

Welcome to Climate Change State University

John Calderazzo

Dear Students and Faculty,

Let me extend a warming welcome to you on behalf of Climate Change State University. Yes, “warming welcome”—my little pun. You can't say we don't have a sense of humor here at CCSU! After all, as our Psychology Department tells us, laughing now and then helps us avoid despair and keep up the fight we must all fight against the threat of planetary apocalypse. Even now, somebody somewhere is probably working up a climate change stand-up routine, and I think we could all use it.

At any rate, welcome to your new and exciting university, which has emerged from virtually every department of your old university. In fact, CCSU or something like it is already couched inside the DNA of dozens if not hundreds of other colleges and universities, just waiting for the right teachers and students to help it break out. It may only be a matter of time before the CCSU “brand” goes viral.

And none too soon. As H. G. Wells puts it, “History becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.”

By the day, it seems, science is demonstrating that we're going to need all the education and then action we can muster before we pump so much CO₂ into our atmosphere that there will be no turning back for centuries. The greenhouse gas molecules we are releasing in ever-greater numbers pile up over the molecules we have already released, and none of them care whether you are a physicist or an opera singer, a Democrat or a Republican, or a Libertarian or a Vegetarian. They're doing their chemical, planet-warming thing, whether or not you “believe in” them.

Therefore, we have gathered here today on the steps of our Art History Gallery, which is the philosophical core of our campus. How so? Well, the gallery has just launched an exhibition of Katsushika Hokusai's great wood-block series, “100 Views of Fuji.” These views of Japan's most sacred mountain include, for instance, an extreme close-up of the volcano's lava-orange slope, a mid-distance image of a perfect cone seen through slanting arrows of rain, and a tiny, snow-tipped summit viewed from the bustling cityscape of Edo, today's Tokyo. Fuji as dominating spirit. Fuji as one of many dynamic views of nature. Fuji as hope, a far-off snow-dream to shopkeepers on a crowded street.

We at CCSU have come to believe that climate change is such an enormously complex problem that, like Hokusai's Fuji, it demands to be examined in classrooms and research labs by *everybody*, from the perspective of every academic department that has something to offer.

We call this “100 Views of Climate Change.”

Naturally, we examine these challenges in our Atmospheric Science department. Just as seriously, though, Political Science explores international policy negotiations. Mechanical

Engineering is working on alternative energy solutions like solar and wind power, plus carbon sequestration. Chemistry is developing ever more powerful batteries and who knows what else.

Then there's Philosophy: environmental ethics and social justice. Human Health: migrating diseases (following northward-migrating mosquitoes, for instance) and world population. Construction Management: the built environment emits a shocking volume of greenhouse gases. Wildlife Biology and Oceanography: what will happen to animals, including yet-to-be-discovered abyssal fish, as the oceans grow more and more acidic? Agricultural Economics: how will farmers and ranchers cope?

And of course English: novels, poems, and essays that show us the human face and drama of these problems—and the opportunities. Plus, English in concert with Journalism and the Natural Sciences can train and inspire writers, a new generation of Rachel Carsons who can translate the hieroglyphics of scientists and scholars into plain English. God knows the academic world needs that help.

Sociology and Military Science, which are not such strange bedfellows in our brave new warming world, are jointly examining the enormous effects that millions of refugees will sooner or later have on all of us, including issues of national security as masses of people flee droughts and rising oceans to go ... where?

For the first time, there are now more environmental refugees on Earth than those displaced by war and political repression, and those numbers are sure to rise. Our Film Studies department will soon underscore this issue by screening the incredibly powerful new documentary, Michael Nash's *Climate Refugees*, which I urge you to see at our spring film festival. If you think immigration pressures at U.S. and European borders are a problem now, just wait and let global warming do its work.

Pop quiz #1, and this goes for you faculty sitting out there, too: Can anybody name a single department that does not potentially offer *something* to teach or research about climate change?

Didn't think so.

Along the way, all of our new efforts encourage cross-campus teaching, learning, and hard discussion, not to mention the potential for interdisciplinary scholarship that explores new and better ways to live on the only Earth we have. New and better ways to live also require the creation of fantastically interesting new careers and jobs that we couldn't have imagined even a decade ago.

That's exciting, and that means *you*, students.

Plus the CCSU way of doing business encourages teachers and researchers to work harder at shedding the too-often private and incomprehensible assumptions, biases, and languages of their specialties, so they can talk and work more effectively with each other, students, policy makers, and the public. As Earth Policy Institute President Lester Brown says, "Saving civilization is not a spectator sport."

Pop quiz #2: Does this re-formed curriculum mean that we're forcing you to study nothing but climate change?

Of course not. Anybody who's passed within sarcasm-range of a teenager knows this would backfire. You may still work on that novel of yours about Ultimate Frisbee and broken love, or your MBA, or build a computer program that can smack down any video game in the cosmos. You can major in anything we have always offered.

But you may no longer graduate without also being climate change literate. Consider this savvyness your tool kit for the twenty-first century: a basic understanding of the best, most sound, most promising climate change science and scholarship. Really, this new kind of education is one of our only hedges against far too much denial, misunderstanding, paralyzing despair, shameful and deliberate misinformation, and ... catastrophe.

Pop quiz #3: Can you think of anything more important for higher education to do?

© The Author(s) 2011. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oup.com