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ES400A -- ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

Section MO1, Timetable # 26824

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Class location: Center for Innovation Teaching, Room 116

Prerequisites

ES300A, Environmental Perspectives, is a prerequisite for this course. Students who lack this prerequisite but have completed coursework in journalism should contact the instructor.

Purpose

The media are a powerful force in environmental protection. They largely determine not just which threats to the environment warrant the public's attention but also whose perspectives on those threats are deserving of an audience. For the journalists in the trenches at the radio and television networks, newspapers, and magazines it's a challenging job: these reporters must rapidly master scientifically complex and hotly contested subjects and convey them engagingly to viewers and readers. ES400A Environmental Journalism will introduce Environmental Studies students to reporting and writing techniques used by print, online and broadcast journalists as well as the ethical, practical and political factors that drive media coverage of the environment. The class will examine examples of the best environmental journalism; explore holes in mainstream media coverage; learn the basics of communicating with journalists; and discuss the ethical quandaries faced by journalists trapped between development interests and activists, between an impulse to be part of the solution and a responsibility to provide balanced coverage.

We will spend the semester reading journalism (both good and bad); talking about journalism with practitioners, scientists and activists; and creating good journalism. If possible, a field trip to an environmental science laboratory or field site will be offered (extra expense to be determined).

This is first and foremost a writing course and students will be expected to produce a number of pieces that will be critiqued by fellow students and the instructor. All assignments must be typed, double-spaced, conform to standard rules of English grammar, and be written to the assigned length. Deadlines are absolute in the journalism world. This class will operate by that standard. Late assignments will not be accepted without written note from a doctor or clinic.

Goals

Upon completion of this course you should:

- * Be able to recognize and critique various types of news stories
- * Be familiar with the mechanics of news reporting and be able to write a competent news story
- * Understand the factors that drive media coverage on the environment
- * Be comfortable approaching and working with journalists
- * Understand the ethical issues that confront environmental journalists
- * Know the basics of pitching a news story to a magazine, newspaper or broadcast outlet

Writing

To fulfill these goals you will be asked to concentrate on a local environmental issue (such as fish farming, renewable energy or water quality) and to report it in depth through the semester. You will write components of this project along the way, including a brief memo on the topic, a well-researched article, an interview with a scientist or government official, and a profile of an interesting person connected to the topic. A final project will combine all of your reporting and research into one long feature-style article.

Reader

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson: Introduction by Linda Lear, “A Fable for Tomorrow”, “Elixirs of Death”, “And No Birds Sing”
“There Is No Dispassionate Objectivity”, “When Journalists Speak Truth to Power” and “Stories Are Where You Find Them” in Green Ink: An Introduction to Environmental Journalism by Michael Frome
“Hidden Health Hazards” in *The IRE Journal*, July-August 2002
“Environmental Reporting: Exploring the Beat” in *Neiman Reports*, Winter 2002
“The Natural History of Hazard Reporting” in Reporting on Risk by Singer and Endreny
“Fooling Ourselves?” debate from *SEJ Talk* online discussion group
“Preventing Precaution” in Trust Us, We’re Experts by Rampton and Stauber
Selected articles from *SFWeekly*, *The Seattle Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *AlbertaViews*, *focus on women*, *Monday Magazine* and other sources

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

1. Tuesday, May 13

Discussion topics: What is news and who are the journalists that produce it? News diversity, from magazines and newspapers to broadcast and online, plus alternative media. What makes a good news story? What is a local angle? Fundamental principles of journalism: Independence and balance.

2. Thursday, May 15

Discussion topic: Why Rachel Carson is an icon for environmental journalists.

Exercises: News review. Brainstorm ideas for semester project.

Assignments: Read selections from Silent Spring and “When Journalists Speak Truth to Power” in Green Ink. Bring in environmental news stories from *The Times Colonist*.

3. Tuesday, May 20

Discussion topics: Finding stories, framing questions, and reaching sources.

Speaker: Stephen Hume, columnist and senior writer, *Vancouver Sun*.

Exercises: News review.

Assignments: Read “Stories Are Where You Find Them” in Green Ink, “Hidden Health Hazards” in *The IRE Journal*, and “Fear in the Fields” from *The Seattle Times*. Bring in stories from *The Vancouver Sun* for news review.

4. Thursday, May 22 (MEET IN COMPUTER LAB, HSD A170)

Discussion topics: News writing: Capturing the news in a hard lede, using active language, and translating scientific mumbo jumbo. Expectations for 800-1000 words news assignment.

Exercises: Practice hard news ledes, then write 200-word news stories from jumbled information.

Assignments: Hand in two-page memo on your chosen semester topic. Read “Fallout” in *SFWeekly*.

5. Tuesday, May 27

Discussion topic: Interviewing. News writing II: logically structuring the body.

Exercises: News review.

Assignments: Read selection by Henry from *Nieman Reports* “Environmental Reporting: Exploring the Beat”. Study news stories in the Capital Times section of Monday’s *Times Colonist*, as well as any environmental stories in the A section. Read “Ten Tips for a Better Interview” by the International Center for Journalists and “Getting the Most from Your Interviews” by Steve Buttry, both at www.journalism.org.

6. Thursday, May 29 (MEET IN CLASSROOM, THEN GO TO COMPUTER LAB, HSD A170)

Discussion topic: Producing under pressure.

Exercise: Mock press conference with Andrew Weaver, Professor, School of Earth and Ocean Sciences. Write a short news story, using quotations and non-technical language.

Assignments: Turn in first draft of 800-1000 word news article on your semester topic. Read “The Science of Climate Change” by Weaver in *Geoscience Canada*.

7. Tuesday, June 3

Discussion topic: The news articles.

Speaker: Carla Wilson, staff writer, The Times Colonist.

Exercise: News review. Peer editing of news articles.

Assignments: Analyze Carla Wilson’s stories on the Broughton Archipelago for news review.

8. Thursday, June 5

Discussion topic: Reporting on Risk. Magazine writing. Finding an angle, broadening the lead, structuring a longer article.

Assignments: Read selections from *Nieman Reports* by Ropeik and Fagin. Read “The Natural History of Hazard Reporting” from Reporting on Risk. Bring magazine feature stories for news review.

Read “How Green is BP?” in *The New York Times Magazine*, “Digging a Carbon Hole for Canada” in *AlbertaViews*“, and “At home with enviro-diva Briony Penn” in *focus on women*. Turn in second draft of 800-1500 word news article.

9. Tuesday, June 10

Discussion topic: Radio, television and photojournalism: Exploiting images and natural sound, using conversational and colorful language, and condensing without condescending.

Exercises: Watch award-winning environmental TV productions. Write a brief radio news script. Return and review news articles.

Assignments: Read selections from *Nieman Reports* by Pawelski, Thomson, and Braasch.

10. Thursday, June 12

Discussion topic: Objectivity and advocacy in journalism.

Exercise: Peer review of profiles.

Assignments: Turn in 800-1000 word interesting person profile. Read selection in *Nieman Reports* by Detjen; *SEJ-Talk* discussion; and “There Is No Dispassionate Objectivity” in Green Ink.

11. Tuesday, June 17 (MEET IN CLASSROOM, THEN GO TO COMPUTER LAB, HSD A170)

Discussion topic: Feature writing II: the feature lede.

Speaker: Environmental scientist, journalist and activist Briony Penn.

Exercise: Discuss feature ledes. Work in class on Lede, Nut graph and outline for 2000-2500 word feature.

Assignment: Bring in feature articles and analysis of ledes.

12. Thursday, June 19

Discussion Topic: Communicating with the press: The good, the bad and the ugly in PR.

Freelancing I: Writing dazzling query letters.

Exercise: Peer editing of feature drafts.

Assignment: Read "Preventing Precaution" from Trust Us, We're Experts. Turn in first draft due of 2000-2500 word feature article synthesizing research, interviews and profile.

13. Tuesday, June 24 (MEET IN CLASSROOM, THEN GO TO COMPUTER LAB, HSD A170)

Discussion topic: Environmental reporting today: The state of the beat

Exercise: News review.

Assignments: Read selections from *Nieman Reports* by Shabecoff, Ward, and Alexander.

14. Thursday, June 26

Discussion topic: The Future: SEJ, Freelancing, and FOI

Exercise: Course evaluations.

Assignments: Hand in Final draft of 2000-2500 word feature article. Hand in one page query letter.

Grading

Semester topic:

- * 2 page Memo on an environmental issue and plan of attack for an in-depth report: 5%
- * 800-1000 word News Article first draft: 10%
- * 800-1500 word News Article second draft: 10%
- * 800-1000 word Profile of an interesting person: 10%
- * 2250-2750 word Article synthesizing all elements gathered: 30%
- * Letter to a newspaper or magazine proposing that the article be published: 5%

In-class exercises: 15%

Class participation: 15%

Final article will be available for pick up on Friday, July 11, 2003 from the boxes outside Sedgewick Rm. C145; Grades will not be posted but will be available online.

Grading Policy: The following correlation of letter grade and numerical score will be used in the class. Some flexibility, no more than 1-2%, will be used in the application of this scale.

GP	Letter Grade	Range (%)
9	A+	90-100
8	A	85-89
7	A-	80-84
6	B+	75-79
5	B	70-74

4	B-	65-69
3	C+	60-64
2	C	55-59
1	D	50-54
0	F	<50; work not completed

NOTE:

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive and safe learning and working environment for all its members. Student evaluation forms now include questions on the respect shown by the instructor for students, particularly those of diverse origins, orientation and physical abilities.

ES400A Semester Topics

Your writing assignments for this course will all revolve around one LOCAL environmental issue. You CAN NOT write about Canada's National Parks. You CAN write about mismanagement of a local National Park or efforts to have a National Park designated near Victoria. Below you will find a list of possible topics to help get you started. You can select one and find a specific angle to make it local and focused, or you can develop your own. Either way you will need to get my approval, and then stick with whichever topic you choose for the duration of the class.

Aquaculture – Sea Urchins.

Fish farming – Should there be more?

Pacific fisheries – How are they managed? How are they doing?

Salmon status of local streams – Profile a stream.

Drinking water – How safe is it? What contaminants abound?

Forestry – What is being cut today? How much? Why?

Alternative transportation – Cycling. Buses and UVic.

West Nile Virus – How will it affect wildlife? Will cities spray?

Wind power – Offshore projects abound.

Tidal power – Local tests for a new technology.

Biomass energy – Is burning wood chips renewable environmentally preferable?

Sea mammals – How are the Orcas? Local impacts, favorite spots for sea mammals.

Land use – Tree cutting by landowners.

Climate change – Regional impacts and responses.

Endangered species – Local species at risk.

First nations and natural resources – Recent treaties. Future treaties. Conflicts.

Parks – Protected? Added? Proposed? Endeavour Hot Vents.

Lifestyle – Hiking. Kayaking.

Pesticides -- Are they acceptable in the city?

Greening the garden – Promoting local flora and fauna at home.

Power conservation – Can it make a difference in Victoria?

Offshore oil and gas – Is it safe? What are the unknowns?

Water supply and conservation – Why should Victorians cut back? How can they?

Offshore sewage dumping – Where does *it* go? Is the practice safe? If so, is it right?

Natural gas pipeline – a net gain for the environment?

Farming – Agricultural land reserve.

Recycling – Where does it go? Is it really recycled? How does CRD rate?

Environmental research with a local angle

Big polluters – CFB Esquimalt, UVic,

Ecotourism – Is it Green? Is it growing locally and why?

Future of the automobile – Hydrogen and fuel cells.

Hydropower – The dispute in Strathcona.

Invasive species – Scotch Broom, etc.

Land Use – UVic's campus plan.

Enforcement – Reduced policing for construction near streams.