ABSTRACT

TITLE:	An Assessment of Fort Lewis Student Perceptions and Emotional Reactions to Climate Change and Their Usefulness for Motivating Pro-Environmental Behaviors
AUTHOR(S):	Stucky, Alan
PRESENTED AT:	8th Annual Natural & Behavioral Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium Program, Fort Lewis College, 2013

ABSTRACT: Climate change is one of the most urgent problems facing modern civilization, threatening to undermine the resiliency of ecosystems, the stability of societies, and the livelihoods of many human beings. This research project examines two psychological theories of motivation, expectancy-value theory, and affective motivation theory, using primary data gathered through a questionnaire administered to 116 Fort Lewis upperclassmen and analyzed using SPSS to explore students' understanding of climate science and how they perceive and react emotionally to climate change in order to determine whether these theories of motivation can help motivate pro-environmental behaviors. This research found that Fort Lewis students generally have a firm understanding of climate science. Responses from environmental studies majors were compared with the responses of students from other majors, which revealed that non-environmental studies majors are less likely to consider climate change to be one of the biggest problems facing society requiring urgent attention. In contrast, environmental studies majors experience more sadness and worry about climate change, are more likely to believe that they could make a meaningful difference individually toward mitigating climate change, and engage in more pro-environmental behaviors. The data generally supported both the expectancy-value theory and affective motivation theory. The presence of negative affective states associated with climate change coupled with high expectancy and value may be useful for motivating pro-environmental behavior.