

INTERDISCIPLINARY ESSAYS ON ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

One Planet, One Humanity,
and the Media



EDITED BY LUIGI MANCA
AND JEAN-MARIE KAUTH

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Chapter 16

Environmental Perceptions of College Students

Anne Marie Smith

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Between January 2007 and December 2011, I taught numerous sections of ecology courses for nonscience majors at College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, IL; Waubensee Community College in Sugar Grove, IL; and Benedictine University in Lisle, IL. During this time, I taught this subject to approximately 350 students in 16 sections. At the beginning of the 16 weeks (8 in the summer sessions), we covered the basics of ecology including the movement of energy and matter. Then we explored many issues, including biodiversity loss, freshwater quantity and quality, air quality, impacts of industrial agriculture, toxins, energy sources, and waste management. Sustainable living was the backbone of the course.

As I gained more experience with the course, I discovered how vital it was to focus on solutions as much as the problems. On a few occasions, students contacted me after class telling me they were extremely concerned and were afraid to do anything for fear they would add to the already overwhelming problems. I had to counsel them that of course they must eat, but don't waste food; it was acceptable to drive, but walk when you can; and of course they must take showers, but don't waste the hot water.

Clearly, some of the students were receptive to the science behind the various environmental issues covered in the course. However, a surprising number were apathetic and skeptical when we would discuss the various issues and their solutions. Either they were unconvinced of the existence of any problems, or they doubted that the solutions could help in any real way.

I wasn't getting my point across about the importance of sustainable living, so I started asking direct, open-ended questions in as nonthreatening a way as possible. "Tell me where you guys are at." "Do you believe me when I tell

you human activities have changed the atmosphere of the planet in a significant way?" "Do you believe me when I tell you there are real solutions being implemented?" When they were willing and able to articulate their thoughts, the trends in the responses were disturbing. Many shared the thought that there was no point to trying to fix any of the issues because they were so big. Others thought it was all blown out of proportion.

Another noticeable trend was students' lack of confidence in their own abilities to learn general science and basic ecology. They seemed to disengage as if it was beyond their capabilities and there was no point in even trying. Of course it wasn't beyond them, but they seemed to believe it was. It's important to remember these were nonscience majors. Perhaps they thought science was for others to learn and understand.

Eventually, I was tired of wondering what they really thought. Was I only hearing from the more vocal students? Were most students afraid to tell me what they really thought because they were concerned it might negatively impact their grade? I decided to collect some data in a more formalized way. My initial goal was to determine the environmental perceptions of anonymous, 18- to 29-year-old college students, so I could more effectively present the material of the ecology course and other environmentally related courses.

Survey #1 was conducted in the spring of 2014 and presented at the *One Planet—One Humanity* research-planning conference in May 2014. Based on the results and feedback from the conference participants, Survey #2 was generated and conducted in spring of 2015. Survey #2 purposely reached beyond Benedictine University students and beyond the 18 to 29-year-old college students.

METHODS

Development of Surveys

Questions for Survey #1 were based on the casual questions I had asked over the years. Survey #2 was based on feedback embedded in the responses to Survey #1 and feedback gained from participants of the *One Planet—One Humanity: Communications For and Against* Conference at Benedictine University, May 29-31, 2014. Attempts were made to remove perceived bias.¹

Distribution of Surveys

In 2007, I generated a Facebook page for my students: www.facebook.com/TreehuggerProfessor. I promised only to post good news about environmental issues. There are many positive efforts happening around the world to address

the various environmental issues, but those efforts usually don't make the news. I feel it is important to share the good news as much as the issues; otherwise, people lose hope of ever overcoming the problems. Every student I've had since then has been invited (not required) to "friend" the Facebook page. As of May 2015, there were nearly 250 current or past students receiving the posts. Approximately another 50 were fellow instructors or others who were interested—some from outside of the USA. This Facebook page was used to distribute the link to Survey #1 starting on May 26, 2014. The survey link was posted in the Facebook page multiple times over the course of the spring and fall 2014 semesters. I asked all who were "friends" of the Facebook page to complete Survey #1 and to forward it on to family and friends.

The distribution strategy for Survey #2 was very similar. It began January 16, 2015 and concluded March 20, 2015. Participants of the *One Planet—One Humanity: Communications For and Against* Conference at Benedictine University, May 29-31, 2014, also helped distribute the second. I took advantage of an opportunity during a presentation to the faculty assembly at Benedictine University to ask faculty members to encourage their students to participate in the survey. I also handed out flyers to faculty to post on their department bulletin boards.

RESULTS

Participation

As of May 29, 2014, 83 total responses were received for Survey #1. Of the 83 responses, 65 participants were students, and the rest were faculty members and others. Responses from nonstudents were not included in the data. Responses to Survey #1 provided valuable feedback for Survey #2. There were 167 responses to Survey #2 as of March 18, 2015. I decided to cut off receipt of responses at that point.

A goal of Survey #2 was to reach as many traditionally aged students as possible. This goal was met with over two-thirds of the respondents to Survey #2 indicating their ages as either between 18 and 20 (31.74%) or between 21 and 29 (37.72%).

Academic Majors of Participants

The strong majority of the participants in Survey #1 were Biology and Health Science majors at Benedictine University. I was hoping for wider variety since the Facebook page included as many nonscience majors as science majors. The lack of variety in major among participants in Survey #1 produced an

inability to analyze perceptions that may or may not be correlated to major. After Survey #1, the need was also revealed for more respondents who did not feel confident in their knowledge of the science behind various environmental issues.

Concerted efforts were successfully made with Survey #2 to gain a wider variety of academic majors. Only then could insight be gained into whether or not a student's choice of major correlated with whether or not that student considered him or herself part of the environmental movement. Although the majority of participants in Survey #2 were also Biology and Health Science majors, the distribution was much more even. Most notably, the number of respondents with business and liberal art majors nearly doubled in Survey #2. A comparison of majors between Survey #1 and Survey #2 is provided in Table 16.1.

No strong pattern was found when students' choices of major were compared with whether or not they consider themselves a part of the environmental movement. Most of the participants (78.47%) in Survey #1 considered themselves part of the environmental movement, and most of the participants (70%) in Survey #1 were biology and health science majors. This may indicate a correlation; however, very few other majors were represented to the same degree in Survey #1.

The successful efforts made in the distribution of Survey #2 to also reach participants with less environmentally focused majors led to more insight. In addition, based on feedback from conference participants, a "Neither" option was added in Survey #2. Because these two changes were concurrent, it is difficult to know which change resulted in a lower percentage of participants in Survey #2 who indicated "Agree" (40.72%) or "Strongly Agree" (12.57%) that they consider themselves part of the environmental movement. It may be because a wider variety of majors were represented in Survey #2. It also may be because a significant percentage (28.14%) indicated "Neither" agreement nor disagreement to the statement. Perhaps the "Neither" response was more attractive. Finally, it may be a combination of both factors.

When responses to the statement "I consider myself a part of the environmentalism movement" are sorted by major, no one category of major stood out for any one response or inclination. That is, each inclination was represented in each major.

There were no "Strongly Agree" or "Strongly Disagree" responses from business majors, and the responses were essentially even in distribution across responses of "Agree," "Disagree," and "Neither." The responses from the other colleges (Education & Health Services, Liberal Arts, and Science) were very similar to each other. The most popular response in all three categories was "Agree." "Strongly Agree" was the second most popular response

Table 16.1 Breakdown of Participants by Major in Survey #1 (65 student participants) and Survey #2 (167 participants)

	SURVEY #1 (30/65 responses)	SURVEY #2 (167 responses)
College of Business	6.67% (2/30)	10.78% (18/167)
Accounting	0	3
Business	0	6
Economics	0	1
MB Program	1 (BenU)	
Management	0	4
Marketing	1 (COD and U of I Chi)	2
Organizational Leadership	0	2
College of Education and Health	33.33% (10/30)	28.74% (48/167)
Elementary Education	0	2
Exercise Physiology	0	1
Health Science	8 (BenU)	13
MPH Program	1 (BenU)	8
Nursing	0	1
Nutrition	1 (BenU)	8
Perfusion Technology	0	1
Pre-Med	0	1
Physical Therapy	0	1
Public Health	0	10
Secondary Education	0	1
Sports Administration	0	1
College of Liberal Arts	10.0% (3/30)	20.96% (35/167)
Communications	1 (BenU)	4
Fine Arts	0	1
French	0	2
History	0	2
Global Studies	0	1
Graphic Design	0	1
Liberal Arts	0	1
Literature	0	2
Music	0	4
Photography/Advertising	0	1
Political Science	0	1
Psychology	2 (BenU = 1, San Diego SU = 1)	11
Social Work	0	2
Sociology	0	2
College of Science	36.67% (11/30)	27.54% (46/167)
Anthropology	1 (NIU)	1
Biology	7 (BenU)	26
Biochemistry	0	1
Chemistry	0	3
Computer Science	0	1
Engineering	0	3
Environmental Science	1 (BenU)	3
Geology	1 (IU Bloomington)	
Mathematics	0	4
NRES	0	1
Natural Science	0	1
Pre-Pharmacy	1 (BenU)	1
Physics	0	1
Other	13.33% (4/30)	11.97% (20/167)

in Education & Health Services and Liberal Arts. Surprisingly, the second most popular response in the Science category was "Disagree."

When "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses were combined and tallied, the positive inclination was ranked but not strongly focused in one category of majors:

1. Education and Health Science majors gave 27 responses for 16.36% overall
2. Science majors gave 21 response for 12.73% overall
3. Liberal Arts majors gave 17 responses for 10.3% overall
4. Other majors gave 15 responses for 9.09% overall
5. Business majors gave 7 responses for 4.24% overall

Similarly to the above, when "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" responses were combined and tallied, the negative inclination also was ranked but again not strongly focused in one category of majors:

1. Education and Health Science majors gave 10 responses for 6.06% overall
2. Science majors gave 9 responses for 5.45% overall
3. Business majors gave 6 responses for 3.64% overall
4. Liberal Arts majors gave 5 responses for 3.03% overall
5. Other majors gave 1 response for 0.61% overall

When "Neither" responses were tallied, it was found that the same two groups of majors were in the top two positions of all three lists, yet the percentages didn't vary much:

1. Science majors gave 16 responses for 9.70% overall
2. Education and Health Science majors gave 11 responses for 6.67% overall
3. Liberal Arts majors gave 11 responses for 6.67% overall
4. Business majors gave 5 responses for 3.03% overall
5. Other majors gave 4 responses for 2.42% overall

Although there are some patterns as outlined above, overall, majors do not correlate with whether or not students consider themselves part of the environmental movement. This means that students who consider themselves a part of the environmental movement are represented to some relevant degree in most majors. The same is true of students who do not consider themselves environmentalists. Table 16.2 provides the raw data from Survey #2 related to the relationship between students' majors and whether or not they consider themselves part of the environmental movement.

It's interesting that no one major or category of majors has a monopoly on the environmental movement. It's a testament to how the natural environment

Table 16.2 Responses by Major

	"Strongly Agree" (SA)	"Agree" (A)	"Disagree" (D)	"Strongly Disagree" (SD)	"Neither" (N)
College of Business (CoB)	0.00% (0/21 SA)	10.6% (7/66 A)	23.08% (6/26 D)	0.00% (0/5 SD)	10.64% (5/47 N)
	0.00% (0/18 CoB)	38.89% (7/18 CoB)	33.33% (6/18 CoB)	0.00% (0/18 CoB)	27.78% (5/18 CoB)
College of Education & Health Services (CoEH)	42.86% (9/21)	27.27% (18/66 A)	26.92% (7/26 D)	60.00% (3/5 SD)	23.40% (11/47 N)
	18.75% (9/48 CoEH)	37.50% (18/48 CoEH)	14.58% (7/48 CoEH)	6.25% (3/48 CoEH)	22.92% (11/48 CoEH)
College of Liberal Arts (CoLA)	28.57% (6/21)	16.67% (11/66)	15.38% (4/26 D)	20.00% (1/5 SD)	23.40% (11/47 N)
	18.18% (6/33 CoLA)	33.33% (11/33 CoLA)	12.12% (4/33 CoLA)	3.03% (1/33 CoLA)	33.33% (11/33 CoLA)
College of Science (CoS)	19.05% (4/21 SA)	25.76% (17/66 A)	30.77% (8/26 D)	20.00% (1/5 SD)	34.04% (16/47 N)
	8.70% (4/46 CoS)	37.00% (17/46 CoS)	17.39% (8/46 CoS)	2.17% (1/46 CoS)	34.78% (16/46 CoS)
Other (O)	9.52% (2/21 SA)	19.70% (13/66 A)	3.85% (1/26 D)	0.00% (0/5 SD)	8.51% (4/47 N)
	10.00% (2/20 O)	65.00% (13/20 O)	5.00% (1/20 O)	0.00% (0/20 O)	20.00% (4/20 O)
"I'm not in college"		4 (???)			1 (U of IL)
"I choose not to answer"	2 (1=?)	2			1 (COD)
TOTALS	12.73% (21 SA/165)	39.39% (65 A/165)	15.15% (25 D/165)	3.03% (5 SD/165)	29.09% (48 N/165)
OVERALL					

Notes: The 165 responses by major out of 167 participants in survey #2 to the statement "I consider myself a part of the environmental movement." (2 did not respond to the question.) Schools are Benedictine University unless otherwise indicated. US Postal Service acronyms are used for states when applicable. Other known acronyms are COD = College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL; NCC = North Central College, Naperville, IL; NEIU = Northeastern Illinois University; NUHS = National University of Health Science; and UCSC = Universit  Cattolica Sacro Cuore. Other acronyms were provided by participants and cannot be confirmed.

touches every aspect of human society from science to law to art and beyond. Every field is impacted by nature, and nature is impacted by every field. Of course this would mean that every field has its skeptics of environmentalism, including science, among college students. Based on the results of this survey, we can consider environmentalism more of a human value than an aspect of science.

What's also interesting about the diversity of majors is that perhaps environmentalism provides an effective vehicle for interdisciplinary courses

and cooperation among fields. I teach Nature Writing as a writing-intensive course for the Biology department. Recently I've begun teaching it as a learning community in conjunction with an Ecology course for science majors. We are still in the pilot stages, but there has been early success. I focus on history, philosophy, and creative writing, and the Ecology professor of course focuses on the science; nature writing focuses on the beauty of the science behind nature, and it provides a natural bridge between science and the humanities. The results of this survey suggest there are many other connections to be made using similar bridges.

It's reassuring to think environmentalism truly is spread out somewhat evenly among the different majors. That way, the environmental voice would be heard in a wider variety of academic and work circles. Therefore, this issue is important to track over time. If possible, I'd like to conduct the same survey again in approximately five years to see if there are any changes. Hopefully, concern for the environment will grow among all fields, and conducting the survey again will measure whether or not that is the case.

Confidence in Scientific Understanding

In Survey #1, participants were not given an option of "Neither" when asked if they understood the science behind various environmental issues. This option was added in Survey #2. Most participants in Survey #1 indicated that they understand the science behind climate change, toxicity, biodiversity loss, overfishing/ocean issues, and the importance of recycling. The lowest level of confidence in Survey #1 was related to toxicity, with 23.08% of participants disagreeing and 1.54% strongly disagreeing that they understood the science behind toxicity. Conference participants pointed out that it is quite possible many participants didn't know what the term "toxicity" meant. The toxicity question was reworded in Survey #2; "toxicity" was replaced with "chemical pollution." Interestingly, confidence rose in Survey #2 in the science behind chemical pollution with only 10.18% disagreeing and 0.6% strongly disagreeing that they understood. This is very likely because of the word change. However, confidence in the science behind why recycling is important remained the highest of all the areas in both surveys. Nearly all participants in both surveys felt they understood the science behind why it is important. Whether this is truly the case is not determined by either survey.

Exploring the possible relationship between scientific understanding and environmental perceptions continues to be difficult. At best, the current survey can only explore a possible link between the participants' levels of confidence in their scientific understanding and their environmental perceptions. Their *actual* scientific understanding is difficult to measure in a survey that won't be overwhelmingly long for participants. Just the same,

the participants' levels of confidence are relevant and interesting to explore, particularly in terms of climate change.

Confidence in Science behind Climate Change Led to Acceptance of Climate Change

Of all the environmental issues, climate change is easily the most publicized and discussed, perhaps because there has been an odd denier's movement in the United States. For that reason, both surveys included questions about whether or not participants accept climate change. Therefore, it is possible to correlate participants' confidence in scientific understanding and whether or not they accept climate change.

The majority of participants in Survey #1 and Survey #2 who indicated that they understand the science behind climate change also accepted climate change. Similarly, very few participants (3%) had confidence in their understanding of the science behind climate change yet did not accept that it is happening. These results would imply that a confidence in scientific understanding is needed to accept what scientists tell us via various sources of information. However, if we look only at the participants who do not have confidence in their scientific understanding, the strong majority (80.95%) of them are still willing to accept climate change. This would seem to indicate some trust in the scientific community or at least in their sources of information (See Table 16.3).

Most Participants Accept Climate Change, But the Cause of Climate Change Is Controversial

In Survey #1, participants were asked a direct question: "Do you accept that climate change is happening?" They were forced to choose from three

Table 16.3 Understanding the Science behind Climate Change

	SA they understand		A they understand		D they understand		SD they understand		Neither		behind CC		behind CC		N/A		blank	
	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science	behind CC	science
SA they accept CC	24.55% (41)	23.35% (39)	1.20% (2)	.60% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A they accept CC	.60% (1)	22.16% (37)	3.00% (5)	9.58% (16)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neither	0	3.00% (5)	3.00% (5)	.60% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
D they accept CC	.60% (1)	1.20% (2)	0	1.20% (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SD they accept CC	1.20% (2)	0	1.20% (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	0	0	0	.60% (1)	.60% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blank	.60% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Notes: Self-reported understanding of climate change science and whether or not they accept climate change from 167 participants in survey #2. (SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, and CC = Climate Change)

responses: "yes," "no," and "not sure." To gain feedback on this issue and ask how to best re-word the question in Survey #2, participants were offered an opportunity to comment on their response. Most participants (85.51%) indicated "yes" to this direct question. No distinction was made in the direct question between human-caused climate change and naturally occurring climate change, and most of the comments provided indicated a need to make a distinction between human-caused climate change and naturally occurring climate change.

This was addressed in another section of Survey #1 where participants were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with the following three statements:

- "I accept that climate change is happening."
- "I deny that climate change is happening."
- "I accept that human activities are causing at least part of climate change."

A strong majority (87.69%) of participants in Survey #1 indicated they either "Agree" (40.00%) or "Strongly Agree" (47.69%) with the last statement listed above. This is reassuring because if people accept that humans are causing climate change at least to some extent, they must also accept that we can take actions to reduce it.

Interestingly, participants in Survey #1 were more likely to "Strongly Disagree" that they "denied" climate change (65.63%) than they were to "Strongly Agree" that they "accepted" it (58.46%). Also the number of "N/A" responses was higher for the statement with "deny" than the statement without. Conference participants speculated that perhaps the word "deny" carried emotional weight to it because of its use in the media to degrade those who do not accept climate change, so that statement was reworded without using the word "deny" in Survey #2, and again respondents were given an option to "Neither" agree or disagree with any of the following statements:

- "I accept that climate change is happening."
- "I do not accept that climate change is happening."
- "I accept that human activities are causing at least part of climate change."

With the re-wording finalized, the direct question ("Do you accept climate change is happening?") was removed from Survey #2.

Like in Survey #1, most participants (85.63%) indicated they "Agree" (35.93%) or "Strongly Agree" (49.70%) with the statement "I accept climate change is happening." Again, participants were more likely to "Strongly Agree" that they accept climate change (49.70%) than they were to "Strongly

Disagree" that they "do not accept" climate change (46.70%). However, the difference was not as pronounced in Survey #2, and there was a smaller percentage of "N/A" responses to any of the statements. Again, because of the addition of the "Neither" response, it's difficult to know precisely how the wording affected responses.

Even though scientists are in consensus that human actions are at least partially responsible for climate change, this consensus clearly has not filtered down into the general public. Time and events such as Pope Francis's encyclical in June of 2015 will likely help overcome this disparity between climate science and environmental perceptions. Conducting the survey again in approximately five years may demonstrate the impacts of such events.

Older Generations Were Blamed More Moderately than Younger Generations

In both surveys, perceptions of older generations were more moderate than of younger generations. Attitudes were more negative toward younger generations when asked whether or not younger generations appreciated all they have (74.27%) than they were toward older generations when asked whether or not older generations caused the problems (44.31%). Because of the age breakdown, this means many younger participants see their own generation negatively. Interestingly, the addition of a "Neither" response in Survey #2 led to a noticeable decrease in the number of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" responses to both statements, but the levels of agreement remained very similar. This would imply that many respondents in Survey #1 responded with "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" when in fact their response was less certain.

A Third of Participants Felt There Is a Level of Exaggeration about Environmental Issues

Two statements in Survey #1 were meant to assess whether or not students perceive exaggeration in the messages of the environmental movement about our current situation. These statements were based on casual conversations I've had with students in the past. Many participants in Survey #1 (61.54%) did not believe the environmental movement is exaggerating our current situation. However, it is important to note that over a quarter of the participants in Survey #1 (27.69%) agreed that there is exaggeration.

Interestingly, a strong number of participants in Survey #1 (81.54%) disagreed with the statement that there is plenty of oil and no need to switch to renewables. None indicated "Strongly Agree," and very few participants (7.69%) indicated "Agree" to the statement. These results would indicate

some level of consensus among participants that there is a need to switch from oil to renewable sources of energy.

These two statements were kept in Survey #2, and a third statement was added: "I believe the environment is getting cleaner." In Survey #2, the statement "Proponents of the environmental movement exaggerate how bad everything is" elicited "Neither" (30.54%), "Disagree" (31.14%), and "Strongly Disagree" (16.77%) as the top responses. The number of participants who indicated "Strongly Agree" (2.99%) and "Agree" (12.57%) to the statement was fewer than in Survey #1, but 15.56% still indicates a surprisingly large number of students who believe environmental problems are exaggerated. The addition of a "Neither" option in Survey #2 pulled responses from both inclinations. This would suggest that about a third of college students are unsure whether or not the issues are exaggerated. The newly added statement, "I believe the environment is getting cleaner," drew a very similar variety of responses. In the end, these results indicate that only about half of college students believe environmental problems are as bad as the environmental movement suggests, a third are unsure, and 15.56% believe environmental problems are exaggerated to some extent.

It is possible that many in this upcoming generation are traumatized by the environmental issues we face. This issue is well known. In fact, in recent decades, a new branch of psychology has emerged: ecopsychology. This new branch explores the psychological relationship between humans and the natural world. The most current generation of college students have been raised with the idea of an environmental holocaust in their future. There is a very real possibility that the participants who are unsure or convinced environmental problems are exaggerated (~50%) are simply unable or unwilling to accept that there are environmental problems. This is a reason to focus on solutions and what is within their power to control. We cannot only focus on what is out of their control. Although the results of the surveys do not point clearly to this conclusion, it is still a very real possibility and one that should be explored if the survey is repeated in the future.

Once again, there was a strong majority in Survey #2 indicating either "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" to the statement that there is plenty of oil and no need to switch to renewable energy. Very few students (2.40%) agreed with that statement, and none indicated "Strongly Agree." It would seem there is some level of consensus among participants on the need to switch to renewable energy sources.

Trust in the Scientific Community Was Strong but Not Absolute

A question was added to Survey #2 to assess the confidence students have in the scientific community. As noted earlier, 10.08% of the Survey #2 participants

indicated that they did not understand the science behind climate change but accepted it anyway. This would indicate a trust in the scientific community on the part of those participants, or at least a trust in those participants' sources of science information. Overall, nearly two-thirds of the participants (64.07%) indicated they trusted the scientific community: 18.56% indicated "Strongly Agree," and 45.51% indicated "Agree." However, 22.16% indicated "Neither," 10.18% indicated "Disagree," 2.39% indicated "Strongly Disagree," and 1.20% indicated "N/A." All those not in agreement, therefore indicating some lack of trust, made up over a third (35.33%) of the participants in Survey #2.

Daniel Willingham (2011) suggests in the article "Trust Me, I'm a Scientist: Why So Many People Choose Not to Believe What Scientists Say" that unconscious emotions play as much a role as logic in whether or not a person believes scientists. He states, "people hold beliefs to protect important values," and "people also hold beliefs that are rooted in their emotions." In the article, he also refers to a National Science Foundation survey done in 2008 that suggested some people do trust scientists in general, but do not listen to them if what scientists have to say counters their emotions and values. Fear and hopelessness could be leading to such a phenomenon in some college students who have grown up with apocalyptic descriptions of the earth in the future. The possibility of these unconscious emotions should be taken into account when presenting content related to environmental issues, and appropriate sensitivity is important to address the possible emotional needs of the students whose trust in science is unsound on the topic of environmental issues.

Attitude Statements Reflected Positive Overall Perceptions of Scientists

Based on a discussion at the One Planet—One Humanity research-planning conference in May 2014, another question was added to survey #2 asking participants to indicate which, from a group of statements, best reflected their attitudes toward scientists. These survey statements were generated from a wide variety of Internet articles related to climate change. The list was presented in a random order for each participant. Also, participants were allowed to choose as many statements as applied, so the percentages listed below add up to more than 100%.

- "Scientists are an important element of society, and their work should determine governmental policies." (52.10%—87 responses)
- "Scientists don't agree on whether or not climate change is happening nor whether or not it's caused by human activities." (8.98%—15 responses)
- "Scientists have been wrong about so many things in the past, I don't trust they know what they're doing." (5.39%—9 responses)

- "Scientists are very close-minded individuals who think they know everything." (6.59%—11 responses)
- "Scientists are very educated people who work to explain everything we see in nature with evidence." (68.26%—114 responses)
- "Scientists have investments in renewable energy technology, so they invented the idea of climate change." (4.79%—8 responses)
- "Scientists generally agree that climate change is happening and is caused in part by human activities." (68.86%—115 responses)
- "Please feel free to write your own statement." (9.58%—16 responses)

Most participants overwhelmingly chose the three statements reflecting positive attitudes about scientists over the other statements. The two most common statements communicated that scientists generally agree that climate change is happening (68.86%) and that scientists were highly educated people who attempt to explain everything we see in nature with evidence (68.26%). The next most common statement communicated that scientists are important to society and that their work should determine government policy (52.10%). The other three statements reflected negative attitudes about scientists not being in agreement about climate change (8.98%), being close-minded (6.59%), and having investments in renewable energy technologies (4.79%). These results corroborate the finding discussed earlier: nearly two-thirds of the participants (64.07%) indicated they trusted the scientific community.

Personally, I was shocked to discover at the One Planet—One Humanity research-planning conference that many people do not trust scientists. I have always trusted scientists and the scientific method for as long as I can remember. However, the discussion about the issue included the idea that many people do not trust scientists because they were "wrong" about smoking and so many other things. Of course, those of us at the conference all knew that science wasn't wrong so much as still exploring the question. Because it takes more than one research experiment to answer most complicated questions, it takes time to get an answer. Statements made while information is still being gathered are bound to occasionally be different from the final answer. This phenomenon would indicate a need to more thoroughly teach the scientific method and its role in the bigger picture of the scientific process. As mentioned above, this process should be mentioned at least briefly as often as possible to ensure college graduate have a full understanding.

The Personalized Statements Communicated a Variety of Ideas Related to Science

Some statements implied that some scientists are trustworthy and some are not. This is true because in the end, scientists are humans, and humans are fallible.

- Not to generalize ALL scientists...
- These are pretty broad statements that do not actually have any weight. We need to know more about the types of scientists and what their studies are.

Some statements focused on the need to take other factors into account along with scientific research when determining government policy. This may indicate that some mistrust comes from the notion that science and only science is being used to determine policy, but this is not the case for better or worse.

- Scientists are an important element of society, and their work should be included in the decision-making process of governmental policies.
- While scientists are a very important element of society, their work alone cannot determine government policy. All knowledge and logic must be brought to perspective with sound morality. Scientists serve as observers of the world, who through data gathering can form conclusions that aid us in understanding the world and help humanity to live.

Some statements applauded the efforts of scientists:

- I agree that scientists are an important element of our society in helping us to determine our opinions and establish facts based on their research.
- Environmental scientists for the most part agree climate change is occurring and human activities have [not] completely caused, but have contributed to climate change. The climate goes through fluctuations based on naturally occurring events on earth which is why it can't completely be blamed on human activities. Scientists do realize the [issues] occurring in the world and are working for solutions to the issues. Some of these are how will we feed the rapidly growing population in the future, looking into how to achieve the same thing with fewer inputs, alternative fuels, renewable fuels, etc. The category of scientists and the professions they cover is very vast. Many of them see the issues at hand and are looking for solutions.

Some statements called attention to the fact that scientists are humans capable of error and bias. This is true, but a fully trained scientist is aware of strategies to avoid bias and error.

- Scientists are well educated and are capable of skewing data to fit their own hypotheses.
- We need to understand and respect science, but we need to be careful that it not becoming a religion. Science doesn't make something true—it only

verifies what is or is not true. And just because science gives us abilities we didn't have before doesn't mean we should use them (e.g., GMO foods).

- Science and the world are evolving. What is true today may not be true tomorrow. Science changes with ongoing discoveries.
- Scientists are people and do their best to make the world make sense and to discover information and reasons that help us organize our experiences.
- Scientists are human, but are making a best effort at finding the truth. This involves fine tuning the response on occasion. Rather than evidence that they are lying or incompetent, it is evidence that the system is working.

Some statements criticized the scientific endeavor in general. These statements were very general without providing specific examples.

- Scientists find ways to prove their theories, regardless of the legitimacy of their findings. The issue is they begin with a result they are driven to, then work backward to prove the result. This is manipulative.
- I feel to[o] many politicians have their hands in the pockets of scientists, making the scientists more greedy.

Some statements focused on the direction of science. Unfortunately, politics sometimes push science in a direction that may not be the most needed.

- The truth is out there; we just haven't figured it all out.
- Renewable Energy should be a HUGE focus of scientific efforts.
- [S]cientists help validate the changes of our surroundings as well as improve our way of life by research, innovations and testing accurate means of prevention and control.

Sources of Information about Environmental Issues Varied Widely

One comment in Survey #1 about the direct question "Do you accept that climate change is happening?" revealed the need to address sources of information. This comment questioned whether they were thinking of the same scientists as the survey designer. For this reason, a question was added to Survey #2 to determine where participants get their information regarding environmental issues. Participants could check as many as applied, and they were asked to indicate their primary source(s).

The results were widely varied. Approximately three-quarters of the participants (75.45%) gained information from college courses they have taken, and this was the most popular source of information. The remaining sources, in descending order, were websites (59.88%), newspapers (55.09%), television news (50.90%), family and friends (44.31%), social media (42.51%),

peer-reviewed journal articles (38.92%), radio or podcasts (31.74%), popular magazines (29.94%), and finally, political speeches (16.77%).

It's reassuring that the most popular response was college courses because of all the sources listed, they are the most reliable. We must trust that any US college course would exclusively use reliable sources of information in terms of textbooks and other materials. Websites and newspapers, however, require some assessment on the part of the user to determine reliability. Many people, particularly younger students, do not know how to correctly assess the reliability of sources. The courses I teach inherently require inclusion of such instruction. However, perhaps source reliability should be covered, even if only briefly, every time college students are required to do any academic writing, so they have this instruction more than just in their freshman year. It would also be helpful if more instructors have source requirements included in the rubric (i.e., requiring peer-reviewed journal articles.) It may be frustrating to some instructors to seemingly have to go back to basics in this way. They should be able to assume that upperclassmen understand this concept, but it's important to remember that the generations of incoming students have grown up with a deluge of information at their fingertips on the Internet. They are the first generations to do so, and a bit more instruction on that front may be necessary.

Emotional Responses to Images Correlated with Level of Confidence in Scientific Understanding

In both surveys, images were provided, and participants were asked to provide their emotional response. Overall, images reflecting less complicated environmental issues elicited clearer emotional responses. In the first survey, two images were provided. One showed a human hand gently cradling or holding an "earth." The "earth" was flaming, and the background was stark black. Participants were asked to indicate all the emotional responses they felt after viewing the image. The strongest responses were "Sad" (43.08%) and "Fearful" (32.31%). Comments provided in response to the "flaming earth" image indicated that the image was confusing and difficult to respond to. This, combined with a lack of permissions to use the image, resulted in its removal from Survey #2.

The second image used in Survey #1 depicted a row of solar panels in front of a row of wind turbines. The entire image included only cool blues, saturated green, and white. Participants were asked to indicate all the emotional responses they felt after viewing the image. The most common responses by far were "Happy" (71.88%) and "Calm" (59.38%). Comments provided in response to the solar panels/wind turbines image strongly mirrored the emotions indicated. Unfortunately, a lack of permissions led to its removal from Survey #2.

In Survey #2, three new images were presented, and participants were asked to give their emotional response. Permissions were resolved before they were included in Survey #2. The new images chosen were more purposeful in terms of attempting to gain specific insight into perceptions by being more direct in the message they were attempting to convey. In addition, the new images were chosen with the hope of testing participants' levels of understanding about specific environmental issues. In Survey #1, the images were often perceived as confusing or eliciting responses completely unrelated to environmental issues. Therefore, a response of "unsure of the idea represented by the image" was offered as an option on Survey #2.

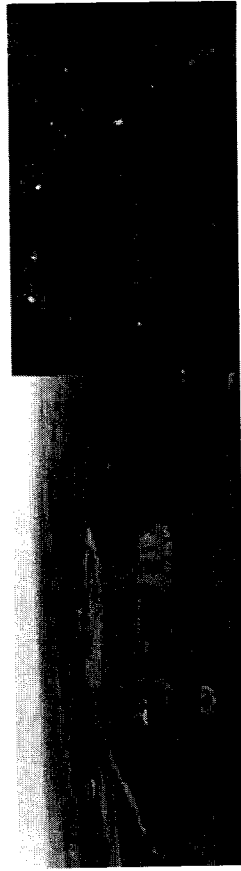


Figure 16.1 Photo Credit: Benedictine University Archives (left) Google Earth (right).

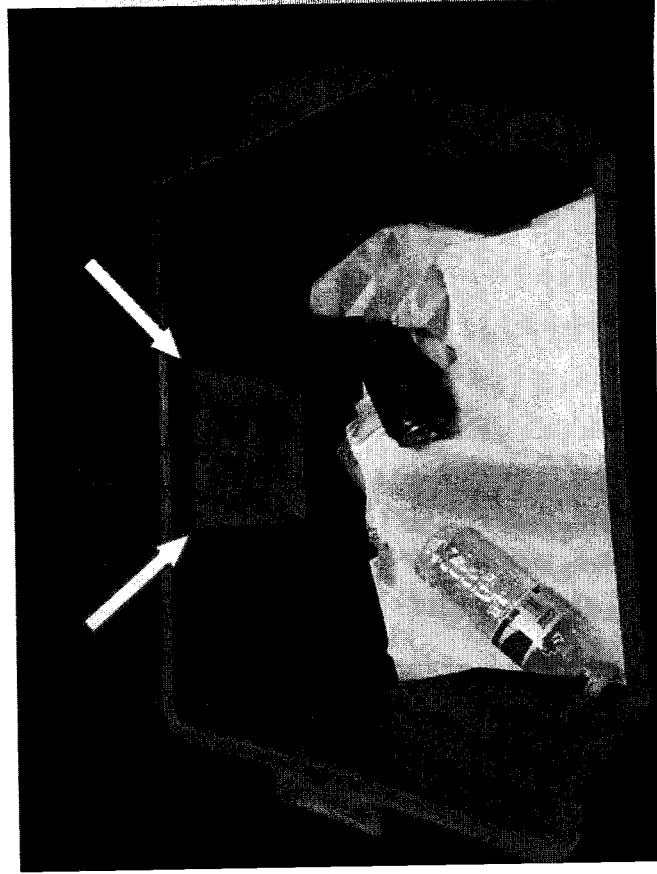


Figure 16.2 Photo Credit: Anne Marie Smith.

The first image in Survey #2 was actually a pair of images shown side by side (See Figure 16.1). On the left was an image of Benedictine University's campus in 1971 showing open space to the horizon; on the right was an essentially current GoogleEarth® image showing the same area with houses for miles around. The most common emotional response was "Neutral" (43.71%) with "Sad" (24.55%) as the next closest response. The remaining choices were relatively similar in number. Many of the comments provided pointed out the inevitability of development and the benefits of development including the provision of housing for a growing population. It seems very likely that the image elicited a wide variety of responses in most individuals, so they chose "Neutral" because the positive and negative responses balanced themselves out. Of the three images in Survey #2, this first image elicited the highest response of "Unsure of the idea represented by the image." This may reflect a lack of awareness about urban sprawl or a low level of computer literacy when trying to comprehend the GoogleEarth® portion of the image despite inclusion of a short paragraph interpreting the images with unbiased language.

The second image in Survey #2 was of a recycling bin for "paper only" with an aluminum can in it (See Figure 16.2). Bright yellow arrows were used to highlight the "paper only" sign on the bin. Nearly three-quarters of the participants (71.86%) indicated an emotional response of "Annoyed." The next most common responses were "Frustrated" (32.34%), "Angry" (17.36%), "Sad" (14.37%), and "Neutral" (13.77%). The remaining responses were chosen by less than 9% of the participants in Survey #2. Interestingly, this image elicited the most clear overall response of the three images in Survey #2. Perhaps this is because participants were most aware of recycling issues and most confident of the appropriateness of their emotional responses.

The third image in Survey #2 was a meme with a boy outside on a snowy day with the wording "It's so cold here in Chicago! How can climate change be real?" (See Figure 16.3). This meme was purposely generated to test participants' level of understanding in terms of the science behind climate change and their perceptions of the phenomenon. The most common emotional response was "Annoyed" (48.50%). The next closest responses were "Frustrated" (27.54%), "Neutral" (20.96%), "Sad" (14.97%), and "Angry" (13.77%). The remaining responses were chosen by less than 9% of the participants. Although these responses were not as clear as the second image, they reflected more clarity than the first image.

Lessons Learned

1. As mentioned, the word "deny" may have surprising emotional weight. I plan to discuss this possibility with future classes to gain insight into



Figure 16.3 Photo Credit: Mike Shimer © Mike Shimer Photography.

Table 16.4 Emotional Responses to Images

	Number of responses to Figure 16.1	Number of responses to Figure 16.2	Number of responses to Figure 16.3
Angry	6.59% (11)	17.36% (29)	13.77% (23)
Annoyed	13.77% (23)	71.86% (120)	48.5% (81)
Calm	11.38% (19)	3.59% (6)	2.99% (5)
Confused	5.39% (9)	7.78% (13)	7.78% (13)
Fearful	11.98% (20)	3.59% (6)	7.78% (13)
Frustrated	12.57% (21)	32.33% (54)	27.54% (46)
Guilty	8.38% (14)	3.59% (6)	0
Happy	2.39% (4)	1.80% (3)	1.20% (2)
Neutral	43.71% (73)	13.77% (23)	20.96% (35)
Offended	2.39% (4)	8.98% (15)	8.98% (15)
Proud	3.59% (6)	0	0
Sad	24.55% (41)	14.37% (24)	14.97% (25)
Unsure of idea represented	15.57% (26)	1.80% (3)	5.39% (9)
Other	8.38% (14)	3.59% (6)	7.19% (12)

Notes: Emotional responses to each of the three images by 167 participants of survey #2. (Participants were allowed to choose as many responses as applied, so percentages exceed 100% per image.)

how college students view the world in the context of climate change. Normally, I do not debate climate change in my classes because it is no longer debatable. The science is in, and climatologists agree it is happening. However, I plan to change this policy and purposefully discuss the “deniers” movement and its impact on their environmental perceptions.

2. Related to the “deniers” movement is the result from the surveys that approximately half of the participants felt environmental issues are exaggerated and that the environment is getting cleaner. Steps will be taken if the survey is repeated to attempt to determine whether or not students are traumatized by growing up with the possibility of an environmental holocaust or if they’re getting their information from unreliable sources of information.
3. The survey indicated strong trust in science in approximately two-thirds of the participants. This is reassuring because good environmental policy should be based as much in good science as in good economics. However, blind trust is worrisome. If students can gain confidence in their abilities to assess sources, they in turn may be likely to gain confidence in their ability to actually understand science and the scientific process. I plan to conduct more class discussions based on real-life examples of the scientific process. I plan to discuss a series of peer-reviewed journal articles concentrating on a single question and demonstrate how the knowledge changed and grew over time. I believe this will increase college students’ confidence levels in understanding science. However it happens, gaining confidence in understanding the science, at least the basics, is important for perceptions, which in turn impact environmental policy.
4. I will continue to focus on solutions and what is within my students’ control when discussing environmental issues. I have received positive feedback with this approach.

Goals If Survey Conducted Again in the Future

- Determine if the relationship between major courses of study and environmental perceptions change or remain the same.
- Attempt to determine if unconscious emotions (trauma) are obstructing participants’ ability to trust scientists in terms of environmental issues.
- Test participants’ abilities to determine reliability of sources of information.
- Determine the impact of time and world events on perceptions. (Perhaps ask when and what event led them to accept climate change.)
- Determine the impact of a focus on solutions when discussing environmental issues.

The impact of images is important to assess and discuss. As this survey indicates, this is particularly true for young people who have been raised with the climate-change demon in their lives from the start. The conflicting messages have generated some distrust in scientists and skepticism about whether or not climate change is actually happening. There are likely psychological impacts for this and other groups that must be acknowledged and addressed when information about climate change is presented. That is, it is not only important for information to be correct; it is vital that those who present the

information also consider the psychological and emotional welfare of those who consume the information.

NOTE

1. The full surveys can be found at "<http://www.annemariesmith.net/EnvironmentalPerceptions.html>" www.annemariesmith.net/EnvironmentalPerceptions.html

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Chapter 17

Good Company?

The Non-Ephemeral Catalog as Intervention

Elizabeth Kubek

The contemporary consumer catalog seems the antithesis of everything "green," everything to which the *One Planet, One Humanity* book is dedicated. Even those who produce them are critical of the genre: "If you want a throw-away magazine, *Whole Earth [Catalog]* is not for you. We publish a magazine that readers have hoarded, prowled inside of, stored in garages and cellars" (Warshall 1997). "Have you looked at the junk in one of those airline mail-order catalogs recently? Does the world really need a special tool for cutting bananas?" (Chouinard 2013, 89). The print catalog is the ultimate ephemeral object, cramming landfills with glossy visual cues to desire and consume. On the web, the boundaries between commercial catalogs and social media have grown disturbingly blurred, with shopping sites soliciting user reviews and sponsored "individual" blogs incorporating links to retail sites. And in both forms the catalog has become so visibly the advocate of conspicuous consumption that entire online memes are dedicated to mocking its excesses; the banana slicer that Chouinard targets is in fact the object of a well-known internet meme. Yet as the manufacturer of the banana slicer tweeted, "Well, these hysterical reviews [on Amazon] certainly are creating more sales" (*Know Your Meme*). On the internet, the dictum that there is no bad publicity is a first principle, and the interpretation of all "hits" and "mentions" as endorsements is written into the source code and EULAs of many sites.

If consumer resistance is futile, at least in the form of social media gestures, is corporate resistance even imaginable? Contemporary discussions of corporate responsibility often start by referencing, or deploring, the enduring influence of the University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman's famous 1970 *New York Times* piece "The Social Responsibility of Business is to

- World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 174
 World Trade Center, 153.
 See also 9/11
 World Trade Organization (WTO), 42, 151
World War Z, 287
 World Wildlife Federation, 235
World Without Us. *See* Weisman, Alan
 Youtube, 76, 83, 94, 132
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Steve Macek is professor of communication at North Central College, where he teaches courses in media studies, urban and suburban studies, and liberal studies. His intellectual interests are eclectic and wide-ranging: film, news and journalism, media history, media reform activism, philosophy and social theory, urban history, contemporary American politics, and social movements. He is actively involved in AAUP (the American Association of University Professors) and in various movements for social justice. His book on media representations of American cities and the urban poor, *Urban*

Nightmares: The Media, the Right and the Moral Panic over the City, was published by University of Minnesota Press in May, 2006. He coedited the collection *Marxism and Communication Studies: The Point is to Change It* (Peter Lang, 2006). He is currently working on interrelated projects on Chicago media history, part of which was published as a book article, "A Moment of Danger: Critical Studies in U.S. Communication History Since World War II."

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Kit O'Toole is a Chicago-based freelance writer and blogger who has written about rock, jazz, and R&B for over 20 years. She is the author of Michael Jackson FAQ (Backbeat Books), and her work has appeared in such print publications as *Showcase Chicago* and *Goldmine*. She is a longtime contributing editor for *Beatlefan* magazine. As a blogger, O'Toole writes for *Something Else Reviews*, *Blinded by Sound*, and *Cinema Sentries*, and previously served as a music editor for *Blogcritics*. She received her Ed.D. in Instructional Technology from Northern Illinois University.

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William Scarlato has been a professor of fine arts at Benedictine University for twenty-five years. He has taught art for a total of thirty-five years in colleges and universities in the United States and West Sussex, England. He earned a B.F.A. degree in 1975 from Northern Arizona University with an emphasis in painting and an M.F.A. degree in 1979 from Yale University with a concentration in printmaking.

Anne Marie Smith has worked in various elements of the environmental education field. While earning her graduate degree and after, she worked for nonprofit organizations including Argonne National Laboratory, Chicago Wilderness, The Conservation Foundation, and the Illinois State Board of Education managing K-12 environmental education programs at the state and multi-county levels in Illinois. Most recently, Ms. Smith has been working in undergraduate education. Beginning in 2007, she taught as an Adjunct Faculty Member for Benedictine University, which led to her current position as Writing Learning Specialist. She integrates environmental themes into freshman writing courses and continues to build her professional role as a bridge between the sciences and the humanities. In her free time, she volunteers at Willowbrook Wildlife Center, a wildlife hospital run by the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County.

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This is a collection about the media, the environment, and the whole of humanity at the brink of extinction. As the demands of overpopulation and an unsustainable consumer economy dry up existing natural resources and destroy vital ecosystems that we need to survive, the corporate-controlled media saturate worldwide audiences with a barrage of hypnotic images and narratives to stimulate over-consumption and to distract us from the consequences of rampant consumerism, while remaining silent about the systematic destruction of the environment and our future.

Academicians from the across the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities engage in an interdisciplinary discussion informed by a vision of an interconnected humanity and focused on the role of the media in forging public discourse.

Contributors to the collection argue that today's media are failing humanity. Rather than providing pictures of reality on which the world's citizens can act, the corporate-controlled media are widely used as instruments of commercial and political propaganda, creating an immense web of images and narratives that their creators know to be untrue—fabrications designed to sell, manipulate, and in a sense, enslave worldwide audiences.

At the core of the discussion in this book is a utopian vision of one unified humanity—billions of people whose destinies and dreams are imbricated and interdependent, and who share the same world, the same habitats. It is a vision of a world that cherishes diversity but is also united—a world where our differences are no longer a cause for conflict and where separate countries or separate ethnic or religious communities no longer have to compete or wage war to exploit available resources. As extensions of humans, the media can be instruments of salvation instead of destruction, liberation instead of oppression. But first, we must recognize the challenges we face.

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