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_A Deconstructed Syllabus: Environmental Humanities and Climate Change in the First Year Classroom_  

a) **Syllabus vision:**  

Over the past few years, I have started asking myself: what can the environmental humanities do for first year college students? I am intrigued by how the environmental humanities as a field—with its interdisciplinary and its propensity for fostering collaborations both inside and outside the university—can introduce first year college students to university structures and help them explore what it means to be academics, humanities scholars, and engaged community members, especially in a time of global environmental crisis. This environmental humanities “first year initiative” course is designed to introduce undergraduates to the wide field of the environmental humanities by using climate change as a focalizing device throughout the semester and by emphasizing the creation of public texts.  

Climate change is an issue that, according to Timothy Clark, “refuses to stay put, dispersing as soon as you look at to it into multiple questions, disciplines and topics,” and thus it provides a fertile ground for introducing new students to the practical and theoretical powers of the environmental humanities—that is, how the environmental humanities can address the environmental-social-political imbroglio that is climate change. Furthermore, through thinking about climate change, students can make connections between their own local communities and other places—distant in space or time—and in so doing practice modes of reading and writing that are situated and embodied. Or in other words, one of the objectives of the course is for students to understand how different kinds of cultural, literary, political and scientific texts act in the world, and then to actually create such texts and send them out, so to speak, into their local communities.  

b) **Syllabus methods:**  

This environmental humanities course is designed to help students develop twenty-first century literacy skills in the context of climate change and to give students powerful new ways to communicate climate science, climate justice, and their own experiences with climate change in languages/rhetorics that can break down barriers and meet people where they are, in local communities and places. Thus, the course firstly foregrounds critical and close reading of multiple forms and genres, including scientific texts, journalistic reportage, poetry, fiction, personal nonfiction, photography, documentary, new media, and drama. Furthermore, the course asks students to reflect on the different ways of knowing climate change that these various genres and forms make possible, and then to discuss which form/forms would be useful in their own communities. Lastly, students work individually and collaboratively to create such texts and tailor them to specific audiences. The course also serves then not only as an introduction to what might be called environmental
c) *Some syllabus texts (suggested for a 15 week semester):*


Selections from local newspapers, political documents, press releases from environmental and community groups, etc.

*Slow Ride Stories*, kickstarting the climate conversation:

http://slowridestories.com/


Nyks, Kelly, and Jared P. Scott. *Do the Math: A Film to Spark a Movement.* 2013. Film.


*I See Change*, an online, crowd sourced climate change weather almanac:

http://thealmanac.org/year.php

d) *Course actions:*

During the first half of the semester, students complete several independent writing assignments, including a textual analysis, a short piece of argumentative writing, and a piece of creative writing—either poetry, fiction, nonfiction, or drama. Then, during the second half of the semester, students work in small groups to connect with a local group (either on campus or off campus depending on the size of
the school) in order to design a media presentation, new media project, public performance, or other co-authored text that attempts to communicate climate change to a particular audience. Possible venues include existing campus groups, community centers, local religious institutions, other schools, or even business or political organizations. This collaborative project provides students with practical experience seeing the effects of their own choices regarding genre, rhetoric, narrative, etc. Furthermore, and most importantly, students hopefully begin to view themselves as agents of change and as part of communities of change within the rubric of the environmental humanities. At the end of the semester, students complete individual reflective essays in which they use the tools and strategies of cultural analysis to consider the effects of their projects.