and guest lectures.

Class meets twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00am to 11:20am. Classes will typically be structured around three modules:

Reading discussion: drawing out principles, themes, and questions from the readings

Workshop: in-class work to further students' critical and analytical skills, including verbal and graphic analysis of environmental communication projects.

Lecture and case study: clarifying and synthesizing principles and ideas as they related to landscape architecture practice.

Students are required to read selected readings and prepare questions before class to ensure productive discussion. Optional readings are highly encouraged.

The class will generally follow a regular schedule as follows:

- **Tuesdays:** DBB lecture and/or workshop and group discussion
- **Thursdays:** guest lecture and discussion

Weekly assignments to be uploaded by start of class **on Thursday.**

Course work will be posted before the start of class on Thursday before the week it is due.

Please refer to Canvas for weekly agenda, readings, and assignments.

Guest lecturers will be scheduled as their professional calendars permit. That said, the class content schedule will surely change.



Requirements

1. Attendance to all online lectures and discussion sessions.
2. Evidence of reading preparation through written response assignments, prepared discussion questions, and conversation and debate during class, or by specific reference in the student's individual projects throughout the term.
3. Projects analyzing communication design through different practice modes and communication tools

This class is graded with formative and cumulative feedback. This class can be graded as Pass/No Pass if requested. Exceptional effort, intellectual growth, and creative risk-taking will be rewarded in final grade. Minimal effort, not so much.

Grading Breakdown

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| 10% | Personal practice statement |
| 15% | 101 Applied Enviro-Comm Concepts |
| 25% | Class participation |
| 30% | Critical response assignments |
| 20% | Final paper |

Attendance, preparation, participation, and all assignments are mandatory. Unexcused absences or failure to submit assignments on time will lower your overall course grade. Students are permitted one grace absence.

Unexcused absences beyond that will result in a grade reduction of a grade per two absences (Pass to Marginal Pass, e.g.).

Assignments

Assignments are due digitally (PDF), at the beginning of the class session on the due date. Include last name and date in file name. for example *Smith_09292020.pdf*. Late work will be penalized a grade step per day (Marginal Pass to No Pass, e.g.). Digital work must be submitted on the Canvas course website; emailed work will not be accepted.

Reading and discussion

Class includes discussion of the readings for that session. Discussions are an integral part of the course. They are forums for sharing your critical insights regarding the readings; and they are where questions can be aired and discussed with your peers.

Expectations

I expect the highest professional standards to be maintained throughout the term. Active in-class participation, open communication, and consistent progress is very important. In addition, class participation also includes respecting the rights and property of others, working cooperatively, and completing assignments satisfactorily and on time.