

Environmental Storytelling

JOMC/ENEC 565 | Fall 2014 | Instructor: Sara Peach | Office hours: By appointment | Email: peach@unc.edu

Welcome to the Fall 2014 semester

In “Environmental storytelling,” you will be immersed in the environmental issues that matter to North Carolinians, such as the Dan River coal ash spill and the state’s current solar revolution. You’ll learn from a pro how to engage the public about issues that matter. During the semester, you’ll build a portfolio of written stories suitable for publication in a news outlet, culminating with a final project focusing on a North Carolina environmental issue of your choice.

Course objectives

My main objective in “Environmental Storytelling” is to introduce you to the skills you need to communicate effectively with ordinary people about environmental issues. This interdisciplinary course is designed for students with an interest in journalism or environmental issues.

For journalism students, this course will stretch your skills as you learn to identify credible sources, sift through data, and explain complicated issues to a mass audience. Acquiring these skills is essential for anyone entering the media industry – no matter which beats you cover during your career.

For students planning to enter an environmental career, learning how to communicate to a mass audience will help make you a rock star. Nonprofits, government agencies, eco-friendly businesses, universities and news organizations all look for employees who can effectively communicate complex information to the public.

In “Environmental Storytelling,” you will:

- deepen your understanding of environmental issues important to North Carolinians
- gain an understanding of common challenges in communicating about environmental issues
- dream up and execute feature stories related to environmental issues in the state
- choose credible sources who can speak fairly and accurately about highly controversial issues
- improve your skill at conducting interviews
- locate and evaluate scholarly work and data related to environmental issues
- structure your storytelling for maximum impact and audience engagement
- improve your storytelling by using strategies such as revising and seeking peer feedback
- prepare yourself for communicating about environmental topics during your career

Course policies

Email

Although I will always do my best to answer your questions and concerns in a timely fashion, you should expect some delay between sending an email and receiving my reply. During some periods of the semester, such as holidays and weekends, it may take me longer than 24 hours to respond. Please plan your work accordingly so that I may best provide you with assistance.

Classroom conduct

Simply put, attendance is required, participation is expected and deadlines are absolute.

Only a death in your immediate family, your own demise or a physician-noted illness will be accepted as a reason for missing class. One unexcused absence is allowed. For each unexcused absence after the first one, you will lose one-third of a letter grade from your final grade (an "A" will become an "A-," an "A-" will become a "B+," and so on).

Because much of the course involves group discussion, plan to arrive on time to class. I will reserve the right to reduce your final grade if you are late repeatedly.

During class, do not have private conversations, read *The Daily Tar Heel*, update your Facebook status, work on non-class related items or otherwise disrupt the class.

Although technology enhances our lives in many ways, it occasionally fails. You should plan all your work with this in mind. Maintain multiple backups of your files and print your work early enough to find an alternative option if something goes wrong. I will not make accommodations for problems with technology, and you will be expected to complete all your work on time even if technology does not work properly.

Assignments are due on the specified dates. Hard copies should be turned in at the beginning of class unless I specify otherwise.

No late assignments will be accepted.

Honor Code

You are expected to conduct yourself within the guidelines of the UNC honor code. All academic work should be completed with the high level of honesty and integrity this university demands.

Visit honor.unc.edu for more information.

Disability Services

If you are registered with the UNC Department of Disability Services and would benefit from accommodations in order to achieve course goals and assignments, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester. I am happy to work with you to meet your needs.

Online work

Your final projects will be published online at the class website. However, if you do not feel comfortable making your work publicly available, notify the instructor in writing.

Grades

A= Story could be published in a reputable print or online news outlet or an environmental magazine. Written and structured to effectively engage the public.

B=Minor editing needed, but is publishable.

C=Needs extensive editing and rethinking. Structure or conclusions may be flawed. Story may be boring or contain an instance of jargon.

D=Story needs to be rewritten and re-reported all the way through. May contain more than one spelling error. Story may be inaccessible or uninteresting to a general audience or may contain more than one instance of jargon.

F=Story has a fact error. It's technical, abstract, or altogether lacking in human interest. Seriously flawed in writing and conclusions.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

10%=Exercises (Note: the exercises are graded pass/fail.)

10%=Feature assignment No. 1

20%=Feature assignment No. 2

20%=Feature assignment No. 3

30%=Final project

10%=Final reflection

Revisions

You may turn in revisions of your feature stories, with the exception of the final project. I will regrade your story, and if the revision grade is higher, I will award that grade to you. Revisions are due at the beginning of class one week after I return it to you. NOTE: This option is not available if you miss the first story deadline. You will still receive a zero for the assignment.

Schedule

You are expected to complete all [readings and assignments](#) before you come to class. Arriving to class consistently unprepared will hurt your final grade.

Date	Topic	Assignment deadlines
Tuesday, August 19	Introduction to the course	
Wednesday, August 20		Exercise: Introductory essay
Thursday, August 21	Introduction to feature writing	
Tuesday, August 26	Intro to interviewing	Exercise: Issue summary

Thursday, August 28	Guest speaker: Steve Wall, UNC Institute for the Environment, on how state government is approaching environmental issues	
Tuesday, September 2	Structure	
Thursday, September 4	Robbie Harms day	
Tuesday, September 9	Writing workshop	Feature No. 1
Thursday, September 11	Guest speaker: Steve Wing, UNC School of Public Health, on hog farms	Collect and label your foam sample for flame retardant testing. Bring it to class.
Tuesday, September 16	Intro to background research; how to find sources	
Thursday, September 18	Guest speaker: Markus Wilhelm, CEO of Strata Solar, on the state's solar revolution	Exercise: Scavenger hunt
Tuesday, September 23	Guest speaker: Matthew Starr, Upper Neuse Riverkeeper, on coal ash	
Thursday, September 25	Sea-level rise	
Tuesday, September 30	Guest speaker: Kathleen Gray, Institute for the Environment, on fracking and public health	
Thursday, October 2	Guest speaker: DENR rep (invited)	
Tuesday, October 7	Writing workshop	Feature No. 2
Thursday, October 9	Writing workshop	
Tuesday, October 14	How to read a science paper	
Thursday, October 16	Fall Break	
Tuesday, October 21	Coffee experiment	
Thursday, October 23	Coffee experiment results	

Tuesday, October 28	Guest speaker: Flame retardants (Heather Stapleton lab)	
Thursday, October 30	Science vs. journalism norms	
Tuesday, November 4	Writing workshop	Feature No. 3
Thursday, November 6	Writing workshop	
Tuesday, November 11	Guest speaker: Juliet Eilperin	
Thursday, November 13	Intro to WordPress	
Tuesday, November 18	Life after graduation	
Thursday, November 20	Writing workshop	Draft of final project
Tuesday, November 25	Writing workshop	
Thursday, November 27	Thanksgiving	
Tuesday, December 2		Final project
Tuesday, December 9	Final exam period at noon	Final reflection

AEJMC core values and competencies

This course covers the following core values and competencies as outlined by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications:

- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.