

Syllabus

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

ENW325

Spring 2008

Instructor: Dr. James Simon
Class meets: MR, 1230-145p, CNS304
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Office hours: M 10a-12 noon, 5-6p; T 1-2p; I am here many additional hours; just call first.

Recycling and toxic waste issues. Protecting endangered species. Land use and zoning disputes.. Environmental issues touch our lives in many ways, and this journalism course will give you experience in researching and writing about the environment and related science and health concerns. You will visit environmental sites, learn from reporters working in this area, and then choose issues at the local, state or national level to write about. There is no prerequisite, but students are urged to have completed some course work in journalism, mass communication, environmental science or environmental ethics.

Dr. Simon covered environmental issues for 10 years as a journalist. He served as Assistant Secretary of the Environment in Massachusetts, and he now conducts research on environmental journalism. To better understand the life of an environmental journalist, students will analyze the results of a survey, conducted by Dr. Simon, that included interviews with environmental journalists at every newspaper and television station in the United States.

Required Materials:

- ❖ Blum, D. & Knudsdon, M. (2005). *A field guide for science writers*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Goldstein, N. (Ed.) *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. Reading, MA: Perseus Books. (any edition)
- ❖ Nelson, P. (1995). *Ten practical tips for environmental reporting*. Reston VA: Center for Foreign Journalists
- ❖ 2" three-ring binder with formal, tabbed section dividers (for your portfolio)
- ❖ Itule, B. D. & Anderson, D. A. (1997). *News writing and reporting for today's media*. (5th Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. (*Used for review purposes early in semester; copies on reserve at library*)

Recommended: Any pocket dictionary

Class format. The course will use a triangulated approach to learning about environmental reporting:

- ❖ You will revisit the basics of reporting and news writing, then build on and expand those basics as you learn the craft. You will write a variety of stories based on news conferences, site visits, and your own personal interests.
- ❖ You will meet environmental reporters and discuss how news stories get assigned, processed and presented to the public.
- ❖ There is a strong hands-on component to the course. You will take part in field visits to campus and off-campus environmental sites, then write about those sites.

Stories and Reflective Essays. You will be writing two press conference stories, a class project story and an Original Story. For each, you will attached a reflective essay, a cover memo that give you a chance to discuss:

- ✓ What textbook/classroom lessons have been relevant (or misleading)
- ✓ How the story compared to others you may have done
- ✓ What problems you encountered
- ✓ What lessons you learned
- ✓ What skills you still need to sharpen

For most stories, you will:

- a. Generate a story idea and bounce it off me for feedback. Classmates also will offer advice. Most stories will call for Web research that will add depth to your reporting and add context to the final story.
- b. Type a two-sentence budget line. The first sentence describes the focus on the project. The second sentence explains why the audience will care.

Example: I will do an overview on recycling (or the lack of it) at Fairfield University. At a time when student interest in the environment is high and universities boast about their sophisticated recycling programs, Fairfield has no comprehensive program and has lagged behind most other schools.

- c. Work on a complete draft version of the story. Save all drafts for the portfolio (details later). Bring copies of the story to class for comment by peers.
- d. Rewrite the story and submit it to me for a grade.

e. After I return this rewritten version of the story with a grade, you must rewrite it once more and place it in your portfolio, putting the most recent rewritten version on top. I often will encourage you to run off another copy and submit it to the Mirror.

I will look at the portfolio during our two individual meetings, held mid-semester and at the end of the semester.

Grading Standard

Here is the standard I use in grading writing assignments:

“A” – Excellent. Publishable as is. No significant style errors. Shows superior command of facts, judgment, organization and writing. On some level, extra-ordinary.

“B” – Superior on some level. Overall assignment handled very well. Very few style errors. Copy only needs a bit of rewriting and polishing before it could be published.

“C” – Acceptable job. Not a story someone would read unless the information was really needed. Several style errors. Some basic organizational or writing problems. Still needs significant rewriting.

“D” -- Unsatisfactory. Poor piece. Lacks fundamental judgment and/or writing skills. Frequent style errors. Important facts omitted.

“F” – Unacceptable level of achievement.

Grading Summary

- Two guest speaker stories @ 7 pts each 14 points
- Class project 25 points
- Original story 25 points
- Three AP quizzes @ 4 pts each 12 points
- Test 14 points
- Class participation 10 points

TOTAL 100%

There is no mid-term exam ... no final exam ... and no term paper. Most students like this arrangement. But in return, you are expected to put extra time into this course throughout the 14 weeks of class.

AP Stylebook. Professional journalists are expected to follow a stylebook, and so are you. In this class, you will follow *The Associated Press Stylebook*, which is used in more news rooms and public relations offices than any other. There will be two stylebook quizzes early in the semester; I will give you a study guide to the most important terms. The quiz will be open-book, but you will have less than one minute per question to complete it, giving you time only to double check some of your answers. I encourage you to study in groups for the test. You will lose 1 point for each style error made in subsequent stories.

Attendance. Skipping class is like skipping a day of work. If you can't manage your time and you can't handle deadline pressures, then journalism isn't a good career option for you. Daily deadlines are a fact of life not only in newsrooms, but in all sorts of media work.

I am very old-fashioned about attendance; I take it every period based on the theory that you learn more when you are in class. Your final grade in the course will drop two percentage points starting with the third cut (e.g., a 90 will drop to an 88). Save your cuts for when you are sick or have an emergency, medical or academic. The only exception will be made the lingering illnesses or family emergencies that force you to miss consecutive classes. For your grade, I also take into account your being chronically late to class. For my sake and the sake of your classmates, please be on time.

If you are going to miss a class, I expect you to call or e-mail ahead of class and tell me not to expect you there. We then can make arrangements for you to make up the work missed.

Class participation. Participating in class is a given; you are expected to come to class well prepared and to take an active part in discussions. If you are unprepared for class repeatedly, I reserve the right to adjust your final grade.

E-mail. Today's journalists rely on computer communication, and so will you. For this class, you need to have an e-mail address and to get in the habit of checking your e-mail regularly, preferably every day. Some class assignments may be made via e-mail. I check my e-mail twice a day on average; it is the best way to communicate with me. Don't hesitate to call me in my office, though, if you have a more immediate need.

Writing Format. All writing assignments must be double-spaced and typed on 8½ by 11" paper using a conventional font. Writing a headline is optional. Place your name, the type of assignment (e.g., Draft, Major Story #1) and your campus telephone number in upper right hand corner of the first page. Be sure the pages are stapled.

Getting Stories Published. Many students emerge from this course with a portfolio of up to four stories that they do for class, then submit to the Mirror and get published. On their resume, students can list themselves as a contributing writer to the Mirror, then use their portfolio of published work to improve their chances of getting a good internship or initial job out of college. There is no requirement to submit your stories. But to encourage you to do so, I will raise the final grade by two-thirds of a letter (a C becomes a B-; a B+ becomes an A) for any class story that you submit to the Mirror and get published.

When grading your papers, I will often note whether I think it is a good candidate for publication, but you also can act on your own. After you see my comments on your graded version, consider any suggested changes, then send your story via e-mail to Mirror news editor Ali Bart at *08_abart@stagweb*. Write on the top: *I did this story for Dr. Simon's Environmental Reporting class and I want to submit it to the Mirror for possible publication. You can reach me at extension XXXX with any questions. Thank you.* Add a byline, listing your name as you want it to appear atop the story.

Ali or another Mirror editor also will come to class early in the semester to explain the procedure and answer any questions. Keep a copy of any stories appearing in the Mirror. Show them to me at our end of the semester portfolio meeting to ensure I give you the grade boost.

Gathering Information. We will be discussing, at length, the ground rules for gathering information and when you should go "off the record" with a source. But until we do, you must introduce yourself to all sources by saying you are working on a news story for class that **may** get printed in The Mirror. (My advice: say you are "working on a story for The Mirror on Subject X.") Again, you must alert sources from the start that their remarks may wind up in the paper. If the source is reluctant to talk to you, use your persuasive skills (and tips we will learn) to get them to cooperate. But under no circumstances should you say the story is just for class; too many students make such a statement, get the story published in the Mirror for extra credit, and then face an angry source.

Sources routinely ask to see a story before it is published. This is widely frowned upon in journalism. Do not agree to show anyone the story before publication. Instead, offer to call them back and double check their own quotes and any information they gave you. This will result in a stronger, more accurate story and avoid any ethical dilemma. Obviously, if you agree to call back a source and double check the information, you must do so.

If you violate these rules -- by telling sources their remarks won't be used in the newspaper or by agreeing to let them see a story before publication -- it is grounds for receiving a failing grade on the story.

Deadly errors. News stories lose all credibility when the reader notices a glaring error and starts to wonder how many other problems there are within the story. Imagine a Mirror profile on your roommate that misspells her/his name in the first sentence; would you believe the rest of the story? Accuracy is the most important element in a news story. Therefore, misspelling the name of a principal actor in story will result in your receiving a failing grade on the story. THIS HAPPENS AT LEAST TWICE A YEAR; DON'T LET IT HAPPEN TO YOU!

Honor Code. It is a violation of the Honor Code to submit all or part of someone else's work or ideas as one's own. If a student violates the Honor Code, the faculty member may refer the matter to the Office of Student Life. If found guilty, the student may be penalized with failure of the assignment or failure of the course. The student also may be reprimanded or suspended from the University.

Dr. Simon adds: Let me underscore: do not pass off someone else's work as your own. It will be especially obvious in this class if you have a friend write your major news stories, then find yourself unable to write in class on your own. But I feel it is desirable to have a roommate or friend read your news story and make suggestions for improving it before you submit it to me. But they cannot do the actual writing.

Class Schedule (subject to change)

Part One: Review, News Writing and the Environmental Story

<i>DATE</i>	<i>IN-CLASS ACTIVITY</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Mon Jan 14	Welcome. The journalism environment for environmental reporting.	
Th Jan 17	Ingredients of news, leads	
Mon Jan 21, Th Jan 24	No class, MLK holiday and festivities	
M Jan 28	Organizing and developing stories AP quiz 1	
Th Jan 31	Guest speaker 1: Interviewing, web sites	Story due via e-mail by 10a Wednesday
M Feb 4	Nelson, 10 Practical Tips	

Part Two. Information Gathering: Survey Research

Th Feb 7	Elements of survey research; examining and building poll stories AP quiz 2	
M Feb 11	Survey Research: Interviewing techniques	
Th Feb 14	Final preparation for weekend event; data inputting	
	Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 16-17 Service Learning Project, CT Audubon, Fairfield. Two-hour class requirement	Note: all data to be inputted by Wednesday Feb. 20, 10 a.m.
Mon Feb 18	Holiday	
Th Feb 21	Analyzing initial results	
Mon Feb 25	Draft story on results; adding expert comment	Graded story due via e-mail by 10 a.m. Thurs.
Th Feb 28	Discussion: Varieties of approaches	
Mar 3-Mar 7	SPRING BREAK	

Mon Mar 10	Ethics: Objectivity vs. advocacy Truth vs facts	
Th Mar 13	Guest speaker 2: Ethics	Story due via e-mail by 10 a.m. Friday

Part Three:. Building The Environmental Story

Mon Mar 17	Off-site visit: Options for individual stories	
Thurs Mar 20 Mon Mar 24	EASTER BREAK	
Th M 27	Discussion: Your plan for your original story. Field guide for science writers 1	Original Story web research completed
Mon M 31	NO CLASS. Individual 1:1 meetings	Original Story: Graded budget line due
Th Apr 3	Field guide 2 Rewriting press releases, wire copy, topping stories	
Mon Apr 7	Field guide 3 Proof reading vs. copy editing vs. fact checking	Outline
Th Apr 10	Test AP quiz 3	
Mon Apr 14	Peer review 1	Graded full draft
Th Apr 17	Peer review 2	
Mon Apr 21	Who are the environment reporters 1	Graded final version
Th Apr 24	Who are the environment reporters 2	
Mon Apr 28	The ethics of environmental reporting II Media literacy First amendment Class wrap-up Schedule 1:1 portfolio meetings	

