

## **Environmental Investigative Reporting** **JRN 408, Section 3, Fall 2003**

**When:** 9:10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays

**Where:** 242 CommArts on Tuesday; 169 CommArts on Thursday.

**CAVEAT:** We will not meet formally during some periods so students can arrange interviews, report, write.

**Instructor:** Dave Poulson  
348 CommArts  
432 5417  
[Poulson@msu.edu](mailto:Poulson@msu.edu).

**Office hours:** 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays or by appointment

**Objectives:** Study investigative reporting techniques as they apply to environmental journalism. Apply those techniques to multi-story class projects that get published, affect public policy, make the world a better place. Learn to work as a reporting team.

**How:** In class you will meet with and interview environmental journalists, filmmakers, activists, regulators. You will discuss great and lousy examples of environmental journalism.

Students will plan, write, shoot images for a project or projects targeting specific publications. Depending on interest and expertise, projects may also be prepared for Web and/or radio broadcast.

This is not an academic exercise. It will be treated as a real world effort and held to real world standards of accuracy, readability, professionalism. Success requires self-discipline, creativity, an ability to work with others and an understanding of how to explore and expand story ideas into professional-quality investigative news articles and packages. You'll have to pitch story ideas just like you're trying to convince an editor why he or she should invest your time in them.

No fooling around: Time's short and the world's a mess. But we should have fun.

**Textbook:** None. You need an AP Stylebook and a dictionary. Read local and national daily newspapers so that you can discuss news intelligently. There will be handouts.

**News services:** There's an expectation that you are paying particular attention to environmental news. Story ideas don't come out of thin air. The best journalists steal and modify. To get a concentrated dose, subscribe to:

\*GLIN Daily News, a collection of links to mostly environmental news gleaned from publications in the Great Lakes basin. Subscribe at [www.great-lakes.net](http://www.great-lakes.net). Click on daily news.

\*Echo, a collection of links to environmental stories scoured from publications in Southeast and West Michigan. Send name and e-mail address to [debbie\\_munson@yahoo.com](mailto:debbie_munson@yahoo.com).

\*SEJ's Daily News, a collection of links to environmental stories selected by the Society of Environmental Journalists from publications across the nation. Go to [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org) and click on EJToday.

**Other:** You are required to provide the instructor and classmates a copy of an already published environmental investigative story that you will analyze during a class presentation.

Depending on your project, there may be some costs such as mileage for interviews, document copying, film, phone calls. The J-School will provide some minimal support for these costs but they must be pre-approved.

**Assignments:** They must be typed and in AP style. They are due on deadline. There are no make-ups. The fatal error rule applies without exception: Assignments with one significant fact error or misspelled proper name cannot earn more than 1.0.

I check facts and spellings. Often.

**Absences:** If you miss an assignment because of an unexcused absence, you get a 0 for that assignment. Excused absences include serious illness, natural disasters, provable unavoidable accidents and the death of a family member. Documentation is required. Examples of documentation include a letter signed by a physician, a police report, an obituary.

You may make up coursework missed to observe a major religious holiday only if you make arrangements in advance.

### Grading:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>percent of grade</u>
Attendance/participation	10
Story analysis	10
Three story ideas	10
Project proposal/outline	10
Rough draft	10
Final story	50
<hr/>	
Total	100

### Bonus

\*Train for and participate in MSU's Dino Dash on Oct. 5 and live a healthier life. See: <http://museum.msu.edu/events/Dinosaur/dinosaur.html>.

### Demerits

\*Read your e-mail or surf the Internet for non-coursework material during class and you'll make your instructor really grumpy.

\*Cell phones that ring during class can be retrieved later from the Red Cedar River.

## **Plagiarism**

Don't. Students who cheat, fabricate or plagiarize **WILL** fail the course. Plagiarism is presenting another person's work or ideas as your own. Check the General Procedures and Regulations section of the MSU Academic Programs publication for more information.

## **Accommodations for disabilities**

Call the OPHS Disability Resource Center at 353 9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (TTY).

## **Final**

There is none

## **Weekly schedule**

This schedule lists some important dates. But this class demands flexibility. It's a journalism course. When news happens, plans change. Schedule is dependent on speaker availability and evolution of projects. We will not meet formally at times so that students can arrange interviews, research, write.

### **Week 1**

Aug. 26 – Introduction and overview

Read and follow all links at

<http://www.medill.nwu.edu/specialprograms/innocence/index.html>

Aug. 28 – Juris Didrichsons, Department of Environmental Quality law enforcement

### **Week 2**

Sept. 2 – David Dempsey, Michigan Environmental Council

Sept. 4 –

### **Week 3**

Sept. 9 – Terry Link, director, Michigan State University Office of Sustainability  
Possible FOIA conference

Sept. 11 – Eric Freedman;

Copies for class and instructor of story you plan to analyze are due.

### **Week 4 discuss story analysis**

Sept. 16- Story analysis due; class presentations begin .

Tom Rohrer, director of the environmental studies program at Central Michigan University and retired chief of Water Quality Enforcement for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Sept. 18 – Class analysis continues.

Last day to drop class and get tuition refund.

### **Week 5 Broadcast investigations.**

Sept. 23 – Three story ideas due.

broadcast viewing/discussion

Sept. 25 – Terri Taylor, independent environmental filmmaker.

Week 6 Discuss ideas

Sept. 30 Seth Borenstein, Knight Ridder Newspapers

Oct. 2 Lester Graham, Great Lakes Radio Consortium

Week 7 Discuss ideas, assign project(s)

Oct. 7

Oct. 9

Week 8

Oct. 14 – Project outline due; Last day to drop class with no grade reported.

Oct. 16 – Terry Link, journalism bibliographer. Meet at library.

Week 9

Oct. 21

Oct. 23 – Project outline revisions due

Week 10

Oct. 28

Oct. 30

Week 11

Nov. 4 First rough draft of project due

Nov. 6

Week 12

Nov. 11

Nov. 13. Second rough draft of project due

Week 13

Nov. 18

Nov. 20

Week 14

Nov. 25 Final Project due.

Nov. 27 (Thanksgiving; no class)

Week 15

Dec. 2 Fact checking. Archives of Michigan

Dec. 4