

Environmental Reporting, 382-0
Wednesdays 2-5 p.m.
Evanston Campus, MTC 3-107
Office hours: Monday 1-4 p.m.
By appointment

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Environmental Reporting Seminar

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The ***Environmental Reporting Seminar*** teaches you to understand and report science and public policy focused on environmental news, nature writing and global issues such as global warming and energy alternatives. The course teaches you how to obtain information relevant to environmental and natural resources issues, evaluate it and make it relevant and understandable to your audience. The course includes weekly workshops, field trips, research and story assignments to develop reporting, sourcing and cross-media storytelling skills at the foundation of science reporting and environmental journalism.

LEARNING GOALS

- Develop compelling environmental stories relevant to a lay audience
- Report environmental issues using multiple story forms and media formats
- Recognize the fundamentals of good environmental writing and research through seminal works of science and environmental journalism
- Obtain and evaluate reliable information
- Master the art of finding the best sources and asking the right questions
- Develop interpretive skills to read journal articles and the science press
- Sharpen analytical skills and the ability to recognize the scientific merit of research and technology through field trips and the weeklong practicum.
- Identify the impact of a story for a lay audience
- Learn caution and skepticism regarding “breakthroughs” and “discoveries.”

CLASS FORMAT

We will meet weekly for a three-hour workshop and seminar that will include lots of reporting and writing in varied media and story formats. You will have the chance to meet and interview different experts during the quarter, both in class and in the field. You are expected to research and prepare questions based on the information they provide and your own reading. Homework assignments will build on skills and strategies learned in class. **Class will not meet on Wednesday, Nov. 26, so you can get home for Thanksgiving. Anyone staying on campus for the holiday is invited to join my family for dinner.**

REQUIREMENTS

Assigned reading:

Fixing Climate, by Dr. Wallace Broecker, Columbia University

Earth from Above, by Claire L. Parkinson, NASA

You can read selectively from other books in areas that interest you and are pertinent to the stories you cover. I will distribute throughout the quarter examples of outstanding environmental journalism and classic pieces that will show you how good writing and reporting in a variety of media and formats enhance the subject of science. Readings will be distributed in class or assigned each week and posted on our Blackboard site as well. In addition, you will be expected to read the weekly science section in either Time or Newsweek, the Science Tuesday section in the New York Times and at least one specialty publication such as Science or Nature. Keep up with science shows such as Nova on PBS.

You can browse through the major technical journals at the Technological Institute library on the Evanston campus or in the medical school library at the Ward Building downtown. Technical journals are abstracted in the NU libraries' electronic resources and as full texts on line.

Develop stories:

You will produce stories both in class and as homework on topics that include:

Energy and energy alternatives

Global warming, weather systems and weather research

Natural resources and recycling

Wildlife and ecology

Agriculture - competition for food and biofuels, contaminants, pesticides

Water: competition for Great Lakes water and pollution concerns

Oceans and ocean research – the next frontier

Green trends in transportation and architecture

Environmental medicine

Health and the environment

Cancer and the environment

GRADES

In-class assignments and participation will count for 40 percent of the grade, homework assignments will count for 40 percent and final projects will count for 20 percent.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are required to follow Medill's academic integrity policy. Fabrication, plagiarism and other violations of the policy will not be tolerated and may lead to

dismissal. The integrity of your byline is the most critical resource you possess as a journalist.

CLASS OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

Week 1, Sept. 24: **What is science and environmental writing?** How to cover, research and source environmental issues. Everyone will receive the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change. We will discuss the specific reporting and writing strategies to make this accessible to our audience and everyone will write a 300-word story based on the article by the end of class.

Homework: Based on the IPCC report, write an article on “10 Things You Can Do to Help the Environment.” You can bullet the items. Contact at least two local experts for ideas and quote them in the story. You will do additional research on the environmental IPCC findings and recommendations to complete this assignment. Tell us not only what people can do but how much it will help.

Alternative homework: Read and write a 350-400 word story of Richard Alley’s lecture (passed out in class), “Abrupt Climate Changes: Oceans, Ice and Us.” Due research on the Web or talk to experts and quote them to explain to readers anything you don’t understand. review

Week 2, Oct. 1: **Localizing a story.** We will take a nationally released environmental report and discuss how to “bring it home.” We will sift out the local statistics and impact from the story, using the national picture for context. Students will split into teams to write the story in different formats: a news summary, a Q and A, a bulleted report on the top findings of the report, quality, a “charticle” or table comparing the problem in our city to other cities. We will share results in class.

Homework: Write a 500-word book review of *Fixing Climate*, the book on our assigned reading list. Compare the book to at least one other on and public policy and how to determine up to date changes to the legislation that may impact your story. A writing assignment will follow the discussion.

Week 3. Oct. 8. **Share book reviews in class.** The rest of the class will be devoted to a workshop on how to assess legislation and public policy and how to determine up to date changes to the legislation that may impact your story. A writing assignment will follow the discussion..

Homework: Produce an audio slideshow to tell a local story about recycling, water pollution, transportation alternatives or another environmental alternative. Due Week 5, Oct. 22. Submit on a CD, DVD or flash memory.

Week 4, Oct. 15: **Underreported stories: finding the scoop.** You will interview Chris Williamson of the Sierra Club on local, state and national events her

organization is researching. The events – such as bringing the Olympics to Chicago – have major but underreported environmental impacts to consider. Homework: Continue to work on the audio slideshow. Read *Earth from Above* for an in-class teleconference interview with author Claire Parkinson of NASA.

Week 5, Oct. 22: **Focus on global warming. We will interview Claire Parkinson for the first hour of class**, show our slideshows, and then write a story based on the interview.

Homework: Research and write a story about a natural area such as a native prairie, a forest preserve or the ridges along Ridge Road carved as the last glaciers receded. Write a 500-word story accompanied by photographs. Due Week 7, Nov. 5. Submit the photos on a CD or you can create and submit the complete layout.

Conferences: I will schedule individual conferences with you.

Week 6, Oct. 29: **Meet with Chicago Tribune Environmental Reporter Michael Hawthorne**. This interview with Hawthorne is downtown at 1 p.m. Class is over at the end of the interview but you must file a story based on the meeting by 10 p.m. that evening.

Homework: Continue to work on the story due Nov. 5.

Week 7, Nov. 5: **Focus on environmental health**. Talk about our nature stories and read some in class. We will learn to use Web sites and statistics to establish a sound reporting base on environmental links to cancer, heart disease, birth defects and other diseases. We will close the class with a stats exercise.

Homework: Work in teams of two and propose a final project story that will include an 800-word print story, photos, two charts and a slideshow or video. There will be a separate assignment sheet detailing what to do. Email a two-paragraph topic proposal to the instructor before the Nov. 12 class.

Week 8, Nov. 12: **Energy, the environment and politics**. Research the position of newly elected candidates on energy and environmental issues. You will be assigned a candidate. Each of you will present and critique the positions of the candidate you have researched and offer insights on the impact of the positions for policy.

Homework: Start interviews and research for the final project. Present a written log of what you have done to the instructor at the start of class. Present an outline for stories and a tentative script for slideshows or videos.

Week 9, Nov. 19: **Your carbon footprint.** We will learn to calculate the “carbon footprints” of activities and use them to compare different lifestyles and communities. We will do tables or “charticles” in class to draw comparisons.

Homework: Work on final projects.

Week 10, Nov.26: **No Class. Thanksgiving Break.**

Week 11, Dec. 3: **Final projects due at the start of class.** We will present and discuss them during class. Conference with each of you will close the afternoon.