

9-2013

# JRNL 570.01: Covering the Environment and Natural Resources

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## Recommended Citation

Lowisch, Henriette B., "JRNL 570.01: Covering the Environment and Natural Resources" (2013). *Syllabi*. 141.  
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# COVERING THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

JRNL 570 • Fall 2013 • TR 3:40-5 p.m. • DAH 301

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and by appointment

## Course objective

This course applies the journalistic method to the coverage of environmental science and natural resource issues. Through lectures, workshops, exercises, instructor feedback, peer review and class discussion, you will learn how to report and tell stories of innovation, research, risk, policymaking, conflict and change. As a reporter, you will develop story ideas; gather news; conduct interviews, and work on deadline. You will submit stories to reputable publications and start assembling your journalistic portfolio.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the semester, successful students will:

- Produce news and features on environmental science and natural resource issues
- Apply news values, ethical and professional standards
- Practice developing and pitching story ideas
- Know how to cultivate and interview sources on the environmental beat
- Hone their writing, editing and self-editing skills
- Publish a story in a professional news medium

## Course Overview

Beat reporting: In the course of the semester, you will cover several news events and report four enterprise stories, with mounting levels of sophistication in terms of sources, news value, storytelling and format. You'll be on deadline, and I will hold you to real-world newsroom standards. Make sure to budget enough time for this key course, with a "homework" load of 7+ hours per week. I will provide timely and detailed feedback. You'll rewrite each story once, and may submit a third draft of one story of your choice.

Lectures: Topics will range from regulatory issues to reporting tools. I will share tricks of the trade on how to conduct successful interviews; identify news pegs and trends; deal with embargoes; deliver winning story pitches; avoid and translate jargon, and engage the public with memorable stories on complex subjects.

Workshops: Lectures will be followed by in-class exercises, practicing interviewing, attributing information, rewriting journal articles for the general public, structuring narrative, editing for jargon, formulating leads and kickers and other techniques.

Tuesday class sessions will typically begin with a brief discussion of the latest news on the environmental science and natural resource beat. Share a link to a noteworthy story via Twitter each Tuesday by 10 a.m.

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Thursday class sessions will typically be set aside for peer review of first drafts, as well as for budget meetings where story ideas will be presented and critiqued.

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### Course Tools

These tools are essential for environmental science or natural resource reporters.

- A reliable recording device (audio or video).
- Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.
- The AP Stylebook (free on campus via [http://www.apstylebook.com/umontana\\_edu/](http://www.apstylebook.com/umontana_edu/) or buy a subscription).
- A Twitter account, to follow organizations and individuals on your beat.
- Society of Environmental Journalists listservs, for story ideas for this class and beyond. Become a student member (\$25 / year) at [sej.org](http://sej.org), or sign up for RSS Feeds (Headlines and Watchdog Tip Sheet).
- Missoula Councilman Bob Jaffe's listserv at [http://www.missoulagov.org/List\\_serve](http://www.missoulagov.org/List_serve) for a heads-up on local stories.

### Assessment

To the journalistic profession, deadlines are key. On the graduate level, there can be no grace period, not even for a delay of "only" five minutes. As in the industry, the burden of proof is on your side. I highly recommend submitting printed versions of assignments in addition to emailed documents, to avoid an "F" for an email that didn't get through. Don't count on me sending you receipts. I don't know an editor who'd do that.

Covering your beat: Grades will be based on second drafts, but failure to submit a first draft by deadline will automatically result in an "F" for the entire assignment.

Enterprise stories: 4x100 points. Story pitches: 100 points. News assignments: 150 points.

Publication requirement: To receive credit for this course, you must get one of your stories published in a professional media outlet, for example: The Montana Kaimin; High Country News; The Bugle; Crown of the Continent; Vision; The Missoula Independent. Without a clip in hand by Dec. 15, you will receive an "I" for "Incomplete." You will have till the end of Spring Semester 2014 to fulfill the requirement and have the grade converted; if you don't, you'll have to retake JRNL 570 in the fall of 2014.

Workshops: Participation in peer review and class discussion will be assessed on a credit/non-credit basis, for a total of 200 points.

Final exam (Dec. 9, 3:20 - 5:20 p.m.): Will cover current events; laws and regulations of the environment and natural resources, and editing and style. 150 points.

### Professionalism

Journalism is competitive; you must act professionally at all times to succeed. What's true for the newsroom is true for this classroom:

- Meet deadlines. I will not accept late submissions. They will be graded "F".
- To make sure assignments reach me in time is your responsibility.
- You will be forgiven one absence, as long as you notify me ahead of class.
- Don't be late. Class doesn't start at 3:41 p.m. It starts at 3:40 p.m.
- In case of emergency, contact me to discuss the problem and negotiate a solution before you miss a deadline or a class.

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- Missing one third of classes will automatically result in failing the course.
- Acting professionally throughout will positively affect your course grade; acting unprofessionally will negatively affect your course grade.

### **Academic Honesty**

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review at [http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student\\_conduct.php](http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php)

### **A Few Words About Plagiarism**

The UM catalog defines plagiarism as the act of “representing another’s work as one’s own.” Those who plagiarize “may fail the course or be remanded to the University Court for possible suspension or expulsion.”

In journalism, you’re guilty of plagiarism if you hand in a story that was written in part by someone else (another student, your mother, the Kaimin, the Missoulian, a website, etc.) That includes writing a story based on reporting not your own. If you must use material from another published source, attribute it.

### **Same Work for Multiple Classes in J-School**

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class, unless you receive prior approval from the professor for this course. To do so without permission will result in an "F" for the assignment, and could result in an "F" for the course.

### **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. Disability Services for Students will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process. For more information, visit <http://life.umt.edu/dss>.

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### Tentative Deadline Schedule

Unless specified otherwise, submit assignments as email attachments (.doc or .docx) by 3 p.m. on Thursdays, and bring printed version to class.

Aug. 29, 10 a.m.: Share link to noteworthy beat story via Twitter (every Tuesday)

Sep. 19, 3:40 p.m.: Oral Pitch, Enterprise Story 1 (Profile)

Sep. 26, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 1, first draft

Oct. 3, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 1, second draft  
- Oral Pitch, Enterprise Story 2 (Trend)

Oct. 10, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 2, first draft

Oct. 17, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 2, second draft  
- Written Pitch, Enterprise Story 3 (Investigative)

Oct. 24, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 3, first draft

Oct. 31, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 3, second draft

Nov. 7, 3 p.m.: Written Pitch, Enterprise Story 4 (Reportage)

Nov. 14, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 4, first draft

Nov. 19, 3 p.m.: Enterprise Story 4, second draft

Dec. 5, 3:40 p.m.: Third draft, story of your choice

Dec. 9, 3:20 p.m.: Final exam

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