



Environmental Journalism with Cynthia Barnett Fall 2025

Undergrads: JOU 4314
Grad students: MMC 6936

Mondays 9:35 to 12:35
Weimer Hall 1090

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Office Hours:

Walk-in @ 3063 Weimer: Mondays 2-4 and Wednesdays 3-4.

By appointment: Phone; Zoom; Office; or Walk & Talk in the Florida Park neighborhood, 9 blocks north of the stadium.

Environmental Journalism, the craft: Living in what scientists term the Anthropocene Era (anthropo: man, and cene: new), in which human activities have ever-more serious impacts on people and the planet, it is increasingly urgent to report on and improve public understanding of climate change; freshwater quality and scarcity; the decline of our oceans, fish, and wildlife; environmental health; sustainable energy, agriculture, and food systems; and more. But complex science; politics; disinformation; zealous stakeholders; and what can (incorrectly) seem like hopeless causes make environment/climate among the most challenging specialties in journalism.

Environmental Journalism, the course: This course will introduce you to Environment/Climate Journalism; elucidate the roles and differences between journalism and communications; help you find the most accurate, credible and timeliest information on science and issues; and ground you in the essentials of environmental reporting: Discerning uncompromised expert sources; using human narratives and descriptive storytelling to relate real-world impact; reporting on solutions not spin; and tapping the databases, records and other tools commonly used by environmental reporters.



EJUF COURSE OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, you will:

- 🌱 Understand the specialization of Environmental Journalism and its role in an informed citizenry, including both watchdog and storytelling roles.
- 🌱 Evaluate pressing environmental issues with objectivity and fairness.
- 🌱 Analyze sources and differentiate among them, including ranges of scientific, policy, activist and corporate sources and their press releases; and including the ability to discern manipulation such as greenwashing and disinformation from scientifically valid research.
- 🌱 Critique a range of nonfiction environmental communications, from film to photography and from activist missives to scientific research.
- 🌱 Demonstrate ability to communicate in-depth environmental issues in journalistic form to lay audiences in compelling ways.



EJUF COURSE READINGS & PARTICIPATION

READINGS: Please read (or view/listen to) the assigned works of journalism each week before class. Most are here on the syllabus and some will be added based on news of the day—look for my weekly email, usually on Thursday mornings, with reminders for the following Monday’s class. Grad students are required to read and review a nonfiction book of environmental journalism, science writing or environmental history **by Thanksgiving**. Please talk with me about your interests so we can find the right book for you.

For all students, our weekly assigned articles and essays are available free online, or via Canvas, or through UF’s electronic databases; make sure you’ve downloaded the [Gatorlink VPN](#) so you can access them. Please also do your best to keep up with the Environmental Journalism of the day. One way to do so is to read the Society of Environmental Journalists’ “EJ Today,” a well-chosen collection of top headlines from the beat updated every weekday morning. You do not have to be a member of SEJ to access the daily links, here: www.sej.org/headlines/list. You will want to join ([\\$25 for students](#)/first year) if considering EJ as a career.

PARTICIPATION: Being engaged in the course is part of your grade. Class time will consist of discussion, with each other and some terrific guest speakers, many of whom are EJUF alumni now working in the field. It’s essential that you keep up with the readings, come to class prepared and participate: Share your insights, ask questions, challenge respectfully. With only 14 meetings including our field trip, I expect you to attend.

FIELD TRIP! Getting out in the field is fundamental to environmental storytelling, and the EJUF field trip is a favorite part of the course. The Nature Writing/Field Notes assignment we’ll do together is part of your grade; anyone who misses will need to make it up in a different field experience. More details and directions in class and by email. **Sat Oct. 25th: Request time off now!**



EJUF COURSE GRADES

- 🍃 Attendance & Engagement in EJ class: **100**
- 🍃 Assignment 1: EJ presentations: **100** (due Sun 9/7)
- 🍃 Assignment 2: Climate Change story: **100** (due Sun 9/21)
- 🍃 Assignment 3: Disinformation/Greenwashing analysis: **100** (due Sun 10/5)
- 🍃 Assignment 4: Animal story: **100** (Due Sun 10/19)
- 🍃 Assignment 5: Nature Writing/Field Notes exercise: **100** (hand it to me after the field trip)
- 🍃 Assignment 6: Pitch and Outline, EJUF final story: **100** (due Sun 11/2)
- 🍃 Assignment 7: First draft, EJUF final story: **100** (due Sun 11/16)
- 🍃 Assignment 8: Final draft, EJUF final story: **200** (Due Weds 12/3)

Total points possible: 1,000

930-1,000 points: A

900-929: A-
 880-899: B+
 830-879: B
 800-829: B-
 780-799: C+
 730-779: C
 700-729: C-
 680-699: D+
 630-679: D
 600-629: D-
 599 or below: E



EJUF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

EJ Assignment 1: ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM ANALYSIS & PRESENTATIONS

Undergrads: A 500-word critique of a work of Environmental Journalism you choose from among [the 2024 winners of the SEJ Annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment, here](#); or [the ONA 3M Truth in Science Award found here](#) (can be a 2024 finalist or winner); or for film, a selection from the [DC Environmental Film Festival](#). (Many 2024 selections are available for watching here.) Plan to give us an informal class presentation on the strengths and weaknesses of the piece. It could be a long-form story; conservation film; data story; conservation photography project; multimedia story; or other EJ work. **Please post the story you choose on the Canvas discussion thread where I've asked so we don't have duplicates.**

Grad students: A 500-word analysis + formal class presentation on a special problem or issue in Environmental Journalism. This could relate to your graduate study or a special interest of yours, and ideally should teach the rest of us something. Here are just a few possibilities. Feel free to come talk to me about others, and get my approval for your topic: Climate disinformation; covering GMOs; anthropomorphizing animals; the problem of doomsday climate reporting; [the "Matilda effect" in science writing](#), etc.

Due Sunday Sept. 7th midnight: Undergrads, turn in text on Canvas w/ link to story, trailer etc. Grad students should turn in text, + slides for an approx. 15-min. class presentation. **All students should be prepared to present as of Mon Sept. 15th; we'll schedule over the coming weeks.**

EJ Assignment 2: CLIMATE CHANGE STORY: A climate change story spanning any beat, from agriculture to real estate to sports to weather. Think about our guest speaker Alex Harris and how she localizes and humanizes a global crisis. You can tackle a local, state or national story, newsy or featurey. The key requirement is that it intersects with the science of climate change, ie, heat records and Gator games or local crops; solar energy and carbon emissions; [the UF English professor who plants trees with his students for climate mitigation](#) etc. A 500- to 800-word written story; a data-viz story; or 2-3 minute audio or video story. **Due Sun Sept. 21st @ midnight.**

EJ Assignment 3: ANALYSIS OF MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, FALSE SOLUTIONS or GREENWASHING. A 500-word critique and informal class presentation on a current example of misinformation/disinformation or alleged false solution or greenwashing. You could analyze an ad; political or corporate press release; website; green campaign, etc. You may feature an effort that represents a tangible solution or makes a difference—or expose one that is spreading disinformation, greenwashing or pink-washing. (Pink-ribbon-promoting companies whose products are linked to increased risk of breast cancer, see thinkbeforeyoupink.org.)

Due Sunday Oct. 5th @ midnight. Please include link to press release, ad, or etc., and **be prepared to present informally over the next few weeks.** No slides necessary, but do show us the campaign you are analyzing.

EJ Assignment 4: ANIMAL STORY: A news story based around animals and/or an animal issue. You may choose to report on wildlife, farm animals, marine or aquatic life, a microscopic myxozoan or a behemoth whale—even pets. Remember to avoid clichés or overly anthropomorphizing animals; include context and underlying causes of human/animal interactions; and other advice from my lecture and guest speakers. Include some inherent wonder in the animal you’re writing about—and a photograph! A 500- to 800-word written story; a data-viz story; or 2-3 minute audio or video story. **Due Sunday 10/19 @ midnight.**

EJ Assignment 5: NATURE WRITING/FIELD NOTES EXERCISE. Due to me in person when we leave the field trip.

EJ Assignment 6: PITCH AND OUTLINE, EJUF FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL STORY: A reported, 500-word story pitch (plan) for your major Environmental Journalism story that will be due in two parts: A first draft 11/16 and a final draft on the last day of the semester. This is essentially the vision for your story—the angle; the data on which the story is based; the sources you’ll interview (5 at minimum); peer-reviewed research papers that deepen context (2 at minimum); any places you’ll visit and describe; the structure you envision; and ideas for visuals and other assets. **Due Sunday 11/2 @ midnight.**

EJ Assignment 7: FIRST DRAFT, MULTIMEDIA CLIMATE or ENVIRONMENT STORY: Your final story should be a written narrative of roughly 1,000 words unless we agreed on a video story, NPR-style audio story, interactive graphic, or other form. It should include at least two additional multimedia elements—photos; audio or video clips; data visualizations; a timeline or other elements to draw people in. Please note that first draft does not mean rough draft. You’ll be graded on your effort to make this draft as strong and complete as possible. **Due Sunday 11/16 @ midnight.** I will return edits ASAP with the hope that you can both enjoy Thanksgiving and have time to complete your final, fact-checked multimedia package by the last day of the semester.

EJ Assignment 8: FINAL DRAFT, MULTIMEDIA CLIMATE OR ENVIRONMENT STORY: Again: roughly 1,000 words unless we agreed on a video story, NPR-style audio story, interactive graphics, or other form. The story should include at least two additional multimedia elements—photos; audio or video clips; data visualizations; a timeline or other elements to draw people in. This piece should have a compelling storyline and a good blend of storytelling and science. It should be clear and well-organized and get across why it’s important. It should include at least five sources and be fact-checked by you. It should address all edits and answer all questions from my feedback on your first draft. An “A” story is ready for publication. **Due the last day of UF classes: Wednesday 12/3 @ midnight.**



EJUF COURSE AGENDA & WEEKLY READINGS

Week 1, Monday Aug 25th Introductions & History

Intros to the course, story assignments and each other, including mutual interests in the environment and the place(s) most important to you. Intro to the craft, which stretches back to the seventeenth century, when John Evelyn writes “Fumifugium, or the Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoake of London Dissipated” (1661), proposing remedies for London’s choking black air: *The immoderate use of, and indulgence to, sea-coale in the city of London exposes it to one of the fowlest inconveniences and reproaches that can possibly befall so noble and otherwise incomparable City. Whilst they are belching it forth their sooty jaws, the City of London resembles ... the suburbs of Hell [rather] than an assembly of rational creatures.*

We’ll also devote some time to the 20th Century environmental writers who changed the U.S. and Florida’s environmental ethos and helped give rise to modern environmental protection. They include Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas – a journalist and author long before she became an environmental activist at age 76 – and Rachel Carson, whose 1962 book *Silent Spring* remains one of the best-known works of EJ for its profound impact. *Silent Spring* helped launch the modern environmental movement, spurred the federal government to ban DDT, and helped bring about a remarkable recovery of eagles, falcons and other fish-eating birds then at the brink of extinction.

Finally, we’ll introduce a class theme exploring the history of the industry that was also at work on disinformation and denial.

PREPARE:

- 1) **Read** this EJUF syllabus in full.
- 2) **Read** “Marjory Stoneman Douglas, ‘Voice of the River’,” by Tim Collie, the *Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*, 1998 (on Canvas).
- 3) **Read** [Silent Spring Part I](#), Carson’s first excerpt in *The New Yorker*, published in June 1962.

Labor Day holiday Monday Sept 1st NO CLASS

During our off week, please:

- 1) **Work on** your presentations, due Sept. 7th
- 2) **Begin listening to** “[The Mad Men of Big Oil](#),” Season 3 of the investigative climate podcast Drilled by Amy Westervelt. We’ll discuss the 9-episode season during Week 4, so please finish listening by then.

Week 2, Monday Sept 8th Climate Change, the story of our time

Reporting on the climate crisis is an “[all-hands-on-deck affair](#),” as CNN climate correspondent John Sutter points out, a story for all beats. Climate journalism is also an in-demand specialization requiring fundamental knowledge of climate science, a willingness to do investigative reporting, skepticism for false solutions, and other nuances. Helping the public understand warming, its human causes and its impacts to the Earth and its life is a special challenge in journalism today, and one of the great stories of our time. Local climate journalism can be some of the most powerful.

Guest speaker: EJUF alumnus Alex Harris, climate change reporter, *The Miami Herald*, @harrisalex

PREPARE: Read our guest speaker's 2025 series, Floods of Trouble in the *Herald*, exploring how real estate and climate change are colliding in South Florida. Develop questions for Alex.

- 1) [How secret flood histories cost Florida home buyers and mask state's risk](#)
- 2) [Climate change is coming for Florida's real estate. Why don't prices reflect it?](#)
- 3) [Thousands of Florida homes have flooded before. Tips to avoid buying one](#)
- 4) [The unseen flooding risk in South Florida: Rising water beneath our feet](#)
- 5) [From the sky, the ground, the sea. The three ways South Florida gets flooded](#)

Week 3, Mon Sept 15th Conservation photography & film

Conservation photography tells a purposeful story. "The images exist for a reason," explains *National Geographic* photographer Joel Sartore. "To save the earth while we still can." We'll dig into these dynamic visual forms and how they differ from traditional nature or landscape photography; the key role of imagery in environmental storytelling; and strategies for photography and films that help audiences understand environmental issues and their personal connection.

Guest speaker (in person): Conservation photographer and filmmaker and *National Geographic* explorer [Gabby Salazar](#). insta: @gabbysalazar

PREPARE:

- 1) **Watch the film**, [The Path of the Panther](#). (Streams on Hulu; we can do a screening if the class wants to.)
- 2) **View our guest speaker's short film**, [Outnumbered in Africa: One Woman's Remarkable Journey to Protect Lions](#), and Gabby's photographic portfolio at gabbysalazar.com. Develop questions for Gabby.
- 3) **Read and view**, [Use Your Photography to Support and Advance Conservation](#), by Morgan Heim in *Audubon magazine*.
- 4) **Read and view**, [Plight of the Platypus](#) story by April Reese with photographs by Douglas Gimesy, *bioGraphic*.

Week 4, Mon Sept 22nd Greenwashing, misinformation & disinformation

Is that new housing development really green? Is the phosphate industry feeding the world or depleting it? Are 15-minute cities a conspiracy to trap us all in open-air prisons?

Environment/climate journalists must ask the questions and follow-up questions; report with sophistication and fairness; recognize greenwashing vs. effective corporate social responsibility programs; and take care not to amplify misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories.

PREPARE:

- 1) **Watch** the documentary film *Merchants of Doubt*, directed by Robert Kenner. The film is available free online via the UF Library's catalogue. (So long as you are logged in to the VPN.) Watch this fantastic movie with a friend/classmate if you can. (93 minutes).
- 2) **Finish all 9 episodes of** "[The Mad Men of Big Oil](#)," Season 3 of the investigative climate podcast Drilled by Amy Westervelt.
- 3) **Read** "[The carbon footprint sham](#)," by Mark Kaufman, Mashable.
- 4) **Read** "[Climate misinformation turning crisis into catastrophe](#)," *The Guardian*.

Week 5, Mon Sept 29th Centering People and their Places

ALERT! Week 5 class will take place in the beautiful O'Neill Reading Room on the second floor of UF's Pugh Hall. Please be settled into your seats by 10 a.m. to meet our guest lecturers. Whether on *The Washington Post* climate desk or one of the dynamic nonprofit news sites covering the environment, some of the most impactful Environmental Journalism connects intimately to the lives of people and their places. The planet will survive as it has for 4.5 billion years, but environmental crises such as climate change, water pollution and the loss of forests around the world have profound consequences for humanity, offering rich opportunities to tell human stories that make a difference. This week we focus on reporting on place with sensitivity, and how to center people in EJ stories. {Don't worry, we'll devote the next class to reporting on animals! 🐱🦋🐸}

Guest lecturers (in person): [The Marjorie](#) cofounders Becca Burton, program coordinator of UF's Gulf Scholars Program, and Dr. Anna Hamilton, assistant director of UF's Samuel Proctor Oral History Program.

PREPARE: 1) Read all parts of "[Island Impermanent](#)," [The Marjorie](#)'s investigation into the loss of cultural heritage at Egmont Key, which has lost half its land mass due to sea rise and storms. 2) Read: "[Who is an Expert?](#)" by Attabey Rodríguez Benítez, October 2021.

Week 6, Mon Oct. 6th Animal week in EJUF!

Earth is losing species 100s to 1,000s times faster than natural extinction, a pace that has not occurred since the dinosaurs and many other species disappeared 65 million years ago. Environmental journalists have special ethical considerations toward the animals we cover. These creatures also help tell and sell our stories, from polar bears struggling to survive a warming Arctic to sharks, which marine scientists have found are more harmed than helped by Discovery Channel's Shark Week, the longest-running cable series in history. How do we avoid the "Jaws Effect"? Should we avoid anthropomorphizing animals? What are some ways to report on the biodiversity crisis, and make the peril facing Florida's frosted flatwoods salamander as vital as for our charismatic Florida panther? What should we look out for when covering stories about farm animals?

Guest speaker (on Zoom): Sentient disinformation correspondent Jessica Scott-Reid, @JessLReid

PREPARE:

- 1) [“Florida has become a zoo. A literal zoo,”](#) by Benji Jones, Vox.
- 2) [Q&A with author and shark biologist David Shiffman](#), *Mongabay*, June 2022.
- 3) [“Sharks, Lies and Videotape: Scientists Document Many Problems with Shark Week, Marine Biologists Biggest Stage,”](#) Allegheny College, July 2021.
- 4) [“Are wild animals really ‘wild’?”](#) TED Talk by the environmental writer Emma Marris, followed by Q&A with TED science curator David Biello, September, 2021.
- 5) MAHA’s [“Natural Foods Obsession Doesn’t Account for the Way We Actually Eat,”](#) Jessica Scott-Reid, Sentient media.

Week 7, Mon Oct. 13th The art & science of science writing

Translating scientific research and interviewing scientists can be challenging; the key is to be prepared. Going in with a knowledge gap is OK. After all, you’re there to bridge the knowledge gap between the science and your audience. This week’s class is devoted to find compelling stories in science and tell them with flair, from one of the best—distinguished science writer Dr. Ainissa Ramirez. You’ll get tips for finding and interviewing scientists, and tricky issues that come up, such as the scientist who asks to review your draft or the one who seems to be speaking an alien language.

Guest speaker (on Zoom): Dr. Ainissa Ramirez, distinguished science writer and author, *The Alchemy of Us* @ainissaramirez

PREPARE:

- 1) Read Chapters 1, “Interact,” and 4, “Capture,” in *The Alchemy of Us* by Ainissa Ramirez. (Available in digital format via UF libraries; be sure to be logged on to VPN.)
- 2) [“How to Find Scientist Sources and Plan Interviews,”](#) by Abdullahi Tsanni, The Open Notebook, April 2021.
- 3) Check out: [The 500 Women Scientists’ GAGE Resources page](#) to help put you in touch with more women scientists, and scientists from underrepresented backgrounds.

Week 8, Mon Oct. 20th Tools of the Trade Part I

Environmental databases offer important story ideas and data on topics like extreme heat with the [CDC Heat & Health Tracker](#); industrial chemical releases via [EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory](#); weather and climate data via NOAA’s [National Centers for Environmental Information](#); Florida [Department of Environmental Protection pollution notices](#); and many others. But it takes sources, time, skill and statistical understanding to analyze data and turn it into thoughtful storytelling. EJUF alum **Max Chesnes**, environment and climate reporter for *The Tampa Bay Times* who broke the [“hotels and golf courses in Florida’s state parks”](#) story with the help of a whistleblower, will join for Part I of two classes devoted to the “Tools of the Trade.” Max will go over sources and data including for hurricanes and flood projections, and how he uses drone photography as a vital environmental reporting tool.

Guest speaker: Max Chesnes, environment and climate reporter, *The Tampa Bay Times*.

PREPARE:

- 1) “A new hurricane season is here. In Fort Myers Beach, the old one never left,” by Max Chesnes, *The Tampa Bay Times*. @MaxChesnes
- 2) “DeSantis admin wants to put golf courses, pickleball courts and more in Florida state parks,” by Max Chesnes, *The Tampa Bay Times*.
- 3) “How Trump environmental rollbacks could increase pollution in Florida,” by Emily L. Mahoney and Max Chesnes, *The Tampa Bay Times*.

Week 9, Monday Oct 27th Prepare, plan, pitch

With the pitch and outline for your big environmental story due Nov. 2nd, we’ll spend time in class brainstorming dream stories and making final decisions about whether to tackle a team project or individual work. Please bring your story ideas to workshop with the class and brainstorm reporting suggestions and strategies. Once you have a great idea, how do you pitch it to a top outlet that will pay you and amplify your important work?

PREPARE:

- 1) Spend some time with the Open Notebook’s “Pitch Database,” a fantastic resource for learning to write pitches: <https://www.theopennotebook.com/pitch-database/>
 - 🌱 Bring a favorite pitch from the database.
 - 🌱 What did you learn about pitching?
 - 🌱 How close was the final story to the pitch?
- 2) Everyone should bring at least two story ideas you’re considering for your final project.

Week 10, Monday Nov 3rd Equity and the Environment

While climate change is a global phenomenon, its negative consequences are more severely felt by poor people and poor countries, and by low-income people within wealthy countries. In the U.S. as in many parts of the world, minority neighborhoods bear the brunt of environmental threats such as exposure to chemical plants, Superfund and other toxic waste sites. Research shows that the chronic stressors of poverty fundamentally alter the way the body reacts to pollutants, especially in young children. Historically the environmental movement, governments and Environmental Journalism alike all lagged in recognizing the impact of pollution and other pressing environmental issues on vulnerable communities.

Guest speaker (in person): NKwanda Jah, chair, Alachua County NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee.

PREPARE:

- 1) “How a protest in a North Carolina farming town sparked a national movement,” By Darryl Fears and Brady Dennis, *The Washington Post*, April 6th 2021.
- 2) Letter from SouthWest Organizing Project to the president of the National Wildlife Federation, March 16th 1990.

- 3) View: “[Burning Injustice: Latino activists battle to shut down California’s Toxic Incinerator](#),” documentary by the Story of Stuff Project. (17 minutes)
- 4) Energy Burden Part II, the Power of Irma, by Joan Meiners, www.wuft.org/news/energy-burden/the-storm/

Week 11, Monday November 10th: International reporting on the environment

An 8-billion population, resource extraction and global trade and travel connects us all to life, water, air and land on other continents, from toxic chemical pollution in China linked to our products and companies to the dumping of our digital waste in Africa. Climate change, species extinction, water strife, and other major environmental issues are at once local and global. The global story offers great opportunities for journalists and requires sensitivity and overcoming assumptions. We’ll also spend time on grants available for international reporting—and offer a realistic view of freelancing.

Guest speaker: [Gloria Dickie, Bangkok-based international environment/climate journalist](#). Gloria has reported from five continents and on topics as diverse as maggot farming and giant pandas for *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, and many other publications. Her beautiful book [Eight Bears](#) explores our relationships with bears around the world. @GloriaDickie.

PREPARE (all stories by Gloria):

- 1) “[Monkeys falling from the trees and baking barnacles: How heat is driving animals to extinction](#),” the *Guardian*, August 2025.
- 2) [How to Make Peace with the World's Deadliest Bears](#), *National Geographic* (grant funded)
- 3) “[The World’s Northernmost Town is Changing Dramatically](#),” *Scientific American*, finalist, international reporting in the Livingston Award for Young Journalists.

Week 12, Monday Nov 17th Tools of the Trade Part II

For Part II of the “Tools of the Trade,” EJUF alum Alan Halaly joins from Las Vegas to explain additional federal resources environmental journalists should know, including familiarity with the Federal Register, and how to read an Environmental Impact Statement.

Guest speaker: Alan Halaly, water and environment reporter, the *Las Vegas Review Journal*. @AlanHalaly

PREPARE:

- 1) **Read:** “[Inside the rush to make Nevada the country’s lithium capital](#),” by Alan Halaly, *The Las Vegas Review Journal*, March 1st 2024.
- 2) **Check out:** [The Federal Register](#), the daily journal of the U.S. gov’t. Using the search function, find a document/action involving a topic/place you’re interested in and be prepared to share with the class what story you might be able to tell using that doc.

THANKSGIVING WEEK Monday Nov. 24th No class!

Week 13 & last day of class, Mon Dec 1st

Final meditations on environment and climate journalism; solutions-oriented reporting; careers in environmental journalism and communications; and finding grant funding for passion projects. Plus, an Ask Cynthia Anything session! We'll use the second half of class to work on polishing your stories and preparing them for publication.



COURSE POLICIES

Safety and security: Your safety and security are paramount and supersede the value of any stories our class might produce. If you are interviewing or photographing a subject of our reporting in a private setting – such as the person's home or private office or the boondocks – please inform me before you leave. We may conduct a quick background check on your source and establish a security plan so that we know where you will be, when you would expect to be finished and when you will contact me to let me know you're back. I also want to know if you head out in the wake of a hurricane or other disaster. I may suggest that a classmate or instructor accompany you.

Student Health and Wellness: Your well-being is important to me, and to everyone here at the University of Florida and our College of Journalism and Communications. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging everyone to look out for one another and reach out for help if anyone is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu so the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the person in distress. A nighttime/weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 911.

Students with disabilities: All reasonable accommodations will be made. Should you need them, please register early in semester w/ the [Disability Resource Center](#). Once registered, you'll receive an accommodation letter to provide me when requesting accommodation.

Academic Honesty is always expected. As a UF student, you've agreed to comply with the [Honor Code](#). Please make sure you understand the code and consequences. Any violations of the code in our course will be reported to the Dean of Students. You must also pay special attention to journalistic ethics and issues of plagiarism and copyright, as well as ethics for using Chat GPT and other AI programs. These programs can be useful for brainstorming headlines and finding layered information—but they also generate considerable mistakes so must be fact-checked. You may not turn in stories or parts of stories generated by AI. We'll talk about the evolving generative landscape through the semester, including studying the disinformation spread by AI.

Class attendance: [Requirements for attendance and other work fall under UF policies here](#). If you need to miss for illness or professional travel, I will provide links from Zoom lectures or slides from mine; get notes from a classmate. Otherwise, any reason for absence from regular class that does not appear on UF's list of excused absences will result in a 25-point deduction per missed class.

Late assignments: Meeting deadline is crucial to your future success and relationship with bosses/editors, whether in journalism or any other field. On all assignments, your grade will drop one full letter grade for each day overdue.

Story Sources and Conflicts of Interest: Always pursue storytelling that is fair, accurate and complete—and based on information gathered from a variety of sources. A greater understanding of the cultural and ethnic differences in our society will enhance learning, and help students develop habits and sensitivities that will be of great value in their workplaces and communities. This emphasis on diversity of sources shall not focus just on race and ethnicity or sexual orientation, but also age, education, gender, geography, occupation, politics, religion, socioeconomics, etc.

Avoid conflicts of interest at all times. Students in this course shall not be used as sources for your assignments. The same applies to relatives, roommates, friends (from campus or back home), sorority sisters, fraternity brothers, or members of any other co-curricular or extracurricular organizations to which you belong. Interviewing UF faculty, staff, or employees is allowed provided they are not friends of yours.

Sources must be interviewed either in person, by phone or via Zoom or other virtual platform. Email interviews are discouraged and permitted only with my permission in advance. Sometimes a source will want you to let them read a story before it's submitted or published. Do not do so. It may be appropriate – sometimes, depending on the story, even ideal – to call the source back to confirm facts or context, or, in the case of complex science, to read a sentence back to ensure you've accurately understood and translated. Be wary, however, of allowing someone else to steer, censor or otherwise undermine your reporting or story approach.

Multiple sourcing is required – and “sources” means interacting with real human beings, not simply relying on organizational statements, news releases or websites. This also involves contacting as many people or obtaining as much related documentation as you can. It's wise to interview as many sources as possible, so you have more than you need for your story.

All facts and opinions in your story must be attributed to sources. Anonymous or off-the-record material is not acceptable any more than fictional people. If there's a compelling reason to not use a source's full name in a story, you must run it by me before agreeing. Assignments not abiding these sourcing and interview mandates will lose points.



YOUR TEACHER:

Cynthia Barnett is Environmental Journalist in Residence and Director of Climate and Environment Reporting Initiatives in UF's College of Journalism and Communications. She is an award-winning journalist who has reported on the environment around the world, and the author of four books including her most recent *The Sound of the Sea: Seashells and the fate of the Oceans*, named one of the best science books of the year by NPR's Science Friday. She also wrote *Mirage*; *Blue Revolution*; and *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History*, longlisted for the National Book Award. She's written on the environment for *National Geographic*, the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, the *Atlantic*, *Discover*, *Salon*, *Politico*, *Orion* and others. She once was in your seats here at Weimer Hall: Cynthia earned her bachelor's in journalism and master's in environmental history, both from UF, and spent a year as a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan specializing in freshwater. She is Mom to a 24-year-old son and 21-year-old daughter and lives with her husband just north of campus in the Florida Park neighborhood, where she likes to do walk-and-talk office hours.