PUBPOL 582: Communicating Climate Change
Evans School of Public Policy & Governance
Winter 2017 Course Syllabus

Class meets Wednesday 4:30-7:20 in PAR 106

Instructor: Tim Scharks, PhD: tims2@uw.edu
Office Hours: Before class, 3-4:15 at Suzzallo Espresso (or by arrangement)

Expectations: Don’t miss class. Come to class prepared to discuss the readings, including with specific questions on parts of the reading you didn’t understand. Finally, please remember this great saying attributed to John Watson: Be kind, for everyone is fighting a hard battle.

Guiding Questions:
What do we know about climate change communication?
Who does climate change communication and what are their goals?
How does climate change communication represent a thorny policy problem?
What questions remain to be answered about communicating climate change?

Course Objectives:
At the completion of this class, students should have an understanding of:
● The science of science communication as it relates to climate change communication.
● The ethical issues associated with communicating the risks of climate change to the public as well as the ethical issues around persuasion vs. informing for policy goals.
● The way in which climate change beliefs have come to be viewed as markers of social group identity rather than acceptance/rejection of science (the cultural cognition hypothesis)
● The problems represented by psychological distance and proximating for climate change communication.
● Identifying barriers to policy support and lessons learned for building engagement about climate change mitigation.
● Interpersonal communication: Why it’s hard to talk to our parents/friends about climate change.
● The sources of political polarization and climate denial in the United States.

Evaluation
Grades will be assigned according the the Evans MPA Handbook using the following weights:
25% Class participation (we’ll do at least one written activity or quiz every class)
25% Team prepares and leads class discussion
50% Group research project or research-based outreach project
**Course Schedule**, subject to change in the progress of the course, especially as a few guest speakers remain ‘in the wings’.

Readings posted to Canvas>>Modules

*Week 6, 7, & 8 readings are still being finalized and will be posted to Canvas as well as an addendum to this syllabus.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Reading &amp; Tests</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1:</strong> January 4</td>
<td>Introductions, course objectives, topic selection as a class</td>
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| **Week 2:** January 11 | Fundamentals: the science of science communication, American perceptions of climate change/climate science, debunking fundamentals  
Tim presents and leads discussion  
Readings:  
| **Week 3:** January 18 | Team 1 presents and leads discussion on the ethics of climate change/ ethics of climate change communication  
Readings:  
Fimrite, P. (August 9, 2013). “Gleick hurt by ethics lapse over climate papers.” San Francisco Chronicle, accessed at: |
| Week 4: January 25 | Team 2 presents and leads discussion on cultural cognition hypothesis
Readings:
| Week 5: February 1 | Team 3 presents and leads discussion on psychological distance
Readings:
| Week 6: February 8 | Team 4 presents and leads discussion on other barriers to policy support/building engagement
Readings:
| Week 7: February 15 | Team 5 presents and leads discussion on micro-level/interpersonal communication about climate change |
| Week 8: February 22 | Team 6 presents and leads discussion on politicization & polarization of climate change and climate change denial Guest [Katharine Hayhoe](#) 6PM (via Skype) |
| Week 9: March 1 | Groups give preliminary project reports |
| Week 10: March 8 | Final project presentations |
| | No final exam |
Class Discussion Leaders Assignment

For this assignment, work with your group to prepare and lead an approximately 1.5-hour class discussion (with a break) of the week's assigned readings.

Some guidelines:

- The primary goal is to facilitate discussion of the readings to involve all students in understanding the readings, i.e., two-way communication of course content and its implications for policy.
- In pursuit of the above goal, it's a good idea to motivate students to complete the readings to the best of their ability....a principal challenge of instruction! Classically, a quiz serves as a “stick” to incentivize this behavior, but you may be as creative as you like in developing these incentives.
- Further per these goals, please do not prepare a PowerPoint rehashing the key points from the readings, which will disincentivize student preparation and participation in discussion. It’s fine to have a PowerPoint laying out an agenda, projecting discussion questions, etc.
- Do your best to locate and share examples of the topic you're presenting--perhaps advertising messages, something from social media, a relevant political or policy action, or a story in the popular press.

Your grade for this assignment (representing 25% of your total grade) will be based on:

1. A 1-2 page written plan for the day, submitted by email to me no later than midnight Tuesday before class. 25%
2. Develop a participation instrument whereby student participation can be recorded, and all students who attend are able to participate (e.g. a class worksheet or short quiz on fundamentals of the reading), submitted by email to me no later than midnight Tuesday before class. 25%
3. Lead an effective class discussion where all students feel welcome to contribute information and perspectives, highlight key points of the readings, take positions on issues, and/or argue with the perspectives advanced by the readings. 40%
4. Your class discussion must include consideration of the ethical issues around the specific topic discussed (the group focusing on ethics has an easy job here). 10%

Please ping me for ideas if stumped or to see if I think something will/won't work well, I'm happy to share my views.
**Final Project**

The final project is to be completed in groups of 4-6 people, selected by mutual interest although I’m happy to randomly assign people if you prefer.

You may choose to conduct a research project or research-based outreach project, depending on your group’s preference for research vs. application of research.

For a group research project, consider:

- Testing and replicating a finding from the literature that you find interesting (or dubious)
- Making a slight extension of a finding from the literature (this is more difficult but also where people like to go with research)
- Applying some finding from the literature to existing communications, (for example: looking at a set of messages about climate change to see what kind of psychological distance is involved in the messages on average)

If your research project needs human subjects I’m happy to help--within ethical research rules--by providing my community college students as test subjects for a small study.

For an applied outreach project, your group should craft some climate change communications (messages or strategies) based on findings from the research we are reviewing. Some ideas include:

- Applying some rules about messaging to craft messages intended for less liberal audiences.
- Crafting and deploying a research-backed communication strategy on a social media platform.
- Analyzing, politely critiquing, and recommending changes to an extant climate change communication strategy (or messages) from a group working to communicate climate change.

Applied outreach projects should include a suggested mechanism for evaluating the success or failure of your outreach (policy evaluation is an often missing step of the policy process!)

In either case (research or outreach) the final project will consist of a paper or report of approximately 2 single-spaced pages per group member, not counting citations, a preliminary and final presentation to class, and a 1-page individual report on your learning experience while conducting the group project. Outreach projects should also include outreach materials, e.g. a memo sent to an organization or research-backed messages in addition to the group report on the project and its process.

Each week of class will suggest new topics to us as we learn more about climate change communication, but we want to be underway with at least the seed of an idea by Week 5. More
detailed description of each component of the project and their part of the assignment grade will be forthcoming.