Communicating the Climate Crisis
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Background
- There is still a disconnect between most peoples’ perceptions of climate change and their actions to mitigate or fight such an emergency (attitude-behavior gap)
- This project seeks to closely examine climate change communications to bridge this gap and encourage action

Research Questions
What are some of the barriers to climate engagement? How can climate communications strategies be improved to overcome such barriers?

Internship & Methods
- Interned with the King County Climate Action Team helping to develop materials to supplement parts of the Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) (Figure 1)
- Interviewed professionals in the climate change communications field
- Surveyed young people in the County to understand how they perceive climate change messaging
- Conducted research about the value of rhetorical devices in climate change communications

Results
- County efforts to combat climate change are not adequately communicated to young people (Figure 2)
- Young people today feel discouraged most by their lack of access to resources to learn more about and fight climate change (Figure 3)

Figure 2. The above chart indicates that, even among respondents who feel that they are in the target audience for King County's climate communications, the majority of them have not heard of more than 3 of the County's environmental initiatives

Figure 3. The above pie chart lists the survey respondents perceived barriers to engaging with issues of climate change

- Perceived lack of influence (20%)
- Minimal access to necessary resources (32%)
- Politics/denial by audiences (25%)
- Bureaucracy and power structures (13%)
- Overwhelmed feelings of fatigue (10%)

Results (continued)
- Many County efforts to communicate about climate change use more broad appeals that are not specific to communities or lived experiences
- A trusted messenger makes for more effective climate change communications
- Best way to combat this is to frame climate issues in a context that can be understood by the audience
- Rhetorical tools: anecdote, comparison (metaphor), and framing

Recommendations
- Increasing amount of accessible materials and information will increase action
- Seeking new avenues to distribute information that engages new audiences
- Utilizing rhetorical devices to put information into common terms that are easy to understand

Implications
- Increased access to climate change information empowers individuals to make behavioral changes that can help mitigate harm in the future
- Empowerment can also lead to community buy in and faith in policies and procedures in place to fight climate change

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