

Engaging University Students as Stakeholders in Climate Change

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Students are the future of our country, but often communication of climate science focuses on interfacing with the press with abbreviated summaries of detailed research, or with the general public in brief appearances, or even on direct but short discussions with city, state, and federal legislators. The goals of the communication of any science, about the climate system or otherwise, is to effectively and accurately describe the science, but also to clearly describe the role of the scientist in the project. The university classroom is an important and unique venue to discuss the nuances of climate science. Instructors are usually experts in the field. When experts teach the topic, students get a chance to learn how a climate scientist thinks through aspects of the broad topic of climate science, see how climate science is heavily interdisciplinary, and how scientists contextualize their own research within the general framework of climate change. I will present my philosophical and pedagogical approach to discussing global environmental change in the university classroom, and how it has evolved after teaching the course over the period of four years. I will talk about a successful and adaptable outline for a 15 week university course on the topic of global environmental change that would be appropriate for any Earth Sciences program that has students with diverse sub-disciplinary interests, but a general interest in the study of our planet. The outline has evolved in response to summative student feedback and formative course evaluation via tests and informal writing. I will present the case that an introductory course on the topic of climate change is more successful when students get direct feedback on their formal and informal work, but I would also hope to hear from other experts about their own experiences teaching global environmental change, or working from an outreach and awareness perspective.