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Journalism
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Course name: The Green Beat
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Sustainability suffuses my new environmental journalism course, The Green Beat. The course will carry the intensive writing designation and will be offered for the first time in Spring, 2015. I will seek cross-listing partnerships with the Environmental Sciences Department and other Emory departments.

My experience in the Piedmont Project is reflected throughout this course. Indeed, I came away from the seminar with more ideas than I could possibly integrate in launching this class. Like the Piedmont Project, The Green Beat is intended to raise student awareness about sustainability, the environmental challenges, and the threats to our wellbeing. I have structured the course to provide students the writing, reporting and technology tools to join the crucial public discourse on our environmental future.

This course includes a number of opportunities to involve students in environmental issues and learn through first-hand experience. I believe strongly in taking learning beyond the classroom. The environment provides broad scope for this and many points of engagement. Some of them are:

- A visit to the new Emory University water reclamation facility with Amy Kirby, an assistant professor in the Rollins School of Public Health and a Piedmont Project colleague, to discuss looming water scarcity and ways to conserve and use water more efficiently. Students will later discuss the experience and devise ways to report and write about the challenges in the news media;
- A viewing of the “Healthy Human Habitats” TEDTalk by Howard Frumkin, dean of the University of Washington School of Public Health; students will then write a blog about whether their hometowns are healthy communities and how they can be improved;
- A class exercise in a forested area near Emory in which students spend a half-hour by themselves and use all their senses to observe the area; they will then write a blog as an exercise in nature writing; (I use an excerpt from *The Forest Unseen* as a reading for this exercise.)
- A field trip with an environmental sciences professor and his graduate students to report on their research and make observations; students then write an anecdotal lead and nut paragraph for a feature story about the project.
- A unit on climate change that includes a visit to The Weather Channel and a meeting with a meteorologist;
- A study unit on hydraulic fracking and its impact on the environment and discussion of how the news media should be covering the issue in local communities.

- An exercise on urban sprawl in which the students will reenact a township zoning board hearing on a proposed development and will play the roles of the landowner, developer, lawyers, zoning officials, environmental and community activists, and journalists and editors;
- An investigating environmental issues discussion with Michael Coren, an Emory Journalism graduate and a science journalist who writes for The Economist, Foreign Policy and other publications; students will read and view investigative journalism on the environment.

IDS385: THE GREEN BEAT

Emory University

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THE COURSE

About The Green Beat

“The environment is everything but me.”
Albert Einstein

Every day environmental issues grow in importance and complexity. Science and technology have advanced our quality of life but also fallen short in resolving the crisis of pollution and global climate change threatening the world around us. The news media, not scientists, are the public’s primary sources of information on these issues and shape the decisions of governments, institutions, businesses and individuals. Nuanced, balanced journalism is key to grasping these challenges and seeking effective ways forward.

This is a journalism class focused on reporting and writing about the environment for newspapers, radio, magazines, online sites and social media. Since the journalism industry has become multimedia in nature, you will learn ways to write and use technology to produce powerful print, online and broadcast journalism. This course does not assume any background in journalism.

Student work will be published on a course ScholarBlogs site that will allow you to read each other’s writing, engage in online conversations and create a course community. Although the assignments are designed with strong digital components, you will still focus on the traditional skills of researching, identifying and developing sources, reporting in-depth, interviewing, making observations, and improving your writing. You will find journalistic techniques form the basis of all writing for non-expert audiences. Our goal will be masterly storytelling across media platforms.

As a writer on science and the environment, your task will be to interpret scientific research and engage the public in environmental controversies and issues. Beyond translating science, you will be expected to understand articles, events and developments and be able to explain their meaning. Critical judgment and skepticism are important qualities of successful reporters and writers. We will work on developing these attributes

by reading and listening to top-notch journalism, discussing techniques with reporters and scientists, and striving to produce stories that assess all sides, are nuanced and accurate, and are written to captivate readers and viewers.

Each student will choose a compelling topic for the semester and fully research it. Strong writing is grounded in thorough research and reporting. The majority of your writing this semester will focus on that subject. This is an opportunity to expand your horizons and also develop in-depth knowledge in a particular area. In journalism, we call this developing a beat.

In *The Green Beat*, a writing intensive course, revision and rewriting will be as important as deadlines in writing news. We will focus on the writing process--producing powerful and original journalism through stages of writing, critique and revision. You will research issues and developments and conduct interviews for your stories. You will write, learn from the critiques of your writing, and then rewrite. I will meet you regularly to discuss your writing.

I will conduct this class as a writing workshop and expect each of you to “workshop” one of your stories during the semester. This will involve submitting a draft of your story to other students ahead of time and then doing a short presentation explaining your writing decisions to the class. We will then discuss the piece.

A workshop benefits the writer by learning what others find confusing and needs rewriting. It also benefits the rest of the class—the editors—by discovering ways to improve their own work. Journalism is a public act, and you have to get used to having your writing discussed and critiqued publicly. That said, everyone should be polite and cite both strong and weak points.

I also expect you to be an engaged participant. Students must come to class prepared to discuss readings and assignments and will be asked to submit questions for guest speakers ahead of presentations. Good journalists and scientists are well-informed and critical readers and viewers. You should be regularly reading *The New York Times* and its science section and following environment developments in the news. I also ask you to read the blogs listed on the course Blackboard site.

This class will enable students to learn side by side. Our goal as a class is to gain insight across disciplines and learn from each other’s strengths.

Course Texts and Materials

Silent Spring, Rachel Carson

Course readings will be posted on Course Reserves

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

This is a writing-intensive journalism course. You will write and undertake different kinds of print, broadcast and online writing—a blog, an op-ed, a feature story, a podcast

and social media. You also will complete a research project to identify your semester topic and learn to evaluate sources. We will emphasize clear, concise writing, solid research and reporting, and the accurate presentation of facts.

We will pay close attention to the mechanics of good writing: grammar, spelling, punctuation, precise word choice, strong sentences and well-organized paragraphs and stories. We will use these building blocks to help you develop ease in writing for the professional world.

For each of the op-ed, podcast and feature assignments, you will submit rough and final drafts. When you submit your rough drafts, we will hold a writing workshop on the assignment. I will assign the pieces to be discussed in each workshop. After the workshop, I will critique and grade your rough draft and be available to meet with you. You will then rewrite and submit a final draft for grading.

All assignments must be submitted by e-mail on the designated due date at the beginning of class. Deadlines are taken seriously in this course and late assignments will not be accepted, except in the case of a documented personal or family emergency.

Please submit your assignments via Emory email. The Emory spam filter will likely remove your assignments if they are submitted on an outside email account.

Prepare your stories as if they are being submitted to a publication. Use a word processor. Double-space stories, and leave one-inch margins. Please use 12-point type.

1. Researching your class topic, 10 percent.

Choose a topic for the semester and fully research the subject. Write a two-page report summarizing the main issues, recent developments and sources you might use in your story. Choose at least five sources and analyze them for your research, including a news article, opinion piece or op-ed, a scientific study, a radio report, and a newspaper feature or magazine article. You will complete an assessment handout for each article and submit the five assessments with your report.

The project will lay the groundwork for your writing this semester. I expect you to stay current on your topic throughout the semester and share news and insights about your beat via our Twitter class feed.

2. Op-ed, 15 percent

Write a fully developed opinion piece or op-ed of 800 words or about four pages. The article, based upon your chosen semester topic, should be researched well and follow a line of argument.

3. Feature article, 25 percent.

Write a 1200-word feature story (five-six pages) related to the topic you selected for class. You will complete recorded interviews for this assignment and also use them in producing a podcast.

4. Podcast assignment, 20 percent. Write a podcast script on the topic you selected for the course. You will incorporate your script and recorded interviews into a produced podcast.

5. Blog and social media, 15 percent.

You will write two 600-word blogs and create one online presentation. You also will be expected to share news and insights about your beat via the Twitter class feed.

6. Class participation, 15 percent

We live in lively and challenging times. I expect you to prepare for and participate fully in class discussions and presentations. When you are reading and responding to personal emails, you are not participating. This will count against your overall participation grade.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

I place great emphasis upon these responsibilities:

1. Honor Code

Plagiarism undermines a journalist's credibility. It will not be tolerated. Any incident will be reported to the Emory Honor Council. Please read the attached the Journalism Program Plagiarism Statement carefully.

2. Attendance and Punctuality

Attending every class and arriving on time is imperative. Everyone's input is important to a rich and beneficial classroom experience. I will take attendance at the beginning of each class and expect everyone to be present. Late arrivals are very disruptive and disrespectful to your classmates and me.

I consider more than two unexcused absences excessive and will reduce your grade in proportion to the number above this limit. Other absences for illness or personal emergencies need to be documented in writing. In-class participation represents a significant portion of your grade. It is important for you to attend every class meeting and be engaged.

3. Deadlines

Assignments are due by the class period on the stipulated deadline. Late papers, without a valid excuse, will not be accepted.

4. Accuracy

A major factual error on a paper, such as the misspelling of a name, will result in a lowered grade. Students who make repeated major errors will be penalized.

5. Copy Preparation

Prepare your stories as if they are being submitted to a publication. Use a word processor. Double-space stories, and leave one-inch margins.

CLASS CALENDAR

WEEK 1:

What is news and how is it reported and written in multimedia journalism?

How have journalists covered the environment?

What makes for high-quality environmental journalism?

How should the public judge environment and science news coverage?

Good writing and hooking the reader

Tweeting your environmental beat

WEEK 2:

Discussion of *Silent Spring* and Rachel Carson as a journalism model

The writing life in a life of science, guest speaker

WEEK 3:

Story ideas, finding and cultivating sources, and story pitches

Researching your beat

Guest speaker: Jennifer Elder, research librarian, Woodruff Library

Sources and attributing information

WEEK 4:

The explainer blog

Explain Everything presentation

Listen like a science writer

WEEK 5:

Writing the op-ed

The power of observation: journalism and the scientific method

A walk in the woods: the power of observation

WEEK 6:

Nature writing

The feature: telling the bigger story

WEEK 7:

Workshop on op-ed rough drafts

Radio writing and delivery, guest speaker

WEEK 8:

Audacity workshop and in-class editing

Journalists and scientists

Story structure: print vs. broadcast

WEEK 9:

Health and the environment: is your home community healthy?

“Healthy Human Habitats,” TEDTalk by Howard Frumkin, dean of the University of Washington School of Public Health

The feature story and the anecdotal lead

Spice up your writing with quotations

WEEK 10:

Field trip: reporting and observation in the field

Reporting scientific studies and writing about uncertainty and risk

WEEK 11:

News and numbers

Interviewing

WEEK 12:

Writing workshop on feature story rough drafts

Reporting on international and global health threats

WEEK 13:

Scarce water: field trip to the Emory water reclamation facility

Climate change and the politics of science, guest speaker

WEEK 14:

Writing workshop on podcast scripts

Investigating environmental issues

WEEK 15:

Urban sprawl and its environmental costs

Hydraulic fracking and its impact on the economy and environment

WEEK 16:

Showtime and class presentations