

## Introduction

Prior to becoming a professor, for more than two decades I made my living as an artisan, a furniture maker. During that time, I was a voracious reader. I spent my days working wood. My nights and weekends were given to reading pretty much anything that I could get my hands on. My principal interest was (as it still is now) the environment.

The challenge was getting access to useful books.

While my local library had some things of interest, what I really needed was a good academic library. I was seemingly in luck, as I lived a little south of Princeton University and little east of the University of Pennsylvania, also an Ivy League school. Both have amazing, world-class libraries: Firestone at Princeton and Van Pelt at Penn.

The problem was that neither library would let me in the door, literally. On more than one occasion, I was turned away by guards posted at the entrances. And, mind you, I had absolutely no hope of securing borrowing privileges. I just wanted to come in and read the books.

Some universities at the time - and we're not talking all that long ago - were not only ivory towers, but walled-off ivory towers, that had little interest in sharing their riches with members of the public (like me).

And, of course, being able to attend a lecture was altogether out of the question. In my early 20s, which was during the early 1980s, I actually went to Princeton to ask them if they had night classes or if I could sit in on lectures. I wasn't seeking university credits or a degree, I just wanted to learn.

They literally laughed at me. Apparently, Princeton wasn't *that* sort of school. It was as frustrating as it was humiliating.

If knowledge is power, doesn't it just seem wrong that only some people have access to it and, in some ways even worse, that universities went way out of their way - by actually posting guards at the doors - to make sure that others were denied access? We are not talking about a totalitarian government seeking to control access to knowledge here, but rather higher education the US. in the closing quarter of the 20th century.

In terms of a subject like the climate crisis, why in the world would anyone want to restrict access to such knowledge? Standing outside of these extraordinary libraries, as well as classrooms where amazing courses were being taught, it just didn't make sense.

Of course, I wasn't alone out there. In fact, the rest of the world was largely there with me.

Nearly everyone in low- and middle-income countries have long been quietly excluded from international educations. This is a huge social justice issue, which is, as far as I am concerned, still being ignored today. As with most social justice issues, this hurts us all.

So, I began dreaming of a time when the walls would come down and universities would make their riches (books, courses, discussions - everything) available to nearly anyone. To me, it was all about access.

A dyslexic furniture maker in New Jersey, a deaf teacher in Nigeria, a blind young woman on a farm in Mexico, nearly anyone, anywhere could learn as much as they wanted, whenever they wanted, about anything they wanted. And, ideally, learn it from any professor in any school on the planet.

It was quite a dream.

However, as I was a furniture maker and the Internet was still in a pretty nascent form back then, I had absolutely no idea how to bring it about.

But, then, years later, after I became a professor, I began to explore ways of realizing my outlandish dream. After more than a decade experimenting, Climate Crisis 101 brings together much of what I have learned through quite a bit of trial and (mostly) error. Although it falls short of the dream in some ways, it is, nonetheless, designed to be free and accessible to anyone, anywhere.

It is also a course that could be put together by pretty much anyone. No fancy cameras or studios were involved. Everything is filmed at my desk in a tiny little office, no bigger than a closet, that I built in my backyard and where I do most of my work.

This introductory chapter takes up in detail my quest to make a truly accessible university lecture course. In order to do so, we will first consider the various forms that the Climate Crisis 101 material takes, which is key to its accessibility.

If you are primarily interested in the climate crisis and what we can do about it, feel free to skip the rest of this chapter, which deals with the unusual format(s) of Climate Crisis 101 and educational reform (my dream from decades ago), and instead jump ahead to the next chapter.