

Different Approach To Environmental Argument

Dr. Andrew Hoffman's Research on the "Social Dimensions of the Climate Change Debate"

Emily Farah February 10, 2012

People either believe in climate changing patterns, or they don't. Dr. Andrew Hoffman, Director of the Erb Institute at the University of Michigan, looks beyond the scientific debate and considers the social aspect of the believers and non-believers.

Hoffman delivered the keynote address today at Duquesne University's Sustainability Speaker Series at the Duquesne Club downtown. He focused on trying to understand the reasons people accept or reject the science of climate change. He noted that it is not due to a lack of scientific data. In fact, he says that giving people more information is not the way to persuade people one way or another.

"If people are disinclined to believe the science and you keep pushing them with more data, they will dig their heels even harder," Hoffman said. "You have to focus on what are the underlying issues, underlying concerns, values, ideological world views that are filtering their interpretation of science."

One of the ideological factors, he says, is political tendencies.

"If you look at the data for what are the demographic variables that correlate most strongly with a person's belief on climate change, political party affiliation actually comes out quite strong, if not the strongest, and there's a widening gap between conservatives and liberals, democrats and republicans on this issue," Hoffman said.

Hoffman attributes the declining acceptance of climate change to "a whole host of issues," including underlying cultural filters, lack of media attention, and the economy. He argues that the science behind climate change is there, but the social consensus is not.

"We have scientific agencies that are saying 'something is happening here,' but the public is not accepting it," he said.

Hoffman highlighted a parallel between the debates on cigarettes correlating with cancer. He said that it took time for the science of cigarettes causing cancer to be accepted socially, and suggests that the environmental debate faces the same challenge.

Links:

[1] <http://andrewhoffman.net>