Course description and objectives:
Public concern about environmental issues is driving social, political, and cultural change in German-speaking countries today—a trend visible in the successes of the Green party in recent elections and plans to decommission nuclear power plants over the next decade. This course (taught in German) looks at the ways environmental imagination is expressed through language and contemporary culture. Frequent comparisons will be made with parallel global phenomenon, particularly in the U.S. We will examine the evolution of the environmental movement and European conceptions of sustainability through the lens of nonfiction writings, literature, online resources, and film. Historically, concepts of ecology arose out of early 20th century discoveries about interconnectedness, epitomized by the term Umwelt (surrounding world), which was coined by Jakob von Uexküll. In keeping with this systems perspective, we will study examples like food production, energy consumption, and urban design. To take into account the divergent opinions that surround these topics, assignments will include debates, expository writing, and creative projects that probe differing positions. Our starting point will be Volker Quaschning’s witty, yet scientifically grounded overview of hot button topics, Mülltrenner, Müsliesser und Klimaschützer: Wir Deutschen und unsere Umwelt (Trash Sorters, Muesli Eaters, and Climate Protectors, 2010).

Objectives: In this course students will...

- explore the formal/aesthetic dimensions of literature and the arts, transnational public discourses about sustainability issues, and cultural/social/historical contexts that relate to the development of environmental imagination and awareness of global perspectives.
- expand abilities to read, interpret, and appreciate literary and multi-media texts related to contemporary Germany and environmental topics.
- exercise effective communication skills in German and English in ways that lead to the development of critical literacy skills applicable in many contexts (e.g., other classes, work settings, and personal communications).