

J346F/395-Reporting on the Environment-Spring 2017

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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

- 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, press conferences with environmental experts, 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. While there will be no formal exams (including no final) there will be many writing assignments and quizzes that require you to analyze and synthesis course readings and materials. One of your first assignments will be to identify the readings you’re most interested in leading discussions on and then will be paired with colleagues to do so.

READING MATERIALS

Required:

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

“The Thinking Person’s Guide to Climate Change.” Robert Henson. American Meteorological Society.

“Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages.” Julia B. Corbett, Island Press, 2006.

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

Recommended:

“A Field Guide for Science Writers.” Edited by Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson and Robin Marantz Henig. Oxford Press, 2006.

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 proofreading will be deleterious to your grade. All work should be double-spaced to provide room for feedback. 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. Based on your skills and interests you will be encouraged to produce content across journalism platforms (print, web, audio and video). Each of you will also research your environmental issues and make presentations as “deep background” on the topics for the entire class. 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 various texts, as well as weekly writing assignments in addition to the major projects and presentation. Attendance and high quality participation are required.

25%-Participation/Writing Assignments/Leading Class Discussions

15%-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. The goal will be to hone your writing skills while sharpening your understanding about environmental issues.

Religious Holy Days

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence. <http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance>

Students with Disabilities

Please notify me of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities.

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Scholastic Dishonesty

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

UT 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, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.