UEP 101
Environment and Society
Fall 2012
Professor Víctor M. Polanco
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Students are expected to have read and understood the contents of this syllabus.

Section 1: Tuesday/Thursday 10:05-11:30 am
Room: Rangeview 242
Office hours: T/Th 3:30–4:30 pm or by appointment
Phone: 323.259.2991
Office: UEPI 204

Section 2: Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-2:55 pm
Room: Rangeview 206
Office hours: T/Th 3:35–4:30 pm or by appointment
Phone: 323.259.2991
Office: UEPI 204

Course Background and Objectives
Environment and Society is an introductory course on the urban environment. It is designed for students with an interest in urban and environmental issues who might want to pursue further studies in Urban and Environmental Policy as well as for those interested in the topic even though they may be pursuing another major.

The class will examine a broad range of urban and environmental issues. Readings, discussions, presentations, class exercises and writing assignments will allow students to engage with the course material from a variety of perspectives and should provide a broad framework for linking the environment and society. The course will be organized around six broad topic areas: a) Environmental Footprints – Defining the Problem, Identifying Agencies for Change; b) the Global Environment – Climate Change, Global Trade, and China and the Environment; c) Pollution and Waste – the Toxic Environment; d) The Built Environment – Transportation, Planning, and Streets; e) Nature in the City; f) Food and the Environment. The class will include reading and writing assignments, seminar discussions, presentations, films, and speakers. Students will select a specific topical area by the second week of the semester to work with a group that will help organize the seminar and presentation sessions regarding the readings in that topical area. Students will also attend at least two events outside of class (see below).

Through the course, students will:
• critically examine a broad range of contemporary urban and environmental issues and policy debates.
• develop analytic skills to make connections between the urban environment and economic development, neighborhood and regional planning, community health, labor and workforce development, organizing and advocacy, and public policy.
• gain insight about the nature of urban and environmental problems and their possible solutions.
• gain understanding of the urban and environmental conditions and policy debates in Los Angeles by talking with activists, planners and policy makers in the classroom and also in the field.
• Develop understanding regarding how urban and environmental issues in Los Angeles connect to those issues at the national and global level.
Course Structure
The six topic areas for the class encompass different ways to understand and frame urban and environmental issues. They include:

INTRODUCTION: ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINTS AND AGENCIES OF CHANGE. How individual, institutional, and political and economic factors contribute to community and environmental impacts and how to identify and evaluate different agencies for change.

THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT. How do our development, industrial and lifestyle practices relate to global environmental impacts, including climate change? How do global trade and freight traffic impact the environment? And what role does China play as an increasing industrial/manufacturing hub and the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

THE TOXIC ENVIRONMENT. Understanding the sources and impacts of pollution; air quality concerns; pollution prevention versus pollution control versus market strategies; precautionary principles; and environmental justice.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT. How does transportation affect land use and choices about the built environment? What is the connection between sprawl and the environment? How have cars and freeways become part of our culture and ways of viewing the world? What alternative transportation strategies are available, even in (or especially in) a place like Los Angeles?

NATURE IN THE CITY. How have we controlled nature to build cities? Can cities become more sustainable? More livable? More ecological? Is the concept “Nature in the City” an oxymoron?

FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT. Where does our food come from? How is it manufactured? Where is it bought, and how is it consumed? What alternative food strategies are available?

The course will also address current and emerging urban and environmental controversies and policy debates by drawing in guest speakers who are actively involved in urban and environmental problem solving and policymaking as well as viewing films and documentaries that inform those topics.

Requirements and Grading
Students are required to attend class and complete all assignments and class exercises, including the two out of class events. Grades will be based on the following:

1. PARTICIPATION (40% of grade)

Participation and active engagement in class discussions, exercises, assignments, and out-of-class events are a critical component of the course.

A. Reading Responses (15% of grade)
You are responsible for completing all readings listed in the schedule below, and submitting a written reading response by midnight the night before every class. Readings listed for each class on the schedule below are to be done before that class (i.e. the readings listed for Sep 4 are the readings we will discuss in that class). Reading responses are meant to prepare you for the class discussions, therefore, they must be submitted on time to receive credit. They are graded 0,1,2. Students are expected to cite at least 2 readings in your response. Throughout the course, we will use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) author-date system for citations (See “CITATION” below).

Reading responses are NOT a summary of the readings nor a commentary about whether or not you liked the reading, but rather a critique, assessment, opinion, protest about the authors’ key arguments, or any combination of these. They may also highlight issues that are unclear to you or that you wish to discuss further in class. Reading responses should be no more than 200-250 words and must be posted to the appropriate forum (by date) on the class Moodle website (deadlines listed below) – make sure you post your response to the correct section – Section 1 (10:05 – 11:30am) or Section 2 (1:30 - 2:55 pm). Students should also read the postings by other students to better facilitate a seminar-type discussion format.

**B. Urban and Environmental Issues in the News (5% of grade)**
Each week, students should post the link to a news or journal article with an urban and environmental focus related to one or more of the topical areas that will be discussed in class or from speaker presentations. These should also be posted on the class moodle website on alternate times with the reading memos (deadlines also posted below). Similar to the reading memos, the news postings can help guide the class discussion. They are also graded 0,1,2. Sources for news stories could include newspapers (e.g., LA Times, NY Times, Wall Street Journal), magazines (e.g., The Nation, Mother Jones, The Economist), journals (e.g., Planning, American Journal of Public Health, Environment), or blog posts (e.g., Grist ([www.grist.org](http://www.grist.org)), Common Dreams ([www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)), AlterNet ([www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org)), etc. These are all examples that provide potential sites for news on urban and environmental issues, policies, and social movements. Post on Moodle by 11:55 pm on the following dates:
  - Sep 12, Sept 19, Oct 1, Oct 8, Oct 17, Oct 24, Oct 31, Nov 7, Nov 14, Nov 26

**C. Attendance & Class Participation (15% of grade)**
Class attendance and active participation in class is essential to the class. Let me know if you’re unable to attend class; if you don’t, I’ll assume you just failed to come without a particular reason for doing so.

**D. Out-of-Class Events (5% of grade)**
Students are required to attend at least 2 out-of-class events (see below for possible events to select from). Students should also post an event memo (no more than 200 words) afterwards on moodle to share your observations with the class about the event.
POSSIBLE EVENTS
1. LA River Clean Up (September 15)—Sponsored by Heal the Bay
   http://www.healthebay.org/ccd2012
2. CicLAvia (October 7)— http://www.ciclavia.org/
3. Toxics Tour (October 27)—Sponsored by Communities for a Better Environment
   http://www.cbecal.org/get-involved/toxic-tours/
4. LA River Tour (TBA)
5. Attend an LA City Council Meeting—Downtown
6. Attend a conference, lecture, protest, or other instructor-approved event outside of Oxy

2. ASSIGNMENTS (25% of grade)

Assignments will consist of 3 essays and 1 group presentation.

A. Short Essays (15% of grade)
Students will write three formal essays, one on your environmental footprint and two on the different topic areas covered in class. The grading for the essays will be based on your ability to state a clear and compelling argument, provide some evidence to back up this/these claim(s), organize your paper logically, cite appropriate references, and provide a clear written presentation (typed, title, double-spaced, 12-pt font, page numbers, name and date on the first page, etc). The essays are expected to be 3 to 4 pages (approximately 800-1000 words). The use of graphic evidence (photos, tables, maps, charts, etc) to strengthen your points is also encouraged (not included in 3-4 page limit).

Essay #1: Environmental Footprint Commentary (required for all students)

For this essay, calculate your own environmental footprint using:

Your essay should focus on the following:

- What are the implications regarding the number of “earths” it would take to sustain everyone at your lifestyle?
- How do you think you could reduce your environmental footprint?
- What would your environmental footprint be if you made all the same choices but lived elsewhere (say in Africa)?
- What do you see as the major environmental problems facing the planet? In your home community?
- How does your ecological footprint relate to those problems and their solutions?

For this exercise and for subsequent class discussions be prepared to discuss and evaluate the importance of the following: reducing your own environmental footprint; changing consumer behavior; changing institutions; bringing about policy change to reduce footprints; increasing the activism to better advocate for change; using market signals
such as raising taxes; and/or creating incentives or disincentives to influence practices.

The Ecological Footprint essay is due (uploaded to Moodle) by 11:55 pm on Mon Sep 3 and hard copy in class on Tue Sep 4.

Essays #2 and #3: Short Essays for Topic Areas (choose 2)

Note: you will NOT write an essay on the topic that you are presenting on – see group presentation below – so students will have a choice of writing about 2 of the other 4 topics.

The short essays are meant to be a further exploration of one of the topics or debates within each topic area. You are free to choose any topic within each topic area, therefore there is no “prompt” for these two essays. Students are expected to reference at least two of the class readings within their topic area, but are encouraged to do additional research on their topic.

Due dates for the topic area essays are as follows:

- The Global Environment due by Sep 27 (hardcopy in class + Moodle)
- The Toxic Environment due by Oct 11 (hardcopy in class + Moodle)
- The Built Environment due by Oct 30 (hardcopy in class + Moodle)
- Nature in the City due by Nov 13 (hardcopy in class + Moodle)
- Food & Health due by Nov 29 (hardcopy in class + Moodle)

B. Group Presentations (10% of grade)
Groups of five to six students will be formed the second day of class. Each group will give a presentation (followed by class discussion that the group will facilitate) on one of the five topic areas. Each group is required to meet with the professor prior to the presentation day to discuss the topic and the presentation. Groups are encouraged to draw on the readings, speakers and reading, and news memos. In-class presentations for each of the 5 topic areas will be on the following dates:

- The Global Environment Sep 25
- The Toxic Environment Oct 9
- The Built Environment Oct 25
- Nature in the City Nov 8
- Food and Environment Nov 27

3. RESEARCH PAPER (35% of grade)

Due by Friday, December 7 by 2:00 PM in the UEPI office—No late papers accepted
The research paper should be on a specific topic, issue, or question of your choice. The purpose of the research paper is to conduct research on a topic of your choosing that relates to one of the broad topic areas or a current environmental debate (upon approval
of the professor).

A. **Paper** (25% of grade)
Your papers should be between 10 -12 pages (without your citations and bibliography). Your paper should describe your topic and its relevance to the environment and society. In addition to a presentation and analysis of your issue, research papers can also present policy recommendations for the issue you have identified. You also have the option of undertaking an “action research paper” based on your participation in the research needs of a particular organization advocating around an urban and environmental issue that links to the class topics and discussions. For the research (either the traditional research paper or the action research paper), you can draw on and integrate concepts and discussions from the course as well as outside sources (e.g. books, journal articles, and relevant websites). Also include a bibliography that lists resources used for your paper and please use the Chicago Manual style for references.

When selecting a topic and research question, explicitly write out your topic, what question you hope to answer and why that question is important; complete the following 3 steps:

**STEP 1:** name your topic; be as specific as possible. Fill in the blank:
I am trying to learn about (working on, studying) __________.

**STEP 2:** add a question that specifies something you don't know/understand about your topic but want to. Fill in the blank: because I want to find out who/what/when/where/whether/ why/how __________,

**STEP 3:** state why the answer to your question is important. Fill in the blank: in order to help my reader understand how, why, or whether __________.

**Grading.** You will receive a letter grade based on the following:
- Completion of assignment
- Depth of analysis (rather than simply a description of facts and history)
- Critical thinking with clear arguments to support your assertions
- Integration of course lectures, discussions, readings, and films, where appropriate
- Overall organization and structure of the paper.
- Connection to the organization’s research agenda (for an action research paper)

B. **BENCHMARKS** (5% of grade)
You should begin work on your research paper early. To ensure you work on your paper throughout the term (and not leave it to the last minute, which invariably leads to a poor grade), we have set a series of benchmarks **DUE** in class (and uploaded to Moodle) on the following:

1. Identify topic and 2-3 possible questions: **Sep 13**
2. Narrow topic and complete 3 steps: **Sep 25**
3. Annotated bibliography: **Oct 4**
(4) Draft Outline: Oct 18
(5) Detailed Outline: Nov 6
(6) Draft Paper: Nov 15 (optional)

C. Individual Presentation (5% of grade)
In the final two sessions (Nov 29 and Dec 4), students will complete a 5x5 presentation – 5 minutes and up to 5 Powerpoint slides to explain the key argument of your paper.

Think of this as a précis (a condensed summary of the key pieces of your paper). You should discuss:

1. The issue you studying (i.e. your topic).
2. How you studied it (e.g. comparison of cases, interviews, etc).
4. A couple piece of evidence to back up your claim/argument.
5. Lessons learned or potential remedies.
   (note: these 5 things do not necessarily correspond to your 5 images)

Since you only have 5 minutes, it is essential that you rehearse your presentation – know exactly what you want to say. Having notes to remind yourself of key points is fine, but do not read your presentation. Use your 5 images wisely -- they should be primarily photos, graphs, charts, diagrams, etc rather than text (remember a picture is worth a thousand words!).

Your Powerpoint files are due (uploaded to Moodle) by 11:55 pm on Nov 28 (these will be compiled into a single Powerpoint file for each day).

For the Action Research paper option, you can select a group or organization with whom you would develop a relationship. The group would be able to help you identify a specific research and/or action-related objective that would be valuable for the group involved. We can work with you on how to identify a client group and how to best shape and complete such an assignment. Students conducting action research will also be required to present their findings and conclusions during the last class presentation sessions.

Key tasks and due dates:
- Identify research action option—Sep 13
- Identify client and research action objective—Sep 25
- Submit “work in progress memo” w/bibliography—October 18
- Submit draft “product”—November 15
- Present findings in class: Thursday Nov 29th and Tuesday December 4th
- Turn in 10-12 page write up of the goals, objectives, and results of the action research project, including a discussion of the partner or client group’s activities as well as referencing the readings and seminar discussions and events, where appropriate: Friday, December 7 at 2:00pm in the UEPI Office
Citation Format

For your reading responses, essays and research paper, we will use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) author-date system for citations. This is a standard format for social science writing and may be slightly different from other formats you have encountering, so please take the time to familiarize yourself with it. The CMS format involves 2 things:

(1) **Within-text reference:** within the body of the text, when making a reference to another author’s unique ideas or thoughts, you must give credit. In CMS author-date format, this is done by adding the author’s last name followed by the year of the publication in parenthesis at the end of the sentence. For example:

   Price claims that many people see Los Angeles as having no “nature” at all (Price 2005).

   If you quote directly (verbatim) from another author, you must put it in quotations and cite the page number(s) after the publication date. For example:

   As Price says, Los Angeles is “sort of the Death Star to American nature lovers.” (Price 2005, 222)

(2) **“Works Cited” or “References” list:** for each reference you make within the body of your text, you must provide the full citation in a ‘Works Cited’ or ‘References” list at the end of your reading response/essay/research paper. It should be arranged in alphabetical order by author last name. For example, for the Price reference above, the full citation would look like this (note the year of publication comes directly after the author’s name):


Below are a few websites that should provide guidance:

http://departments.oxy.edu/cae/writing/index.html
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html (author-date tab)
http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.php
Readings and Class Schedule

All readings are available on the class Moodle website – refer to the website for the syllabus as well as links to specific readings.

INTRODUCTION: ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT AND AGENCIES OF CHANGE
(Aug 30- Sep 11)

Th Aug 30 – Course Overview
[1] Review syllabus & student introductions
[3] Environmental Footprints Exercise and Group Presentation Information

Tu Sep 4 – Environmental Footprints Discussion
[2] Footprint Essays Discussion – Review each other’s essays, posted on Moodle

ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT ESSAYS TO BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM MON SEP 3.

Th Sep 6 – Green Consumerism & the Story of Stuff

Tu Sep 11 – Agencies of Change, Greening Oxy, and Urban and Environmental Agendas
[1] Guest Speaker—Intro to Greening Oxy initiatives

**TOPIC #1 – THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT: CLIMATE CHANGE, GLOBAL TRADE AND GOODS MOVEMENT, AND CHINA AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Sep 13-Sep 25)**

**URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #1, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM SEP 12**

**Th Sep 13 – Climate Change Politics**


*Class debate based on readings and news items: is climate change real or is it a hoax; Is human activity responsible? What strategies (if any) should be utilized to address greenhouse gas emissions?*

**BENCHMARK #1: IDENTIFY TOPIC & 2-3 QUESTIONS—DUE SEP 13**

**Action Research: Identify Research Action Options—DUE Sep 13**

**Tu Sep 18 – Global Trade and Goods Movement**

Possible Guest Speaker: Jesse Marquez, Coalition for a Safe Environment


URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #2, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM SEP 19

Th Sept 20 – China and the Environment
Possible Films: Manufactured Landscapes; China Blue


[4] Clean Air Network videos (Hong Kong-based advocacy group): a) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmH3xCpOSW8; and b) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0ebc1AQhWs; Optional: Film Documentaries: “Manufactured Landscapes” (available on reserve) and “Up the Yangtze” (available on Netflix)

Tu Sep 25 – The Global Environment: Strategies for change/Group Presentation


Group Presentation and Class Discussion: What are the most significant global environmental issues; what solutions are available? What are the challenges for bringing about change?
**ACTION RESEARCH:** ACTION RESEARCH OPTION SELECTED AND IDENTIFIED BY SEP 25

**BENCHMARK #2: NARROW TOPIC AND COMPLETE 3 STEPS—DUE SEP 25**

**GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT SHORT ESSAY DUE SEP 27**

**TOPIC #2 – THE TOXIC ENVIRONMENT: POLLUTION AND WASTES (Sep 27-Oct 9)**

**Th Feb 27 – Everyday Toxins & Pollutants**
Possible Guest Speaker: Bhavna Shamasunder, or Film Trade Secrets

[1] Look up chemicals listed on the label of some products you use everyday. Use the Chemical Index. [http://www.simplesteps.org/chemicals](http://www.simplesteps.org/chemicals)


**URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #3, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM OCT 1**

**Tu Oct 2 – Pollution Prevention, the Precautionary Principle, Environmental Justice, and the Clean Up-Green Up Campaign**
Possible Speakers (combined with UEP 204): EJ and the Clean Up-Green Up Campaign


**Th Oct 4 – Community Players/Toxic Tour or Community Assessment of Air Quality**
(details to be provided in class)


**BENCHMARK #3: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY—DUE OCT 4**

**URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/INK #4, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM OCT 8**

Tu Oct 9 – Alternatives & Group Presentation


Group Presentation and Class Discussion: How can we best reduce or eliminate the toxic products and toxic processes that are present in our lives and ubiquitous in our society? Are they a necessary evil of our urban and advanced industrial society? Are toxic issues overblown or are they far greater than what gets recognized and addressed?

**TOXIC ENVIRONMENT SHORT ESSAY DUE OCT 11**

**TOPIC #3 – THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: TRANSPORTATION, PLANNING AND STREETS (Oct 11-Oct 25)**

Th Oct 11 - Cars & Freeways


**TU OCT 16 FALL BREAK/NO CLASS**

**URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #5, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM OCT 17**

**Th Oct 18 – Cities and Suburbs: Transportation, Housing, and the Built Environment**


**BENCHMARK #4: DRAFT OUTLINE—DUE OCT 18**

**ACTION RESEARCH: SUBMIT WORK IN PROGRESS MEMO WITH BIBLIOGRAPHY—DUE OCT 18**

**Tu Oct 23 - Transportation Alternatives**

Possible Guest Speaker: CicLAvia rep.; Ron Milam; Christopher Hawthorne


**URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #6, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM OCT 24**

**Th Oct 25 – Students Take to the Streets (By Car, Rail, Bus, Bike, or by Foot) & Group Presentation**

[2] Students report on their transportation experience

Group Presentation: Is a Car Free (or Car Lite) Approach Feasible in Cities; in Suburbs; in Los Angeles? How would we design our cities differently?

BUILT ENVIRONMENT SHORT ESSAY DUE OCT 30

TOPIC #4 - NATURE IN THE CITY (Oct 30-Nov 8)

Tu Oct 30 - Urban Nature


URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #7, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55PM OCT 31

Th Nov 1 – Green Space, Open Space, Lawns, and Reconstructed Space

Speakers: Jessica Gudmundson and/or Stephanie Taylor, UEPI and Verde Coalition


Tu Nov 6 - LA River Tour or Speaker

**BENCHMARK #5: DETAILED OUTLINE—DUE NOV 6**

**URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #8, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM NOV 7**

**Th Nov 8 – Reinventing Nature in the City/Group Presentation**

**Group Presentation: Is Nature in the City an Oxymoron?**

**NATURE IN THE CITY SHORT ESSAY DUE NOV 13**

**TOPIC #5 - FOOD & HEALTH (Nov 13-Nov 27)**

**Tu Nov 13 - The Food System, and its Dominant Players**

**URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #9, POSTED ON MOODLE BY 11:55 PM NOV 14**

**Th Nov 15 – Food Politics**
Possible Guest Speaker or Film

**Benchmark #6: Full Draft (Optional)—Due Nov 15**

**Action Research: Submit Draft “Product”—Due Nov 15**

**Tu Nov 20 - Food Globalization**


**Th Nov 22 No class/Thanksgiving**

**Urban & Environmental News Item/Link #10, Posted on Moodle by 11:55 PM Nov 26**

**Tu Nov 27 - Food System Alternatives**

Speakers and/or Film: Truck Farm


http://www.good.is/post/creating-a-better-food-system-one-dinner-at-a-time/


Group Presentation: What ways should the food system be changed? Doesn’t the current food system in the U.S. work best, with cheap food, convenient/fast food, available all year round?

**Food & Health Short Essay Due Nov 29**

**Reports on Events and Research Paper Presentations November 29 and December 4**

**Research Paper Due Friday, December 7th 2:00 PM UEPI Office**
Course Policies and Support Services

Late Work
Students are expected to submit their work by the stated due dates. No late assignments will be accepted without prior approval, which will NOT be granted as last minute requests in person or by email. No exceptions.

Academic Integrity
Occidental College assumes that students and faculty accept and respect the principle of academic honesty. The policies on academic misconduct are outlined in the Student Handbook (http://www.oxy.edu/StudentHandbook.xml). Plagiarism is representing others work as your own. Students are expected to understand and abide by Oxy’s plagiarism policy (http://www.oxy.edu/x8000.xml).

Classroom Responsibilities
Teachers and students share the responsibility of learning and teaching. We see our responsibilities as creating the space and stimulating enthusiasm for learning, coming prepared to class, creating the goals and structure for a course, introducing concepts and ideas, and facilitating the sharing of knowledge amongst the students and between ourselves and the students. Students are responsible for attending and participating in class, completing assignments in a timely manner, and being prepared to discuss readings and material in class. Students are also responsible for engaging in respectful, open and thoughtful discussion with each other and with the professors.

Classroom Policies
There are five basic rules in this classroom:
1. Read all assigned material before class
2. Ask questions if you don’t understand
3. participate in the discussion if you have something to say
4. respect others, and
5. turn off your wireless devices.

Support Services
The college provides a set of resources to students to support them in learning. The Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) provides writing assistance to students to develop ideas, draft, and revise papers. See http://departments.oxy.edu/cae/.

If you have specific physical or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that we can meet your learning needs. The Center for Academic Excellence also provides services to assist students with physical or learning disabilities; these students need to contact Magen Todd, Learning Strategies & Disabilities Specialist, x2849, mtodd@oxy.edu in the Center for Academic Excellence (x2545).

The Emmons Health and Counseling Center provides support for issues of stress, medical and mental health. See http://www.oxy.edu/EmmonsHealthCenter.xml.
Excerpts from
“Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes”

The “Fatal Five”

1. **Reading the slides.** More respondents complained about this behavior than anything else – and by a wide margin. Many indignantly asked why a presenter would read slides aloud when audience members were entirely capable of reading them for themselves…“Watching someone read PowerPoint slides is a form of torture that should be banned under the Geneva Convention,” wrote one respondent.

2. **Too long, too much information.** How long is too long? If a presentation is boring, respondents told us, even 10 minutes can seem too long. And boring presentations appear to be rampant across the sector…“Too many slides with too many words, too many points, too much data, too long, too didactic.”

3. **Lack of interaction.** The problem that first appeared when we asked respondents to describe the typical presentation surfaced strongly in subsequent answers to open-ended questions. Many complained about being “talked at” for 30, 40, even 60 minutes at a time…

4. **Lifeless presenters.** Presenters who speak in a monotone, who seem to lack interest in their own material, or who appear to have wandered in from the set of “Night of the Living Dead” were also reported by many in the survey…

5. **Room/technical problems.** LCD projectors that don’t work, air conditioning that works too well, sound systems that are either too soft, too loud, or have too much hiss – just about every room or technical problem you can imagine showed up in survey answers…many are preventable, and even those that cannot be avoided do not have to ruin a talk…presenters often do not anticipate them or fail to have a backup plan.

The Three Most Wanted

In another open-ended question, we asked, “What one or two key things make a presentation excellent?” Again, respondents provided a wide range of answers, although a few unhappy campers claimed they had never seen an excellent presentation. A consensus emerged around three characteristics, and unsurprisingly each is a direct opposite of a common problem cited above.

1. **Interaction.** Nearly one out of every four respondents mentioned interaction – with the speaker, with other audience members, or both – as a hallmark of excellent presentations. “Interactive presentations that create opportunities for the audience members to work together and with the presenter are almost always top notch,” one respondent told us.

2. **Clarity.** Some used the words “well organized,” and some wrote “concise,” but if you were to scan the verbatim responses to this question, you would see a long run of answers that begin with “clarity.” One such response: “Clarity of three to four well-framed key points the speaker wanted the audience to take away, coupled with smart use of metaphors/anecdotes that helped speaker drive them home.”

3. **Enthusiasm.** Whether respondents used the words energy, passion, charisma, engaging, dynamic or lively, they all wanted the same thing: presenters who were enthusiastic about their topic and conveyed that interest to the audience.

Four other qualities that each received a high number of mentions were: humor, use of stories, relevance, and well-produced visuals.