

9-2014

JRNL 570.01: Covering the Enviroment and Resource Issues

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Recommended Citation

Lowisch, Henriette B., "JRNL 570.01: Covering the Enviroment and Resource Issues" (2014). *Syllabi*. 1534.
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COVERING THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

JRNL 570 • Fall 2014 • MW 12:40 – 2 p.m. • DAH 004

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Office Hours:

Tues 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Thurs 9:30-11:30 a.m.

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 explore the field, 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 add to 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: You will be assigned a beat and report four enterprise stories over the course of the semester, 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 10+ 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 where you'll practice interviewing, attributing information, translating scientific jargon, structuring narrative, editing, formulating leads and kickers and other techniques.

Monday 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. Wednesday sessions will explore specific reporting techniques and challenges.

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Readings: I expect you to read the Missoulian, the Missoula Independent and High Country News on a regular basis, to keep up with local and regional issues. In addition, I will provide you with selected articles and materials ahead of certain class sessions, with the expectation that you will have read them before we meet.

Course Tools

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

- A reliable recording device.
- Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.
- The AP Stylebook (free on campus via http://www.apstylebook.com/umontana_edu/ or buy a subscription).
- A Twitter account, to follow organizations and individuals on your beat.
- A subscription to the Missoulian newspaper; I recommend home delivery.
- Access to Society of Environmental Journalists listservs, for story ideas for this class and beyond. Become a student member (\$25 / year) at sej.org, or sign up for RSS Feeds (Headlines and Watchdog Tip Sheet).

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.

Beat file: Please see separate instructions. I will grade those competitively. 250 points.

Stories: 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: 2x50 points. Science news: 100 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; conservemontana.org. Without a clip in hand by Dec. 12, you will receive an "I" for "Incomplete." You will have till the end of Spring Semester 2015 to fulfill the requirement and have the grade converted; if you don't, you'll have to retake JRNL 570 in the fall of 2015.

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

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- You will be forgiven one absence, as long as you notify me ahead of class.
- Don't be late. Class doesn't start at 12:41 p.m. It starts at 12:40 p.m.
- In case of emergency, contact me to discuss the problem and negotiate a solution before you miss a deadline or a class.
- 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.

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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

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

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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Deadline Schedule

Unless specified otherwise, submit assignments as email attachments (.doc or .docx) **by noon** on deadline day, and bring printed version to class.

W Aug 27	Establish Twitter account; follow me and classmates
M Sep 8	Oral Pitch, Enterprise Story 1 (Profile)
M Sep 15	Enterprise Story 1, first draft
M Sep 22	Enterprise Story 1, second draft
W Sep 24	3 questions for Leon Billings
R Sep 25	Billings Talk, 3:40 – 5 p.m.
M Sep 29	Oral pitch, Enterprise Story 2 (Trend)
M Oct 6	Enterprise Story 2, first draft
M Oct 13	Enterprise Story 2, second draft
W Oct 15	Beat file, work-in-progress
M Oct 20	Written Pitch, Enterprise Story 3 (Investigative)
W Oct 22	Email written pitch to editor (bcc me)
M Oct 27	Enterprise Story 3, first draft
M Nov 3	Enterprise Story 3, second draft
F Nov 7	Science news blurb
M Nov 10	3 questions for science press conference
W Nov 12	Science news story
M Nov 17	Written Pitch, Enterprise Story 4 (Reportage)
W Nov 19	Email written pitch to editor (bcc me)
M Nov 24	Enterprise Story 4, first draft
M Dec 1	Enterprise Story 4, second draft
M Dec 8	Beat file
W Dec 10	Third draft, story of your choice

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