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## Dot Earth

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# Postcard: A Climate Communication Retreat in the North Carolina Hills

By [ANDREW C. REVKIN](#)

[Bill Chameides](#), the dean of the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, somehow finds time to balance pedagogy, research and communication, via his quirkily named blog, [The Green Grok](#). He mentioned a recent retreat his school held to explore how to engage both the analytic and emotional sides of the human brain on the challenges posed by human-driven climate change. I invited him to send a Dot Earth “Postcard,” and here it is:

Imagine a retreat with climate scientists, artists, and neuroscientists pondering the mysteries of perception, communication, and creativity from the perspective of climate change? I participated in just such a retreat recently in the North Carolina mountains north of Asheville.

Our gathering was funded by a group called [Invoking the Pause](#), a small nonprofit that provides modest grants to “foster creativity and ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking ... for innovative and potentially scalable ideas” to, among other things, advance public understanding of climate change.

The meeting grew out of our frustration that so much of the public has an erroneous perception of the state of climate science and the seriousness of the threat we face from climate change. Could it be there that there’s something amiss in the climate story we’re telling folks? If so, why, and how can we better way to tell the story? A group of us at Duke University decided to spend some time pondering those questions but to do so with more than the usual climate science and journalistic suspects. Hence the artists and the neuroscientists.

...In planning the meeting we asked ourselves: If you want to experiment with different modes of communication that affect non-analytical as well as analytical parts of the brain, whom do you need to bring together? The analytical part is easy — climate scientists. But what about the non-analytical part? We chose two groups not traditionally associated with climate science: artists and cognitive/brain scientists. I suppose having artists at the meeting is not all that surprising. After all, artists are in the business of reaching people on emotional and visceral levels, and so can offer a unique perspective and skill set for eliciting such responses in the case of climate change.

We had an amazing exchange of ideas and perspectives and came away with an ambitious set of projects to pursue. Explore the details in [my post on The Green Grok](#).

For the next such session, they might consider adding some folks from another discipline, marketing, given how recent Duke research (described in Chameides's post) illustrates the power of subliminal perception of corporate logos. One problem, of course, is that communication related to climate change and greenhouse gases exists within the vastly larger environment of [messaging fostering consumptive habits](#). Here's a relevant video on the Duke research:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=3iJWyaXLLw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=3iJWyaXLLw)