

Jour 000

Environmental Journalism

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Course Description

From the Animal Protection League to Zero Population Growth, the environmental movement in the United States spans the social spectrum. In this course, students will learn the gathering and presentation of stories about the environment. We will also study the effect of mass media on the environmental movement and environmental topics. For example, the course examines the historical roots of what was then called the conservation movement in the years following the Civil War when newspapers and magazines became involved in the campaigns for national parks. While recognizing the historical roots of environmental journalism, students will focus on reporting and writing stories for newspapers, magazines and Web sites.

Students will come away with knowledge of what makes (and what has made) environmental news; newsgathering techniques like interviewing and researching; and an emphasis on clear, crisp writing. A considerable part of the class is spent on how stories with complex scientific explanations can be conveyed to a general audience. What's worked in the past? What works today?

Journalistic standards of ethics and other conventions, like Associated Press style, will be expected.

Text and Readings

- Mark Neuzil and William Kovarik, *Mass Media and Environmental Conflict: America's Green Crusades* (Sage, 1996).
- Deborah Blum and Mary Knutson, *A Field Guide for Science Writers* (Oxford, 1997).
- Rachel Carson, "And No Birds Sing," Chapter 8 in *Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, 1962): 103-127.
- Thomas McNamee, "A Man in a Truck," et. seq. in *The Return of the Wolf to Yellowstone* (Holt, 1998): 235-306.
- Michael Frome, "The Green Ink Primer," in *Green Ink: An Introduction to Environmental Journalism* (Utah, 1998): 103-134.
- Mark Hertsgaard, "To The Nuclear Lighthouse," in *Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future* (Random House, 1998): 119-155.
- John McPhee, "Travels in Georgia," in *The Literary Journalists*, Norman Sims, ed., (Ballantine, 1984).
- Web resources are available at the home site for the Society of Environmental Journalists at www.sej.org and the National Association of Science Writers at www.nasw.org.
- Students will become familiar with the two main journals in the field, *Public Understanding of Science* (Cornell University) and *Science Communication* (University of Maryland).

Papers/Assignments

Each student will be responsible for producing several newspaper or magazine articles. Some papers will be assigned by the instructor and others will be the idea of the student. All ideas must be cleared by the instructor. Short stories are worth 25 points. Long stories are worth 100 points. Papers will be peer edited and presented to the class. Class participation counts for 10 percent of the final grade.

The nature of nature

Students will be given a bit of the natural world on the first day of class. It may be a

fossil, an animal bone, an arrowhead or something else. The item is to be used as a basis of a story about what it is. It's an exercise in news gathering and storytelling. A story is due the following week. 400 words maximum. 25 points.

Speech

Students will attend a speech by a person involved in the environmental movement, its opponents or a government agency and write a news story. 500 words maximum. 25 points.

Collection plate

A collection plate will be passed among the students, but not for accepting money. Rather, you will draw a story assignment from the plate, at random, and complete the assignment as instructed. 800 words maximum. 100 points.

Institution story

Students will choose a **local environmental institution or organization for a profile**. This could be an educational, political, economic, religious, entertainment or legal institution. 1,000 words maximum. 100 points.

Backgrounder

Students will pick a local person involved in an environmental issue (pro or con) and do a **background story**. The information contained in the story could be used as a sidebar for a longer feature, or material in an obituary, or as part of a personality profile. 800 words maximum. 100 points.

Final Project

Students will pick an environmental issue (in consultation with the instructor) and write a major, 1,500-word story (plus at least two sidebars of 400 words) on the topic.