

## ANNUAL REPORT

### LOYOLA CHAIR IN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS

2002-2003

Environmental Communications is a nationally emerging specialty in the field of Communications. There are presently fewer than ten such endowed chairs in the United States. Most are held by persons with a Ph.D. in Communications or a related field or people who have served a distinguished career in the journalism private sector. At Loyola University New Orleans, the holder of the Loyola Chair in Environmental Communications has a Ph.D. in Vertebrate Zoology and has spent the majority of his career as an environmental educator as Founding and Executive Director of the Louisiana Nature Center. In this role, he has focused his attention on communicating complex environmental issues to the breadth of the Greater New Orleans community - from five year olds through school age to adults. He has developed means of communicating environmental information to those who are highly educated and those with less academic success.

The field of Environmental Communications is an increasingly important element in the State of Louisiana. No other state is so dependant on its natural resources and their direct and indirect use as is Louisiana. Much valuable time and effort is spent dealing with poorly understood and/or false information. It is, therefore, crucial that our state=s professional communicators (especially print and broadcast journalists) refine their abilities to communicate the often very complex and vitally important information relative to the impact of human use of natural resources on the environment. The co-existence of economic and environmental well-being is vitally important to Louisiana. If the citizens do not understand the implications of the use of natural resources and exposure to the by-products of their use, then the state will never reach its economic and human potential.

An environmentally educated citizenry will make the right choices for our state=s economic and environmental health.

One of the foci of the Loyola program is to improve communications among stakeholders in environmental issues in the State of Louisiana. This is done by the Loyola University Center for Environmental Communications (LUCEC) staff working on environmental intervention programs (such as the EPA=s Common Sense Initiative) and hosting the Institute for Environmental Communications (IEC) (a program that brings together citizens from business/industry, environmental activism, government, science, and the media to have an open discussion of the issues).

Another is to work with environmental communicators in Latin America (Belize and Trinidad at this time) and the Caribbean (the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States) to solve their problems. The economic linkage between Louisiana and Latin America is obvious and is

part of economic plans throughout the state.

The Loyola Chair in Environmental Communications sponsors the only program in this arena in the state. It is one of only eight of its kind in the nation, and the only one with the holder of the chair being a scientist and having a background in environmental education.

The endowment funds available to the Loyola Chair in Environmental Communications have served as the cornerstone for the activities of the Center for Environmental Communications (LUCEC), and its subsidiary program - the Institute for Environmental Communications (IEC).

The following are activities directly funded by the endowment proceeds:

- \$ General operation of the office was guaranteed.
- \$ The web site was maintained and continually updated (<http://www.loyno.edu/lucec>). During this academic year, a specific AChair@ site was maintained: <http://www.loyno.edu/lucec/chair/chairweb.htm>.
- \$ The chair holder was able to be active in the International Federation of Environmental Journalists (serving as General Secretary), thus networking with international colleagues.
- \$ LUCEC maintained communications projects in the tropics. This year a project (Caribbean Environmental Communications Initiative) was funded by USAID (through the University of New Orleans Foundation) that is training environmental journalists and ecotourism businesses in the Caribbean.
- \$ Hosted a number of national and international environmental journalists.
- \$ The LUCEC traveling exhibit was updated to reflect changes in the program.
- \$ Magazines and other publications were made available for students.
- \$ Student workers were hired to work on LUCEC projects.
- \$ New software was purchased to maintain efficient communication.
- \$ The IEC held its fourth program with 20 graduating Fellows (for further information, see <http://www.loyno.edu/lucec/fellows.html>).
- \$ Developed the capacity to do digital and analog video taping and editing.
- \$ Published *Miscellaneous Publications of LUCEC*.
- \$ Performed a statewide telephone survey of citizens regarding their attitudes about coastal wetlands loss.
- \$ Planned (as host and co-chair) the annual conference of the Society for Environmental Journalists, thus introducing this group to Louisiana environmental issues.
- \$ Continued a cardboard box reuse program at Loyola University that is intended to result in providing an annual scholarship in environmental communications. The program will be shared with other universities in the state.
- \$ Led a student audit of the environmental operations of Loyola University.

## ENHANCEMENT OF CONTINUING/NEW AREAS OF RESEARCH/INQUIRY

The funds allowed the Chair to attend meetings, visit with colleagues, and gather extensive research materials for his environmental communications research program. The Chair is initiating a new program producing documentaries in the coming year.

## PUBLICATIONS: PEER REVIEWED

None.

## PUBLICATIONS: NON-PEER REVIEWED

**Robert A. Thomas.** 2002. *Stressful Lives of Louisiana Environmentalists*. Misc. Publ., Loyola Univ. New Orleans Center for Environmental Commn. (1): 1-6.

## NEW PUBLICATION:

LUCEC launched a new periodic journal, *Miscellaneous Publications of Loyola University Center for Environmental Publication* (attached). This journal is widely distributed to universities and similar educational program libraries.

## PRESENTATIONS

**Robert A. Thomas.** "Educating the Public on Environmental Concepts/Issues," United States Environmental Protection Agency, Baton Rouge, September 10, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** "SEJ's Annual Conference in New Orleans, 2003," Society for Environmental Journalism, Baltimore, October 11, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** Moderated one of four weeks of directed discussion on an international e-conference, World Bank, Oct 1-31, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** "Caribbean Environmental Communications Initiative: A model for regional improvement," International Federation of Environmental Journalists, Paris, FR, November 1, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** "The Institute for Environmental Communications: Improving Communications among Stakeholders," National Communication Association, Environmental Communication Commission, New Orleans, November 21, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** Panelist and speaker: "Scholars in Action: Communicating about the Environment (specifically, Environmental Justice)," National Communication Association, Environmental Communication Commission, New Orleans, November 21, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** Panel organizer and respondent: "Communications in Action: Lessons from Stakeholders in Environmental Justice Controversies," National Communication Association, Environmental Communication Commission, New Orleans, November 21, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas.** "Caribbean Environmental Communications Initiative: update," USAID Semi-annual Review, Barbados, December 10, 2002.

**Robert A. Thomas,** Key note address, "The Challenges of Communicating Environmental Information," Building Bridges Expo, Metairie, January 18, 2003.

**Robert A. Thomas,** "Challenges in and Strategies for Climatic Change Communications

and Education, “ Climate Change In the Gulf Coast Region Conference for Journalists, Tulane University Environmental Law Center, February 7, 2003.

**Robert A. Thomas**, “Environmental Communications: Good Science, Proper Motives, Intelligent Listening, Evaluating Context, Truth, and a Modicum of Trust,” Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Alabama, February 20, 2003.

**Robert A. Thomas**, panelist, “Preparing our students to meet the ethical challenges in today’s market place,” Loyola University Family Weekend, March 14, 2003.

**Robert A. Thomas**, “Environmental Communications: Good Science, Proper Motives, Intelligent Listening, Evaluating Context, Truth, and a Modicum of Trust,” Southern University, Department of Science/Mathematics Education, April 16, 2003.

**Robert A. Thomas**, “Long-term Policy implications of Louisiana’s Coastal Wetlands Loss,” Council for A Better Louisiana, Leadership Louisiana, Houma, April 4, 2003.

**Robert A. Thomas**. Innovative uses of blackboard, Second Annual Tech Savvy Soiree, Loyola University, May 5, 2003.

## **PRESS COVERAGE/INTERVIEWS:**

Times-Picayune, photo and caption, *Big Easy Partying Shots*, E3, July 28, 2002.

Lagniappe magazine (Junior League of New Orleans), Lee U. Hays, *Junior League projects. Where are they today?*, pp. 38-40, Summer, 2002.

Times-Picayune, Judy Walker, mentioned, *Brother Nature*, E9-10, December 20, 2002.

Forest Operations Review, photo, Neil Ward, *Among the environmental journalists*, 11-14, Winter, 2002.

The Daily Observer, St. John’s, Antigua, Colin James, interviewed and pictured, *Reporters Tackle Environmental Matters*, p. 9, January 25, 2003.

WABB AM 1480, Mobile, AL, interviewed for one hour show about environmental communications, David Underhill, February 20, 2003.

Loyola Today, column of activities, p. 6, March 14, 2003.

Times-Picayune, photo cutlines and quoted, Elizabeth Mullener, *Amphibian assault. Frogs and toads raising a ruckus*, C1-2, April, 2003.

Associated Press, Janet McConnaughey, website used as reference, *Louisiana is sinking, and there’s not a whole lot anyone can do about it*, no date.

Loyola Magazine, add for Miscellaneous Publication of LUCEC, p. 16, Spring, 2003.

Loyola Today, *Bob Thomas receives \$500,000 grant*, p. 6, April, 2003.

WWL AM 870, one hour interview on coastal wetlands loss with Cory Johnson, July 3, 2003.

## **DISPLAYS AND SHOWS**

Table top displays re LUCEC: Society for Environmental Journalists, Baltimore, MD, October 19-22, 2002; International Federation of Environmental Journalists, Paris, France, November 13-17, 2002.

## **MENTORING OF STUDENTS**

The Chair works with many students in mentoring various aspects of their professional development. They use LUCEC as a source of information and resources, and he mentors students as they pursue their professions, theses in the honors and biology programs, and independent studies projects.

LUCEC annually offers a workshop on environmental journalism for local high school newspaper journalists. The workshop is held in Loyola=s Department of Communications and is intended to interest local students in covering the environmental beat in their high school newspapers. LUCEC publishes a monthly newsletter directed at local high schools to enhance their environmental reporting.

## TEACHING ENHANCEMENT

LIST OF COURSES TAUGHT (those with \* are unique in the state):

Fall 2002

\*CMMN A370 Environmental Communications. 3 cr. 25 students.  
BIOL Z144. Ecology of the Mississippi River Delta. 3 cr. 30 students.  
ENVA A499. Practicum. 3 cr. 1 student.  
CMMN A899. Special projects. 3 cr. 1 student.

\*Institute for Environmental Communications. 20 participants.

Spring 2003

\*CMMN A371. Covering the Environmental Beat. 3 cr. 7 students.  
\*ENVA A394. Environmental Analysis of Loyola University. 3 cr. 8 students. (I supervised a sociology student in her practicum in this course)  
\*BIOL A118. Tropical Ecology. 3 cr. 9 students.  
ENVA A499. Practicum. 3 cr. 2 students.  
BIOL A499. Cultural Biology. 3 cr. 1 student (one-on-one session).

LECTURES IN OTHER CLASSES: The chair gives many lectures in classes across the campus and on other college campuses (for the latter, see the APresentations@ section).

GRADUATE STUDENTS AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES:

Amelia Ballew, University of New Orleans, December 2002.

ADVISING: 60 students.

OTHER: See activities listed under AMentoring of Students.@

## **CURRICULUM INNOVATION/DEVELOPMENT**

The following course, directed at students in the fields across the campus, was taught for the first time in Spring 2003:

ENVA A394. Environmental Analysis of Loyola University. 3 cr.

**Course Description:** The focus of this course is to examine the operations of Loyola University in terms of environmental efficiency planning, and policy implementation. Students will learn about how positively addressing environmental concerns may benefit campus operations, research how Loyola addresses such issues, evaluate Loyola's activities, and summarize the learnings. The course will culminate with a formal presentation to the faculty and staff, and set the stage for an ongoing program on campus.

### **OTHER EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES:**

Updated class notes for Mississippi River Delta Ecology on the LUCEC website.

Placed all courses on Black Board.

Scanned over 1000 new slides for use on Black Board.

Continue using *Diversity* (a whole brain model system) for classroom activities (we also administered it to the *Maroon* editorial board and Prof. Henley=s ad team).

Short course on Environmental Communications. At the request of several universities, a short course is being developed that will train graduate students in how to apply their knowledge and training for improvement of environmental and community challenges. Among other issues, it will train the students how to work with the media and how to become engaged in their communities.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

During the past year, the Chair has attended a number of training programs regarding the use of computers, and he has attended professional meetings. Additionally, he visits with colleagues and hosts visitors in his profession.

## SEEKING EXTERNAL FUNDING

Shell Foundation, \$10,000 in support of the Center for Environmental Communications. Awarded. Assisted in acquiring additional funds for other functions in the university.

USAID/UNO Foundation: \$500,000. Caribbean Environmental Communications Initiative. During the 18 month duration of this project, our team (which includes several of our faculty) will 1) train Caribbean journalists to cover the environmental beat; 2) establish structure for the existing Caribbean Environmental Reporters= Network (we will hire an Executive Director, set up an office with supplies, and otherwise stabilize a Secretariat); 3) produce a series of radio shows that will air throughout the Caribbean and certain areas of the U.S. and Europe, provide public relations for the Organization of American States= program that encourages small hotels to become sustainable in their operations and to orient toward ecotourism; 4) survey Media House Managers (editors) re their positions and attitudes about the value of environmental news coverage (we will present the results at their annual professional conference); and 5) publish a book on environmental communications/journalism for Caribbean professionals. Funded.

National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (grants through Congressman Vitter to enhance our understanding of Lake Pontchartrain): \$80,000. Communications Plan and Documentary on the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. The project will result in 1) the development of the first communications plan on the Mississippi river Gulf Outlet (that will enable the public to understand the issue and the ramifications of policy development), and 2) a one hour documentary for public television.

U. S. Department of Agriculture (grants through Congressman Vitter to enhance our understanding of Lake Pontchartrain): \$100,000. Communications Plan and Documentary on the Cypress Mulching in Lake Maurepas. The project will result in 1) the development of the first communications plan on the subject of cypress mulching in Lake Maurepas (that will enable the public to understand the issue and the ramifications of policy development), and 2) a one hour documentary for public television.

Funding for the Society of Environmental Journalists: raised \$112,500 to fund the meeting (donors include Loyola University, University of New Orleans, CWPRAA Public Relations Committee, America's Wetland Campaign, Louisiana State University, Tulane University, Motiva Enterprises).

## ENHANCEMENT OF PROGRAM/DEPARTMENT QUALITY/REPUTATION

As LUCEC develops, its reputation is building. The department and university are becoming widely known as a place where people can discuss environmental issues in a constructive, rational, fair atmosphere.

## **UNITING UNIVERSITY, COMMUNITY, AND BUSINESS/INDUSTRY**

The principal portion of LUCEC that answers this need is the Institute for Environmental Communication (IEC). IEC is held each fall semester. Its purpose is to bring together environmental stakeholders and to stimulate conversations among them. IEC participation has a balance of people from business/industry, the environmental community, government, the media, and the scientific arena. This activity, taking place at the university, creates opportunities that do not exist elsewhere.

Persons completing IEC are named Fellows of the program. There are presently 69 IEC fellows, all of whom are connected via a LUCEC supported listserv. A new class of 20 participants will begin in August.

LUCEC works diligently to convince industry and business that sound environmental planning and consideration is a wise investment, for the company and for the citizens of Louisiana. It also works with the environmental community regarding the value of constructive collaboration for environmental improvement, and with government about the need for fair, consistent enforcement of existing environmental regulations and rational evaluation of existing and potential regulations.

LUCEC is presently collaborating with the University of New Orleans Foundation as developer and subcontractor for the Caribbean Environmental Communications Initiative, a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development.

## **SERVICE TO COMMUNITY**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL:**

Member, Top 10 by 2010, an initiative of MetroVision.

Governor=s Environmental Task Force

Greater New Orleans Foundation Environmental Committee

Board, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana.

Strategic Planning Committee, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana.

Board, Environmental Research Consortium of Louisiana, a not-for-profit organization that will do research, communications, and educational projects on the environment of Louisiana

Board, J. Bennett Johnston Science Foundation, a not-for-profit foundation that will fund environmental research in Louisiana

Board, Asa Wright Nature Centre, Arima, Trinidad

Board, Save Our Lake Endowment  
Environmental Committee, New Orleans/River Region Chamber of Commerce  
Outdoor Activities Advisory Committee, City of New Orleans Recreation Department.  
General Secretary, International Federation of Environmental Journalists Representative,  
Society for Environmental Journalism  
Advisory Council, U.S. PIRG (Louisiana Office), 2001-present  
Board, Caribbean Environmental Reporters' Network, 2003-present

**OTHER:**

Board, Council for a Better Louisiana  
Archbishop=s Community Appeal Committee  
Rotary Club of Metairie Sunrise  
Judge, Biodiversity Journalism Awards, co-sponsored by Conservation International and  
the Center for International Journalism

**ORGANIZE EVENTS AND LECTURES BY AUTHORITIES IN THE FIELD**

Hosted visits by environmental professionals from Venezuela, Nigeria, Barbados, Belize,  
and Trinidad.

Hosted Dr. Mark Plotkin as speaker on the potential impacts of bacteria on humans,  
November 4, 2003

**COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER SCHOLARS/PROGRAMS**

Serving on The editorial board of the Environmental Communication Yearbook, a new  
journal in the field of environmental communications.

Judged the Guyana entries in the Conservation International Biodiversity Awards  
Program.

Judged the entries seeking support to attend the World Summit on Sustainable  
Development to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The program is  
sponsored by the International Federation of Environmental Journalists and  
funded by the Global Environmental Facility.

Working with Mark Schleifstein, Times-Picayune, as Co-chair of the Society of  
Environmental Journalists annual meeting, 2003.

Serve on the Loyola Environmental Studies Faculty

Serving on the Chamber of Commerce Environmental Committee to help them open a  
dialogue with the local environmental community.

Advising management of Motiva Enterprises and Shell Chemical Company in Norco,  
LA, regarding the resolution of environmental justice issues.

Speaking to Silver Scribe competition, chaired by Drs. Larry Lorenz and Leslie Parr.

Working with Shell Oil Refinery (Norco) and local environmental interests to reach an

equitable decision on the fate of Bayou Trepagnier. I serve as the go-between. Leadership role in the formation of the J. Bennett Johnston Science Research Foundation, a concept I developed in 1993 that is coming to fruition. Wrote the early drafts of By-laws and Articles of Incorporations. Worked with the attorneys and CPAs during the submittal of documents

Appointed to the Houston Toad (endangered species) Recovery Team by the Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Training workshop for a group of Nigerian government petroleum regulators regarding how they might help resolve conflicts between oil companies and their neighbors .

Member of a team (based with Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, and architectural firm) developing a master plan for the Bass Fishermen=s Hall of Fame, Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the Boca Rotan Nature Center, Boca Roatan, FL (I am doing the environmental communications/education component).

### **ENHANCE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT OF PROFESSOR**

The Chair funds provide a base-line of support for the Chair=s work and allow time and necessary resources for basic programs and the ability to seek additional support.

### **ENHANCE RESEARCH EFFORTS**

As described in several places above, the funds allow the Chair to fund basic research needs and to travel to important meetings and resource locations.

### **PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CONFERENCES**

The Chair participates annually in the meetings and activities of the Society for Environmental Journalism, the International Federation of Environmental Journalists, National Communications Association (Environmental Communications Commission), and the Association of Nature Center Administrators. Other meetings that are relevant are attended when possible.

### **LEADERSHIP TO COLLEGE AND DIVISION**

The Chair makes the resources of LUCEC available to colleagues throughout the university. He is gradually including more departments in LUCEC activities.

An innovation that he developed (along with Provost Lydia Voigt) and chairs is the Provost=s Committee for Endowed Professors and Chairs. Its emerging purpose is to identify projects important to the State of Louisiana and/or the citizens of Greater New Orleans that may be served by being addressed by Loyola=s community of endowed scholars. This program may serve as a model to other universities in Louisiana.

Additionally, the Chair served on the College of Arts and Sciences Endowed Professor's Committee, the search committee for the Mullahy Chair in Environmental Science, the Environmental Studies Faculty, and the New Faculty Orientation Committee.

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