



## Emory and Environmental Justice

### Contact Information for Piedmont Project Readers

Emory University  
Donna McDermott, PhD  
English Department, Writing Program (focus in science writing)  
Upper Level Continuing Communication Course

### Intro Statement

I initially imagined this course as a science writing course that engaged with tests and assignments about environmental justice issues as an overarching theme. The course could be attractive to students in science majors who would like to understand their science coursework in relationship with societal challenges like racism, gentrification, and social determinants of health. In addition, the course could also attract humanities and social sciences majors who are already learning about the social and economic systems that require sustainability but would like to better understand the natural sciences evidence basis for these issues.

I was interested in the Piedmont project as an opportunity to think more practically about developing this course as a community-engaged course, creating a sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership with an advocacy organization in Atlanta, or an interdisciplinary course co-taught with an instructor interested in environmental justice from a different disciplinary perspective. I would still like to pursue either of these paths. For now, I think a right-size next step could be to find a potential collaborator who would be interested co-teaching the course.

I see this syllabus as a tentative proposal for starting conversations with a co-teaching collaborator. With this document, I want to show a potential co-teacher a little bit about my typical pedagogical style (e.g. course policies, grading) and a few guiding questions and assignments that summarize what kinds of lessons I could bring to the course as a science communication instructor. Nothing here is set in stone—I'd welcome a co-teacher who helped to re-shape this course with their disciplinary perspective.

### Statement on Open Communication:

My hope is that all of the students in this class are able to engage with course materials and lessons in a way that is respectful, interesting, and useful. However, I'm aware that reaching this goal might look different for different students. If there's an aspect of this course that is disproportionately difficult for you (e.g. due to a disability, life experience, etc.), please reach out to me as soon as possible. I will be eager to work with you to find alternatives that help you make the most of this course—and that's easier to do earlier in the semester than later. You do not need to give me a detailed account of your experiences or disability in order to receive these alternatives.

# Course At a Glance

## Learning Outcomes

In this course, I'll guide you as you learn **skills** for reading, writing, and thinking that you can use in college, your future career, and in your everyday life. We'll also grapple with course **content**, which includes nuanced ideas about science and social issues.

Throughout the course, you'll develop your ability to:

- Investigate local environmental justice issues by **critically analyzing evidence** about public health and the environment as well as the social and historical context of the issue.
- **Communicate to Learn.** Using communication as a form of inquiry, invention, and reflection.
- **Communicate Flexibly.** Communicating effectively for specified audiences in more than one genre, medium, or mode, such as written, oral, or visual modes.

## Course Structure

This course is separated into four units. Each unit is focused on a central question. You'll practice skills that will help you address that question. Each unit ends with a graded assignment, in which you'll create evidence of what you've learned.

### Unit One

#### Environment and Environmental Justice

Question: How does social and cultural context influence the pursuit of scientific discovery?

Skills: Critical reading, digital mapping

Project: Mapping Emory Over Time

### Unit Two

#### Social Systems and Environmental Justice

Question: What does quantitative data have to do with people's lives?

Skills: Reflecting on positionality, Audio Production

Project: Emory's Sustainability Commitments in Context—Podcast Episode

### Unit Three

#### Pursuing Environmental Justice

Question: How can empirical data help us make sense of the work accomplished by activist movements?

Skills: Communicating about data, supporting argument with evidence

Project: Op-Ed

# Course Core Principles

Adapted from The Inclusive STEM Teaching Project

In this course, we'll talk about topics that are important both in science and in society. Some of the topics we'll talk about are intellectually challenging and bring up strong emotions, because some of the most important topics in our world do, too. These Core Principles shape how we'll talk about social topics in this course. These principles are essential for understanding course content.

If there are principles that you don't agree with, I ask that you set aside your disagreement during course meetings. We will not be using course time to debate whether these basic ideas are true. However, if you're feeling resistance to these ideas, we can discuss that in office hours. I promise that, even if we disagree, I'll approach our conversation with compassion and respect.

## Core Principles

- In our society, systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, classism, and more, are real and present.
- These systems of oppression continuously cause damage to people with marginalized identities.
- Individuals in majority groups benefit from systems of oppression whether they realize it or not.
- We are not blank slates; we all bring our identities and experiences into the learning space.
- Systems of oppression are the problem, the identities we hold are not. People with marginalized identities do not bring oppression upon ourselves.

## What you can expect from me

- As your instructor, I have the responsibility to create an equitable environment in which all students can learn. I am continually learning more about how to create this environment and I do misstep. If you are willing to let me know how I can make this course a more equitable environment for you, I would appreciate your perspective and would work to find ways to address the issues you tell me about.
- I do not expect minoritized participants to share their experiences of marginalization to benefit the learning of majority-identified participants.
- You are welcome to share information about your life when you'd like, but I do not expect you to divulge traumatic experiences in order to get a better grade or to be taken seriously.

# Course Policies

## COVID Safety

In this course, you will **never** be penalized for missing class or assignments because you feel ill. Please do not come to class if you are experiencing any COVID symptoms.

Everybody must keep their face mask on at all times when they are indoors on campus, and this includes in our classroom. Your face mask must cover your nose, mouth, and chin, and should fit snugly. Due to the necessity of keeping your PPE on, eating and drinking is forbidden in the classroom (unless you have strong medical justification). [Please read this Emory advice about quality and fit of masks.](#) If you aren't complying with the masking requirement, I will have to ask you to leave the classroom to ensure my safety and the safety of your classmates. Keep in mind that some of your classmates may not be able to be vaccinated and/or are immunocompromised, so Emory's campus masking policy ensures everyone's safety without requiring anybody to disclose their personal situation.

At the very first sign of not feeling well, stay at home and reach out for a health consultation. Please consult the [campus FAQ](#) for how to get the health consultation. Recognize that Emory is using several layers of safety: the vaccine mandate, the indoor face mask requirement, and contact tracing.

## Recording

Our class sessions will all be audio visually recorded for students in the class to refer back to the information, and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live.

Lectures and other classroom presentations presented through video conferencing and other materials posted on Canvas are for the sole purpose of educating the students enrolled in the course. I trust you to not release any information from our recordings, including directly sharing, screen capturing, or re-recording content. is strictly prohibited. It is essential that students can share their thoughts in class without worrying about their privacy. Sharing course recordings without permission will be considered an Honor Code violation and may also be a violation of other state and federal laws, such as the Copyright Act.

## Attendance

I ask that you make an earnest effort to attend class whenever possible. This course is designed so that you will learn from you peers, and they from you. This is easier to accomplish when we meet in synchronous Zoom sessions and/or in person.

However, due to the pandemic, some students might be sick or will need to go into isolation or quarantine. Please do not come to class sick. If you are sick, understand that I will be flexible about attendance. Please make sure to email me (when you can) so that we can discuss your individual circumstances. For students in quarantine who are well, I will provide ways that you can keep up with your schoolwork. Please also contact me via email if you are in quarantine.

# University Policies

## The Honor Code

Upon every individual who is a part of Emory University falls the responsibility for maintaining in the life of Emory a standard of unimpeachable honor in all academic work. The Honor Code of Emory College is based on the fundamental assumption that every loyal person of the University not only will conduct his or her own life according to the dictates of the highest honor but will also refuse to tolerate in others action which would sully the good name of the institution. Academic misconduct is an offense generally defined as any action or inaction which is offensive to the integrity and honesty of the members of the academic community.

The Honor Code, a list of offenses and the Honor Council process may be found;

[http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor\\_code.html](http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor_code.html)

## Accessibility and Accommodations

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. I want every student to succeed. The Department of Accessibility Services (DAS) works with students who have disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations. It is your responsibility to request accommodations. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must register with the DAS. Accommodations cannot be retroactively applied so you need to contact DAS as early as possible and contact me as early as possible in the semester to discuss the plan for implementation of your accommodations. For additional information about accessibility and accommodations, please contact the Department of Accessibility Services at (404) 727-9877 or [accessibility@emory.edu](mailto:accessibility@emory.edu).

## Stress Management and Mental Health

As a student, you may find that personal and academic stressors in your life, including those related to remote study, COVID-19, economic instability, and/or racial injustice, are creating barriers to learning this semester. You're not alone; many students face personal and environmental challenges that can interfere with their academic success and overall wellbeing. If you are struggling with this class, please visit me during office hours or contact me via email at [drmcder@emory.edu](mailto:drmcder@emory.edu).

In other words...

I'm happy to work with you so you can get the most out of this course. And I can be a great listener, if that's what you need. However, I don't have the expertise of a trained therapist. You may be able to find more structured support through Emory services.

For an extensive list of well-being resources on campus, please go to:

<http://campuslife.emory.edu/support/index.html>.

And keep in mind that Emory offers free, 24/7 emotional, mental health, and medical support resources via TimelyCare:

<https://timelycare.com/emory>.

Other Emory resources include:

- [Counseling & Psychological Services](#)
- [Office of Spiritual & Religious Life](#)
- [Student Case Management and Interventions Services](#)
- [Student Health Services Psychiatry](#)
- [Support During A Crisis: A Guide for Faculty & Staff](#)
- [Emory Anytime Student Health Services](#)
- [Emory Student Telehealth - 24/7 Medical & Mental Health Support](#)

# Grading

Your grade in this course is determined by the labor that you do. Labor, here, includes both your participation in class and your work on assignments.

The grading philosophy in this course comes from a system called labor-based grading. The goal of labor-based grading is for you and I to spend less time thinking about grades and more on developing your writing skills. In order to accomplish that goal, you'll get a lot of feedback on your writing from me and your peers. But that feedback, even if it's critical, won't affect your grade.

You get full credit for any assignment that you submit by the end of the due date range that meets the criteria for completion (criteria include stuff like having all the expected parts, on a relevant topic, etc.) You'll write a writer's memo for each assignment explaining how it meets the criteria for completion. You can use this memo to defend your choices, even if they disagree with my feedback or suggestions.

## The Grading Scale

	Big Assignment Parts		Small Assignments		Missed Participation Days
	Ignored	Late	Ignored	Late	
A	0	2	0	3	2
A-	0	3	1	4	2
B+	0	3	1	4	3
B	0	3	2	4	3
B-	0	4	2	5	3
C+	1	4	2	5	3
C	1	4	2	5	4
C-	1	5	2	6	4
D	2	5	3	6	5
F	3+	5+	4+	6+	6+