



**CenturyCollege**

## ***News Release***

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### **Global Warming Is Everyone's Issue, Author Tells Century Audience**

The hardest thing about being a global-warming activist is that the world is changing, but most people can't see it, author Elizabeth Kolbert told Century College audiences on March 10 - a chilly day that ended in below-zero temperatures.

While alarming scientific data should be motivating people to action, she has found that people are instead using casual observation to defend their inaction.

"We do not live in the Arctic, so we do not see it, but the ice cap is half the size it used to be," said Kolbert, who spoke to groups in the morning and evening. "This is not part of a natural cycle. When you add carbon dioxide to the atmosphere at the rate we are adding it, it will warm up the world."

Kolbert's widely acclaimed book, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, was selected as Century College's Common Book for 2008-2009. Nearly 130 classes of students and hundreds of staff members have read, discussed and attended events related to the book during the current school year.

Kolbert said she was honored to have her book selected by the college because global warming needs everyone's attention.

“Everyone can help reduce the carbon foot print,” said Kolbert. While she does not hold herself up as a model of conservation, she uses solar energy to heat her home, line-dries her clothes, drives a fuel-efficient car, shuts down appliances when they are not in use and keeps indoor temperatures low for her family of five.

“There are huge interests working against stringent global-warming legislation,” said Kolbert. “But it would be helpful to write to your legislators and let them know that you support new measures to save our planet for future generations. There is a chance for serious action if you demand it.”

Kolbert said reducing carbon dioxide emissions will require rethinking many of our country’s activities, including manufacturing and shipping. “Our economy was not sustainable and fossil fuels are not sustainable,” she said. “We have been putting off the day of reckoning. As we try to rebuild the economy, let’s put it on a footing that could last. It is a perfect time to reassess how we are doing things.”

A former New York Times political reporter who now works for the *New Yorker* magazine, Kolbert said she became interested in climate change eight years ago when she happened to read a book about Greenland by a geologist from Penn State University. She traveled to Greenland in 2001 and then began a series of articles that became the basis for *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*.

“Scientists kept telling me how compelling the data is,” said Kolbert. “But most of us are not moved by data sets. We are moved by narrative. So I set out to find the best stories I could to present the data sets in human terms.”

Kolbert opened her book by telling the story of a tiny Alaskan village called Shishmaref that sits on an island off the coast of the Seward Peninsula. Shishmaref is basically doomed because the sea ice that used to protect it is shrinking and waves are eroding its island coast. In addition, the village’s permafrost is starting to thaw, which means houses are starting to split and giant holes are opening up in various places, such as parking lots.

“People realize they will have to leave and give up their whole way of life,” said Kolbert. “Thousands of years of cultural history are ending.”

Kolbert said she wrote *Field Notes* for people who are not likely to read global warming research. “It was extremely painful to write,” she said. “It was hard, it took me a long time and I was close to giving up. But the way we are living is having serious consequences for our children. I want average citizens to know they do have a voice, and they can make their voice heard.”



Photo: Author Elizabeth Kolbert at Century College