

Earth Science and the Silver Screen

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Abstract

As the global population continues to grow and the associated stress to the world's environmental systems escalates, the need for better scientific literacy and understanding of these often complex environmental issues by students is becoming increasingly important. Unfortunately for many students, particularly non-science majors, personal perceptions and knowledge about environmental issues are influenced by or sometimes limited to the entertainment industry's often inaccurate portrayal of these topics in film and television. The result is often a confused or misinformed student that has difficulty separating fact from fiction with regards to many contemporary science and environmental issues.

In an effort to revitalize and invigorate a previous introductory general education earth science course, the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Furman University now offers a restructured version of the course entitled "Earth Science and the Silver Screen". This new course looks at Hollywood's portrayal of various scientific issues on mainstream television and film as a mechanism to highlight many of the common misconceptions and misperceptions about various environmental issues and more importantly as a means to teach the true science and facts behind many of the world's most pressing environmental topics. By discussing pop culture's portrayal of science, something to which most students readily relate and that is already familiar to them, the course has facilitated a more engaged and active learning environment compared to the textbook, lecture based format of the previous version of this course.