COURSE OBJECTIVES

Global Climate Change represents just one topic in one of the “hottest” fields in journalism--reporting on the environment. Add in Austin and Texas’ intricate environmental challenges--from water supply and quality, to infamous traffic and smog and their related health impacts, to controversy over land use to name a few--and you’ve got a journalism beat that is interesting, demanding and very important to the community. The way media report about these issues influences both short-term and long-term decisions made by individuals, corporations and governments. Some of the topics to be discussed include:

- Journalistic interviewing (especially working with scientists)
- Understanding basic elements and structures to good environment writing
- Using all your senses to write
- Understanding the concepts of scientific certainty and uncertainty
- Understanding the challenges faced by both scientists and journalists
- Communicating complex science to lay audiences
- Environmental topics, such as climate change, energy, air and water quality and sustainability will be discussed in depth in conjunction with how these topics can be communicated effectively

CLASS STRUCTURE

Like many other journalism classes, the class will operate as an intensive writing seminar. You will be writing every week, sometimes responding to readings, or in response to an in class assignment. There will also be two major assignments in the class that will tackle particular environmental topics of your choosing. These news stories will go through an intensive editing process and then revisions submitted with the intention of being published. The class structure will be discussion oriented and will focus on further development of critical thinking skills. Classes will consist of group projects, a press conference, a field trip, group lead discussions, guest speakers and lots of writing. Each student will also present an environmental journalism example that "works.” Your goal will be to explain how and why the communication works. If you have a special area of interest (something like food safety; environmental justice), this assignment would allow you to investigate that topic and share your findings with the class.

We will develop a dynamic and synergy that hopefully will make each person feel challenged in their thinking and secure in sharing openly with the group. You must be prepared to participate fully in class meetings. In addition to various writing assignments, we will also review and critique examples of award winning environmental journalism to get a deeper understanding of how the best in the business do their work.

The goal will be to hone your writing skills while sharpening your understanding about environmental issues.

Since class space is so limited and we are in a conference room without computer stations please bring a laptop or tablet to class if possible for in class writing assignments.
READING MATERIALS

“Worlds Apart: How the Distance between Science and Journalism Threatens America’s Future.” First Amendment Center ((posted to Blackboard)


“Covering the Environment: How Journalists Work the Green Beat.” Bob Wyss, Routledge, 2008 (available on line through UT library)

COURSE EVALUATION

All work must be turned in on deadline. No late work will be accepted. This is a hard reality of all journalism. Please spell check and edit all work. Any errors in grammar, spelling, syntax and proof-reading will be deleterious to your grade. All work must follow the proper protocol (demonstrated in first class) and should be double-spaced and paper clipped (not stapled) together. The two major projects will be evaluated on both the first drafts and then the revised versions with more weight on the revised work and on the final project. Each of you will also research your environmental issues and make presentations as “deep background” on the topics for the entire class. It is highly recommended that these topics be your two major reporting projects. You will also be teamed up with partners to lead class discussions on selected readings. Each week you can anticipate reading 75-100 pages of material from our three texts, as well as weekly writing assignments in addition to the major projects and presentation.

20%-Participation/Writing Assignments/Leading Class Discussions
20%-Class Presentations
10%-Draft First Project
15%-Revised First Project
15%-Draft Final Project
20%-Final Project

This class will allow us to explore some of the most important issues facing our society and how good journalism can provide the public with information it needs to respond to these issues. Since this class is a mix of journalism undergraduate students and graduate students in several science disciplines you will become important resources for each other. Those with more writing experience will help mentor your classmates on good journalism, while those with a stronger science background will help mentor others on basic issues such as how the scientific method works.
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Please notify me of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate any special needs. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone) or http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd.

HONOR CODE AND POLICY ON SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY

Do not plagiarize, and do not make up quotes or facts in your reporting and properly attribute all citations. The university provides this website that clearly identifies issues of plagiarism: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism

University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

RELIGIOUS POLICY

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.