Course Description & Goals

The purpose of this course is to teach an appreciation of environmental and science journalism and provide you with skills to report on environmental and science news for a variety of media, principally print or text, but also video and audio.

As a participant in this course, you'll learn the following:

- How to find news value in scientific research reports.
- How to integrate scientific statistics from source materials into news reports.
- How to research, report and write environmental and science news stories for popular media.

Reading

Readings for the course include a text about medical statistics, a classic book on writing well, a compendium of great writing about health and medicine from the New York Times, a 2018 anthology of the best science and nature writing published the previous year, a primer about science writing from masters in the field, and an environmental book about how animal infections can lead to human pandemics. Please complete the reading assignments before the appropriate classroom discussions. In addition to the list below, I'll supply additional source materials and articles from various publications. Most of the following books are available at the UNC student store and copies of most of the books will be on reserve in the Park Library (second floor) in the School of Media & Journalism. Please note that the books on reserve in the Park Library may be earlier editions that can be substituted for current editions. Students should also consult the AP Stylebook for proper style and usage for all written assignments.


Also, starting with the class for Wednesday, January 30, students should begin reading the *print version* of the Tuesday *Science Times* section of the *New York Times*. On the assigned dates, please bring the *Science Times* section to class. Consult the course schedule below for the exact dates for which the section should be read. Please note that the online version of the *New York Times* is not an acceptable substitute since the online and print versions do not necessarily have the same content. The *New York Times* is available in the UNC Student Store and is also available at a reduced rate by subscription. To subscribe, you can call 1-800-NYTIMES and ask for college subscriptions. Receiving the print edition by subscription also gives you unlimited online access.

**Participation**

A working science journalist typically talks and discusses relevant issues with colleagues and others before preparing his or her report. This class will be no different. I'll expect you to share your thoughts with your peers and with me. Classroom discussion will help clarify your ideas and sharpen your focus. You'll also be posting all written assignments on Sakai where your classmates will critique your work before you submit it to Dr. Linden for a grade.

**Grading Rubric**

Students will be responsible for at least one 15- to 20-minute presentation on assigned reading. Dr. Linden will assign the presentations at the beginning of the second class meeting. As critical thinking and discussion with peers are integral to the work of journalists, classroom participation and your presentation will count for **20 percent** of your final grade. Your classroom participation grade will be based on the quality (not necessarily the quantity) of your discussion and will be based on the following criteria:

1) Whether it's clear that you've read and thought about the readings.

2) Your ability to integrate ideas gleaned from the readings into the larger context of environmental and science reporting.

To sharpen your writing skills, you'll write two original stories and revisions of each of those two stories. The four writing assignments will count for **80 percent** of your final grade. Each story's grade will be determined as follows (with 100 points possible for each assignment):

1) A maximum of 40 possible points for reporting. Key considerations in grading reporting include the
following:

a) Did you interview a variety of sources, each of whom was knowledgeable about the focus of your story and/or able to present a unique scientific or human interest perspective?
   b) Did you consult primary sources (like journal articles or government publications, e.g.)?
   c) Have you attributed information (other than common knowledge) to named and reliable sources?

2) A maximum of 40 possible points for writing. Consideration will be given to the following:

a) Did you write clearly?
   b) Was your writing tight?
   c) Did you follow the writing guidelines enumerated by William Zinsser in his book, "On Writing Well"? If not, can you justify why not?
   d) Does your story flow well?
   e) Did you stick to your six-word message (as discussed in class)?
   f) Did you follow style rules enumerated in the AP Stylebook?

3) A maximum of 20 possible points will be given for the following:

a) Is this story publishable with only minor edits?

**Grading Scale (for undergraduates)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94 - 100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>91 - 93</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88 - 90</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>84 - 87</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>81 - 83</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>68 - 70</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>64 - 67</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 and below</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grading Scale (for graduate students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93 - 100</td>
<td>Honors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74 - 92</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 - 73</td>
<td>Low Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 and below</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After one unexcused absence, each absence will result in a drop of one letter grade in the course. This is a upper division/graduate-level seminar, and your presence and contribution are essential. You cannot pass the course with more than two unexcused absences.

**Assignments**

To succeed in environmental and science journalism, you must write well. Good writing requires an understanding of the material and the ability to communicate ideas simply and clearly.

All assignments must be posted on the Sakai discussion site at least two days before they're due in class. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior permission. Even with prior permission, submission of late assignments will result in a 10-point deduction per day. Not turning in an assignment within two days of the due date will result in a zero grade. Misspelling of proper names will result in a
10-point deduction per misspelling. Misspelling of other words will result in a two-point deduction for each word misspelled. We'll follow the print style guidelines of the AP Stylebook. If you intend to pursue journalism as a career, I strongly encourage you to purchase a copy of the AP Stylebook. As per the usual practice in the School of Media & Journalism, a major factual error will result in a failing grade for that particular assignment. Fabricating sources or quotations or engaging in plagiarism will constitute a violation of the Honor Code (for more information about the UNC Honor Code, go to http://instrument.unc.edu).

**Additional Assignments for Graduate Students**

All graduate students in the class will have additional assignments not required for the undergraduate students in the class. Those assignments will include leading one or more class discussions and/or assuming the role of lead critiquer for drafts of assigned stories uploaded to Sakai -> Forums. Grading for these additional duties will be based on the quality of the in-class presentations and the critiques offered on Sakai.

**Exams**

There will be no midterm or final exam.

**How To Succeed in This Course**

- Attend classes consistently.
- Complete readings before the appropriate classroom discussions.
- Participate actively in class discussions.
- Ask the Professor questions either during class or during office hours if you're unclear about any aspect of the course.
- Turn in stories on time, both on Sakai and in class
- Check online syllabus frequently throughout the semester (preferably before each class) as assignments and topics may change without e-mail notice.

**WEEK 1:**

JAN. 9: INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENCE JOURNALISM

* Turn in Student Data Sheet that was emailed to you.

Reading for this class session:


WEEK 2:

JAN. 14: A GUIDE TO WRITING NONFICTION

* Learn the basics of writing nonfiction.

Reading for this class session:

Zinsser, William, *On Writing Well*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

JAN. 16: ETHICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL, SCIENCE AND MEDICAL JOURNALISM

Reading for this class session:


Holtz, Andrew, "Update: Conflict of interest/funding disclosure missing from half of news releases we've reviewed -- a case study on why that's important," Health News Review, August 18, 2016.


WEEK 3:

JAN. 21: Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday (no class)

JAN. 23: INTERPRETATION OF SCIENCE STATISTICS -- guest speaker, Steven Meshnick, M.D., Professor and Associate Chair, Department of Epidemiology, UNC Gillings School of Global Health (unconfirmed)

Reading for this class session:

Browse Retraction Watch.


WEEK 4:

JAN. 28: WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Reading for this class session:

Quammen, David, Spillover, Chapters 1 through 4.

JAN. 30: A PRIMER ON SCIENCE NEWS STORIES

Reading for this class session:


Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 1.


Assignment #1: 900-word news story due Monday, Feb. 19. Please upload the draft of your story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #1 by Saturday, Feb. 17, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 5:

FEB. 4: SCIENCE NEWS STORIES

Reading for this class session:

Blum et al., editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.


Oransky, Ivan, "If you must use embargoes, here's how to do it right," download pdf file from Epidemiology Biostatistics and Public Health, 2013, Vol. 10, No. 3.
FEB. 6: SCIENCE NEWS STORIES (cont.) (Larisa)

Reading for this class session:

"Science Times" section from Tuesday, Feb. 6, New York Times.

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 2 & 3.


Assignment #1: 900-word news story due Monday, Feb. 18. Please upload the draft of your story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #1 by Saturday, Feb. 16, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 6:

FEB. 11: ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

Reading for this class session:


FEB. 13: ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING -- video interview TBA

Reading for this class session:


Assignment #1: 900-word news story due Monday, Feb. 18. Please upload the draft of your story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #1 by Saturday, Feb. 16, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 7:

FEB.18: CRITIQUE of ASSIGNMENT #1

Assignment #1 due today.
Assignment #2:

Rewrite of assignment #1 (news story) due Saturday, March 3, at 6 p.m. on Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #2 (DRAFT). Final rewrite to be turned in to class on Monday, March 5 and uploaded to Assignment #2 FINAL.

FEB. 20: ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION OF THE GULF OF MEXICO -- video interview TBA

Reading for this class session:
Familiarize yourself with www.restorethegulf.gov
Read "History" of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council.
Blum et al., editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Chapters 30, 31, 34, 35.

WEEK 8:

FEB. 25: COMMENTARY: COLUMNS, ESSAYS AND BLOG POSTING, video interview with Alasdair Wilkins, editor of the innovation section at Inverse

Reading for this class session:
Wilkins, Alasdair, "I lost 100 pounds in a year. My 'weight loss secret' is really dumb." Vox, July 7, 2015.

Assignment #2:
Rewrite of assignment #1 (news story) due Saturday, March 3, at 6 p.m. on Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #2 (DRAFT). Final rewrite to be turned in to class on Monday, March 5 and uploaded to Assignment #2 FINAL.

FEB. 27: COMMENTARY: ESSAYS (cont.) (Abigail)

Reading for this class session:
Assignment #2:

Rewrite of assignment #1 (news story) due Saturday, March 3, at 6 p.m. on Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #2 (DRAFT). Final rewrite to be turned in to class on Monday, March 5 and uploaded to Assignment #2 FINAL.

WEEK 9:

MARCH 4: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #2

Assignment #2 (rewrite of Assignment #1) due today.

MARCH 6: HISTORICAL STORIES -- video interview, Donald McNeil, New York Times (unconfirmed)

Reading for this class session:

"Science Times" section from Tuesday, March 6, New York Times.


Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 9, pp. 183-197.


SPRING BREAK (March 8-17)

WEEK 10:

MARCH 18: PERSPECTIVE STORIES & FACT CHECKING (Discussant: Richard Griffiths, former Senior Editorial Director, CNN) unconfirmed

Reading for this class session:


Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 8, pp. 156-182.

Assignment #3: Essay due Wednesday, March 27. Please upload the draft of your essay to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #3 DRAFT by 6 p.m., Monday, March 25.

MARCH 21: ESSAYS (cont.)
Reading for this class session:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 12, pp. 247-261 & Chapter 13, pp. 262-268. (If you did not read these chapters for an earlier class session, please read them and be ready them for this class session.)


Assignment #3: Essay due Wednesday, March 28. Please upload the draft of your essay to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #3 DRAFT by 6 p.m., Monday, March 26.

WEEK 11:

MARCH 25: PROFILES, OBITUARIES & EXPLANATORY STORIES -- video interview with Benedict Carey, behavioral science reporter, New York Times (unconfirmed)

Reading for this class session:


Assignment #3: Essay due Wednesday, March 27. Please upload the draft of your essay to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #3 DRAFT by 6 p.m., Monday, March 25.

MARCH 27: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #3

Assignment #3 (essay) due today.

WEEK 12:

APRIL 1: SCIENCE WRITING FOR MAGAZINES

Reading for this class session:


APRIL 3: REPORTING HEALTH NEWS - Guest speaker - Rose Hoban, publisher of NC Health News

Reading for this class session:

Branswell, Helen. "When towns lose their newspapers, disease detectives are left flying blind," STAT, March 20, 2018.
From NC Health News:

"What if Dupont had gone green in North Carolina?"  
(note from Rose: The GenX road not taken.)  
https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2017/10/03/what-if-dupont-had-gone-green-genx-north-carolina/

"Eliminating Pre-K Waiting Lists Proves a Knotty Problem"  
(note from Rose: A beefy data story that didn't require programming, just lots of calling and following-up. Done by last year's summer intern.)  
https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2017/07/18/eliminating-pre-k-waiting-long-road/

"Potential Buyers Walk The Halls, Review Financials at Morehead Memorial"  
(note from Rose: how to make business reporting interesting!)  
https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2017/10/06/potential-buyers-walk-halls-review-financials-morehead-memorial/

Final - 2017 Health & Human Services Budget Comparison  
(note from Rose: Finally, something we do annually that's not glamorous, but that we hear from readers that they really value it.)  

WEEK 13:

APRIL 8: REPORTING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Reading for this class session:


APRIL 10: REPORTING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA, video interview, Helen Chickering (unconfirmed)

Viewing:


"Dr. Oz weighs in on new GMO study, label concerns," interview with Dr. Mehmet Oz, Today Show, May 18, 2016.


Assignment #4: Rewrite of Assignment #3 due Wednesday, April 17. Please upload the draft of your essay to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #4 DRAFT by 6 p.m., Monday, April 15.
WEEK 14:

APRIL 15: RACE AND MEDICINE - guest speaker, Damon Tweedy, M.D., Duke psychiatrist and author of "Black Man in a White Coat"

Reading for this class session:
Tweedy, Damon, *Black Man in a White Coat*.

APRIL 17: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #4

Assignment #4 (essay rewrite) due today.

WEEK 15:

APRIL 22: RADIO REPORTING

Listen to "My Lobotomy," "Mastodons in Manhattan," and "An Ill Newborn, A Loving Family And A Litany Of Wrenching Choices."

APRIL 24: RADIO REPORTING (cont.) - guest lecturer, Adam Hochberg, NPR correspondent and Lecturer, UNC School of Media and Journalism

FINAL EXAM SESSION - Monday, May 7, 8 a.m., room TBA

The Honor Code

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (http://honor.unc.edu). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor’s responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2015-2016 Undergraduate Bulletin http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational...
programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Professional Values and Competencies**

Among the many skills students will learn in this course, it's expected they will be able to fulfill the following values and competencies as enumerated by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication:

- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- 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 basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

**Special Accommodations**

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at https://accessibility.unc.edu/

--syllabus revised Dec. 16, 2018