

## COVERING THE ENVIRONMENTAL BEAT

CMMN A371 Sec 001 C/M 324 MW 3:30 pm-4:45 pm  
Spring 2003

**PROFESSOR:** Dr. Robert A. Thomas C/M R327

Office: 865-2107 Home: 833-7727 e-mail: rathomas@loyno.edu

Office Hours: TR 9:00 -11:00 am; MW 1:00-2:00 pm; Other times by appointment.

### SYLLABUS

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Presents an application of the elements of news coverage of environmental issues. Includes discussion of a variety of complex environmental challenges and provides the opportunity to explore disparate points of view. Students will intensively use and sharpen their reporting and writing skills, and study many issues with conflicting information.

**PREREQUISITES:** CMMN A101 (Communications Writing), CMMN A250 (Beginning Reporting), or consent of the instructor.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS:

West, Bernadette, Peter M. Sandman, and Michael R. Greenberg. 1994. *The Reporter's Environmental Handbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press.

Various additional readings may be assigned from the bibliography.

**Recommended reference text:** Miller, G. Tyler, Jr. *Living in the Environment*. Current ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

**CLASS COMMUNICATION (REQUIRED):** I will often communicate with the class via email. You *must* have an email account and it *must* be updated (the one you are actually using on a day-to-day basis) on LORA so that I can batch email the class. *Check often (daily) or you will definitely miss important information. Not getting the messages is not a valid excuse – you snooze, you lose. Both of following must be done by September 5, 2002.*

**CLASS LISTSERV:** You are required to subscribe to the class listserv. All announcements and changes as the course progresses may be shared via this listserv. To subscribe, simply send an email to [majordomo@loyno.edu](mailto:majordomo@loyno.edu). In the body of the email, write *subscribe cmmna371001*. You should almost immediately receive an email telling you that you have been successfully subscribed.

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**BLACKBOARD:** Many elements of this course will be available to you on the class Blackboard site (<http://blackboard.loyno.edu/>). You may find announcements, corrections to the syllabus (including due dates), clarifications, references, etc. You are well advised to check it often. *The “I didn’t know” excuse won’t work.* To access Blackboard for the first time, go to <http://blackboard.loyno.edu>, click on *Login*, then give your *username* (the one for your Loyola email) and *password* (6 digits made up of your birth year [4 digits] and month of birth [2 digits]). Once in, you may (and should) change your password. If you have used it before, then proceed as usual. If you have problems, go to the Monroe Library Reference Desk.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**
  - **Analysis paper:** Each student will select an environmental issue and research and analyze how it has been treated in the media. The framework should be that of the student's sequence in Communications. 100 pts. Due date: April 29, 2003.
  - **Class communications project:** A written description will be given to the class that sets a problematic environmental scenario. Each member of the class will choose/be assigned an aspect (an issue, a topic, an agency, a group of involved people, a human interaction, etc.) to cover as a beat assignment. This project will entail developing sources, writing one story per week, and writing a final major story. Each student may propose coverage and/or projects from his/her sequence. 300 pts. Due date: as assigned.
  - **Public hearing:** If possible, each student will attend one or more (as assigned) public hearings (including possibly a legislative hearing), each on an environmental topic (approved in advance by the professor). The student will write a summary of each meeting, and a personal analysis. 50 pts. Due date: as assigned.
- **CURRENT ISSUES:** Immerse yourself in environmental issues available to you via various media outlets. If it's in the news, it may well be discussed in class. Be prepared to discuss current events in relation to the material on your syllabus. Your abilities to discuss current issues will affect your grade under Class Participation.
- **INTERNET:** The internet is an integral component of good reporting. It is imperative that you have excellent skills in researching and critiquing the value of internet resources. If you have never studied this process, 1) tell the professor and 2) visit the LUCEC website (<http://www.loyno.edu/lucec>). Under "Additional Resources" you will find "News Analysis Helps." In this category there are a couple of web sites that tell you how to evaluate the internet. There are similar resources on the Monroe Library website

- **FIELD TRIPS:** Two field trips may be scheduled. One trip will be on an evening during the week; the other will be on a weekend. You will write an article about your experiences on these field trips and include your observations about how a scientist approaches field work. 50 pts. Due date: the second class after the last field trip.
  - Jean Lafitte National Park - an evening in April to see and hear nocturnal wildlife.
  - To be assigned.
- **CRITIQUE:** Each student will have three opportunities to critique the course. The first will be around mid-term, which will allow for immediate alterations to the course, if deemed warranted by the professor. The second will be a special form that will be returned to the professor at the end of the course, the purpose of which is to evaluate possible improvements for the next time the course is offered. The third is the department's standardized evaluation that will be returned directly to the department without being seen by the professor. All are completed anonymously and intended to improve teaching at Loyola.

**GRADING SYSTEM:** The grade will be based on exams, quizzes, class participation, attendance at field trips and the quality of the written assignments.

- **Exams:** There will be one 100 pt exam and one final 200 pt exam. The final exam is comprehensive. The exams will represent 30% of the total grade.
- **Quizzes:** At the discretion of the professor, daily quizzes may be given on the assigned readings and/or research. These will adjust the total points below (but not percentages). Quizzes may represent up to 5% of the total grade.
- **Writing Assignments and Projects:** See the specific instructions for the projects, which will represent 55% (450 pts) of the total grade.
- **Class Participation:** A rubric will be distributed that will quantify this topic (100 pts). The rubric will represent 10% of the total grade.
- **Field Trips:** Attendance, enthusiastic participation, and a well-written article can earn up to 50 pts. Field trips represent 5% of the total grade.

**HELP ALONG THE WAY:** If you have special needs (i.e., alternative testing, help with writing, etc.), please speak with me at the start of the term so that proper arrangements can be made. For more information about support services, contact Disability Services in the Office of Academic Enrichment, Monroe 405, 865-2990.

If you would like to speak with a personal counselor, contact Counseling & Career Services, DC 200, 865-3835.

The Academic and Career Excellence (ACE) Center, Room 101 Monroe Library, is an excellent resource. In effect, this is “one stop shopping” and one can work on projects there (using computers and other resources), and get instant advice from the following offices: Academic Enrichment, Counseling and Career Services, Disability Services, English Writing Lab, Mathematics Center, Monroe Library, Ross Foreign Language Center, and Writing Across the Curriculum. The information number is 864-7155.

**FINAL GRADE:** The final grade will be based on the following point distribution:

A	92-100%	920-1000 points
B+	88-91%	880-919 points
B	82-86%	820-879 points
C+	77-81%	770-819 points
C	70-76%	700-769 points
D+	67-69%	670-699 points
D	60-66%	600-669 points
F	Below 60%	Below 600 points

**RULES & REGULATIONS:** These will be *strictly followed*.

- **Attendance:** This is not a correspondence course, and students should realize there is a high correlation between attendance and grades. Regular class attendance is expected. Each class absence over four will drop your class average by one letter grade (see additional implications in the class attendance/participation rubric). Two lates count as one absence. Arriving 15 minutes late to class counts as an absence. It is the student's responsibility to see the professor after class to have an absence changed to a late. There is no need to contact the professor if you'll be late or absent; the four cuts are allowed for personal reasons. On the other hand, if you use your four cuts frivolously and then get sick or have a personal problem, you will suffer the consequences.
- **Exam make-up policy:** Arrangements must be made prior to the original exam date. If arrangements are not made before the original exam date, or the make-up is missed, the grade will be "0."
- **Deadlines:** You must meet the deadlines for assignments. The field of communications lives on deadlines. A one-letter grade drop will occur for each class after the deadline that a project is handed in.
- **Proper grammar and spelling are expected:** ALL misspelled words are ½ point off each (unless the word is misspelled in a fashion that it changes its meaning or it is a scientific name, in which case the point loss may be more).

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- **Following directions:** It is important that you follow all directions for assignments. If you do, the assignment will be graded; if not, it will be returned and considered not submitted.
- **Plagiarism<sup>1</sup>:** You are being educated to be a communications professional. If you plagiarize others, you lose the credibility that is so precious to our field. *You are also guaranteed an F in this course, and possible expulsion from the university* (see student handbook regarding plagiarism). And yes, the professor does occasionally submit papers to an internet plagiarism site for evaluation.

Information/data/quotation/opinion/statement of fact taken from any other source must be attributed. You may paraphrase statements of others, but must cite the source. If the material is taken directly from another source, it must be placed in quotes and reproduced with complete accuracy. *Failure to do so is plagiarism and will be treated accordingly.*

READ THIS ONE MORE TIME & MEMORIZE IT.

- **Classroom decorum:** Students are expected to conduct themselves appropriately in class. It is against accepted classroom etiquette to indulge in such activities as private conversations (either verbal or non-verbal), cell phone interruptions, gum chewing, etc. Multiple offenses will result in ejection from class. Students are reminded that when the professor begins roll-call, all conversation is to cease immediately.
- **Facilities:** Please use the facilities before coming to class. It is rude to get up and leave in the middle of lecture.
- **Writing style:** For all writing assignments, the APA style manual must be followed (see the Blackboard discussion).

#### CLASS SCHEDULE:

Jan 13-15 -	Overview of the class, introductory discussion; major environmental issues; overview of the players: scientists, environmentalists, journalists, the people, government officials, politicians, power brokers, business, etc.
Jan 20-22 -	Monday off: Martin Luther King Birthday; Guest speaker: print journalist on using the internet and listservs for scientific information; quality of experimental design, discussion.
Jan 27-29-	Guest speaker: TV/video journalist - how do I process information?;

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<sup>1</sup> The second paragraph of this section is taken from Dr. Cathy Rogers.

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- Feb 3-5 - Telephone interview: radio journalist – how do I process information?  
Parts per billion: what does it mean? Statistics and what they mean in environmental information.
- Feb 10-12 - Risk assessment and how to understand the data; guest speaker: print journalist - how do I process information?
- Feb 17-19- Government regulations: NEPA, SARA, RCRA, CERCLA, ESA, etc.; Analysis: Global warming, ozone depletion.
- Feb 24-26 - Analysis: Human population growth; species extinction and biodiversity; hormone mimicking compounds; amphibian decline.
- Mar 3-5 - Off: Mardi Gras
- Mar 10-12 - Analysis: Environmental justice; environmentalists' perspective on beat coverage.
- Mar 17-19 - Businessmen's perspective on beat coverage; government person's perspective on beat coverage.
- Mar 24-26 - Politicians' perspective on beat coverage.
- Mar 31-Apr 2 - Bayou Trepagnier and coverage; Grand Bois and coverage.
- Apr 7-9 - Petrochemical Corridor (=Cancer Alley) and its coverage.
- Apr 14-16-21- ***Easter Holidays: covering the beat in Florida***
- Apr 21-23 - Louisiana's coastal erosion issue and its coverage.
- Apr 28-30 - Discussion and projects.
- May 5-7 - Review.
- May 13 - ***2:00-4:00 pm; Final exam and group discussion.***

**ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS BIBLIOGRAPHY:** For the most up-to-date bibliography in the field, see <http://www.loyno.edu/lucec/biblio.html>.