

Survey of Environment in Media
JOU 4930, Section 0014 (one credit)
Fall 2015
Monday mornings, period 4
10:40 to 11:30, Rinker Hall 110

Instructor: Cynthia Barnett

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Sometimes I am traveling on a story so best to make an appointment

Environmental Journalism, the challenge: Living in what some scientists term the Anthropocene Era (*anthropo*: man, and *cene*: new), in which human activities have ever-more serious impacts on our local regions and the planet, it is increasingly important to report on and improve public understanding of climate change; freshwater scarcity; the decline of our oceans, fish, and wildlife; environmental health; sustainable energy, agriculture, and food systems; and more. But complex science and uncertainty, public apathy and politics, well-funded counter-narratives, zealous stakeholders, and what can (incorrectly) appear a lack of news hook for stories playing out slowly in the decades of a comp plan or two centuries of CO2 emissions make Environmental Journalism one of the most challenging specializations in our craft.

Environmental Journalism, the survey course: This course will give you an overview of the field. Each week, we'll discuss a major theme in EJ, the underlying science, policy, and/or political issues, and the journalistic challenge, often with a guest speaker. With both journalists and scientists, we'll discuss how to find the most accurate, credible, and timeliest information on science and issues, and the essentials of environmental reporting – discerning uncompromised expert sources, using descriptive storytelling to relate real-world impact, and tapping the primary databases and other tools commonly used by environmental reporters.

Course readings, participation, assignments and grades:

Readings: You are not required to buy any books. Please read the assigned works of journalism each week before class. Most are here on the syllabus and some will be added based on the news of the day; check email Wednesday evening before our Monday class for updates. All weekly assigned articles and essays are available free online, or through UF's electronic databases. You are also expected to keep up with the Environmental Journalism of the day. This is best accomplished by checking 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 may want to join (\$25 for students) if considering EJ as a career.

Your grade: Will be based on two 50-point tests, both short-answers based on our readings, speakers, and discussions. They are take-home and you will have several days to complete them before submitting to Canvas.

No-test option: Though this is a one-credit survey course, it is ultimately a journalism course. So, I am offering you the option to report and write one or two 750-word environmental stories **instead of** one or both tests. This would give you the opportunity to dive into a specific environmental area of interest; to work with me on environmental story for another journalism class (if that professor allows); and/or to get your work published – either in a traditional news outlet or the College of Journalism and Communications’ site devoted to Environmental Journalism at UF, www.stateofwater.org. The stories will be worth 50 points each and due on the same day the tests are due, to Canvas. You could do two of them instead of the two tests, or replace one story for one test and take the other – whatever you wish. **In either case, here’s the grading scale:**

90-100: A
 87-89: B+
 80-86: B
 77-79: C+
 70-76: C
 67-69: D+
 60-66: D
 59 or below: E

Twitter Extra Credit: If you do the readings, come to class, take notes, and otherwise stay engaged, you should have no worries. But, since you are college students, you will worry, and so I’m offering extra credit for social media. Twitter is a vigorous platform for Environmental Journalism. I’ll be tweeting about our lectures and readings using the hashtag #EJUF. I will be blogging about our class on www.stateofwater.org. With a Twitter account, you may receive up to one point of extra credit for each of the 15 weeks we meet if you post an original tweet based on that week’s lectures or readings or something on stateofwater.org with the hashtag #EJUF. Again, you can only earn one point in any one week – ie don’t send 15 Tweets in our last week together. If you choose to do this, please make sure that I know your Twitter handle and see a copy of your tweet. Mine is [@cynthiabarnett](https://twitter.com/cynthiabarnett).

For a good overview of Environmental Journalism on Twitter, follow the Society of Environmental Journalists Feed at [@SEJORG](https://twitter.com/SEJORG).

Week 1, August 24th 2015, Course intro and policies, philosophy and history of

EJ: Modern EJ has roots in 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 take a look at the history of this vigorous field from Evelyn through Florida's own **Marjory Stoneman Douglas** – a journalist and author long before she became an environmental activist at age 76.

Week 2, August 31st, 2015, The Everglades: Wading into major challenges of Environmental Journalism: While more than 7 million people live in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, and 50 million visit each year, most don't understand the fragile connections among water, land, and massive waterworks that make the region inhabitable. The agriculture and development, water diversions and flood-control structures that keep South Florida from drowning also have endangered the ecosystem and its many plant and animal species, with a 90 percent decline in wading birds over the century; and cause severe pollution during times of too much water and scarcity in times of too little. Now, climate change – bringing sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, and more-severe coastal flooding – makes the already-vulnerable tip of Florida far more so. All make the Everglades an ideal case study for EJ, from the most basic question – How do we help audiences care about a swamp? – to the most complex: How do we report on uncertainty, and push beyond political sound bites to help bring understanding of the ecosystems that keep us alive? **Guest speaker: Dr. Karl Havens, Director, Florida Sea Grant.**

Read ahead for class: 1) “Marjory Stoneman Douglas, ‘Voice of the River,’” by Tim Collie, the *Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*, May 18th 1998. 2) “On the Brink of Disaster,” by Curtis Morgan, *The Miami Herald*, August 17th 2013. 3) “Big Money, Big Politics, and Big Infrastructure: Florida's Saga Illustrates Climate Change's Deep Challenges,” by Katrina Schwartz, *New Security Beat*, March 2015.

September 7th Labor Day, No Class

Sunday September 13th Field Trip to Seahorse Key!

(Not mandatory, but a great trip if you can make it.) An hour's drive west of Gainesville and another mile into the Gulf of Mexico by boat, the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge protects rare undeveloped barrier islands, creating an important rookery for nesting migratory birds and a laboratory for Gulf science. We'll meet Sunday morning in the quaint fishing village of Cedar Key and travel by boat to Seahorse Key. Directions, details, and contacts by email. Yes, you may bring a friend, if you let me know ahead of time.

Week 3, September 14th, Literary journalism/environmental biography/nature writing: Environmental journalists are journalists working to cover the environment and not environmentalists trying to practice journalism. Still, nature writing can have its place in EJ. Lyrical descriptions of sea or forest, personal narratives, sense of place pieces and adventure tales – can draw many more readers to environmental stories.

Read ahead for class: 1) Aldo Leopold, “Thinking like a mountain,” essay from *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949. 2) “Silent Spring Turns 50,” by Elizabeth Grossman, June 22nd 2012, *Earth*

Island Journal. (And check out the linked June 16th 1962 copy of *The New Yorker* with Rachel Carson's first excerpt of *Silent Spring*.) 3) Sy Montgomery, "Deep Intellect," *Orion* magazine, October 2011.

Week 4, September 21st, Environmental Journalism, the Beat: (Or, how to get paid to walk in the woods and write about it.) **Guest Professor: Craig Pittman, award-winning environmental reporter for the *Tampa Bay Times* and author of books on wetland fillers, manatee killers and orchid smugglers.** (I will be in Australia; please be awesome to Professor Pittman, who is one of the best Environmental Journalists in the nation.)

Read ahead for class: 1) The first story in Craig's interactive investigative series "Vanishing Wetlands," headline, "They Won't Say No," May 22nd, 2015. 2) Parts 1 and 2 of Craig's 2010 investigation into the plight of the Florida panther, "Dead Cat Walking." 3) Craig's story "Florida's Vanishing Springs," November 23rd, 2012.

Week 5, September 28th, Climate Change, the story of our time: While the science of climate change becomes increasingly certain, the scientific facts aren't translating well to the general public. We'll look at the basic science, the IPCC, finding the best experts and research, dealing with skeptics, reporting on mitigation and adaptation, finding relevance for the daily lives and the regions of our audiences – and maybe most importantly, making the climate change story engaging.

Read ahead for class: 1) "Narrating Climate Change," by Alexis Sobel Fitts, *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 2014; 2) Read two Climate Central special reports of your choice at www.climatecentral.org/reports, and check out Climate Central's "Surging Seas" map at sealevel.climatecentral.org. 3) "Good-bye Miami," by Jeff Goodell, *Rolling Stone*, June 2013.

Week 6, October 5th, Covering the Oceans Sea stories are among the best read in Environmental Journalism because audiences often already care about beaches, charismatic creatures like dolphins and their favorite seafood dinner. What if the story doesn't involve a dolphin with a cute name, rather, complexities such as ocean acidification and red tides, or highly politicized issues such as the Apalachicola oyster collapse?

Read ahead for class: 1) "Sea Change: The Pacific's Perilous Turn," 2013 *Seattle Times* series on the global impacts of ocean acidification, by reporter Craig Welch and photographer Steve Ringman. Read the seven stories online at the *Seattle Times*'s main link to the project <http://apps.seattletimes.com/reports/sea-change/> so you can view the videos and interactive graphics. 2) "A River Runs Through It," by Paul Greenberg, *The American Prospect*..

Week 7, October 12th, Freshwaters. Water lies at the heart of all the planet's biggest environmental stories – climate change, and human and ecosystems health, along with the competition among water, food and energy. Reporting on freshwater encompasses both quality – nitrates and other pollutants; and quantity, which involves the sustainability of water extraction for human use and equity among different users from ag to utilities (us) – and ecosystems.

Read ahead for class: 1) “Nonprofit ‘Pro-Water’ Site Brings Ground Journalism, Striking Visuals to Bear on Complex Global Stories,” a Society of Environmental Journalists interview with J. Carl Ganter, Circle of Blue. 2) “California’s Dogged Drought Cutting Off Water Supplies to State’s Poor,” by Brett Walton, Circle of Blue, August 2014. 3) “In California’s Central Valley, Dry Wells Multiply in the Summer Heat,” by Brett Walton, Circle of Blue, June 2015. 4) “Hey, America, It’s Time to Talk About the Price of Water,” by Cynthia Barnett, *Ensi* magazine, 2014. 5) “A Water Ethic for Florida,” by Cynthia Barnett, Collins Center for Public Policy, 2011.

Week 8, October 19th, Agriculture and food: A large and complex beat covering everything from pollution and water/land use to genetically modified crops and the question of how to feed the world. Americans’ renewed interest in organic food and urban farming, and their perpetual interest in healthful eating, can make these some of the best-read stories on the environmental beat. How can environmental journalists accurately and fairly report big trade-offs like food vs. fuel, subsidies vs. groundwater extraction, the most productive corn region in the world vs. the Gulf of Mexico dead zone, etc? Guest speaker, **Anna Prizzia**, UF campus food systems coordinator and co-founder, Alachua County’s Forage Farm.

Read ahead for class: 1) “A Race to Save the Orange by Altering its DNA,” Amy Harmon, *The New York Times*, July 27th 2013. 2) “Pointed talk: Michael Pollan and Amy Harmon Dissect a GMO controversy,” by Nathanael Johnson, GRIST, August 2013. 3) “A Journalist and a Scientist Break Ground in the GMO Debate,” by Amanda Little, *The New Yorker*, April 25th 2014. 4) “What’s Eating America,” by Michael Pollan, *Smithsonian*, June 15th, 2006..

Week 9, October 26th, Wildlife & biodiversity: Connecting audiences with the web of life. Earth is losing species 100 to 1,000 times faster than natural extinction, a rate that has not occurred since the dinosaurs and many other species disappeared 65 million years ago. Scientists say habitat degradation is the main cause. What are some ways to report on the biodiversity crisis, and make endangerment of Florida’s frosted flatwoods salamander as interesting as our charismatic Florida panther? **Guest Speaker: Dr. Tom Hoctor, UF Center for Landscape Planning**, on Florida Wildlife corridors, and efforts to predict and mitigate the effects of sea-level rise and land-use changes on Florida’s imperiled species.

Read ahead for class: 1) Watch “We Are the Asteroid,” a video by Peter Sinclair, Yale Climate Connections. 2) “The Sixth Extinction: A Conversation With Elizabeth Kolbert,” by Robert Kunzig, National Geographic, February 18th 2014. 2) View on-line interactive report, “Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition,” by photographer Carlton Ward Jr. and National Geographic, <http://www.floridawildlifecorridor.org/geostory/>.

Week 10, November 2nd, Environmental Justice: Low-income, minority neighborhoods tend to bear the brunt of environmental threats such as exposure to chemical plants, Superfund and other toxic waste sites. A growing body of research “suggests that the chronic stressors of poverty may fundamentally alter the way the body reacts to pollutants, especially in young children,” according to the Environmental Health News Network.

Read ahead for class: 1) Martin Luther King III, “Climate change and pollution take away civil Rights,” CNN.com, August 13th 2015. 2) “Cancer Alley: Big Industry, Big Problems,” Photography by Matt Black, Writing by Trymaine Lee, published on MSNBC, funded by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting. 3) (Look at) “Pollution, Poverty, People of Color,” Environmental Health News Network’s U.S. Environmental Justice Series, 2012, 10-day series at <http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/2012/pollution-poverty-people-of-color-series-summary>.

Week 11, November 9th, Chemicals Understanding epidemiology & risk, and investigative reporting on the environmental beat. Chemical pollution lies at the major intersection of environmental, health, and science reporting. **Guest speaker: Joe Delfino, UF professor emeritus in chemical engineering.**

Read ahead for class: 1) Toxic Clout series by Ronnie Greene and others, 2013, Center for Public Integrity. (<http://www.publicintegrity.org/environment/pollution/toxic-clout>) Be sure to read, “In new battleground over toxic reform, American Chemistry Council targets the states.” 2) “Cracking Open a Cancer Cluster,” by Elizabeth Royte, *OnEarth* magazine, April 2014, a discussion of Fagin’s epidemiological scholarship in *Toms River*, the story of chemical production and disposal in a small coastal town in New Jersey with scores of children diagnosed with leukemia and cancers of the central nervous system. 3) (Look at) “Chemical Fallout,” a 2007 series in the *Milwaukee Wisconsin Journal Sentinel* about endocrine-disrupting chemicals in household objects from baby’s bottles to “microwave safe” containers. By journalists Susanne Rust, Cary Spivak, and Meg Kissinger, the series began to expose the problems of common chemicals that build up in our bodies, especially in children beginning in utero – as well as the epic industry effort to prevent regulation of bisphenol A (BPA). Check out the original series and follow-up stories when FDA reversed its position on BPA as a result of the series: <http://www.jsonline.com/watchdog/34405049.html>.

Week 12, November 16th, Greenwashing and spin: Is that new housing development really green? How much water will the proposed organic beef operation pump? Is phosphate feeding the world or depleting the Earth? Asking the questions and the follow-up questions... reporting with sophistication and fairness ... and recognizing greenwashing vs. effective corporate social responsibility/sustainability programs.

Read ahead for class: 1) “The slippery business of palm oil,” by Fred Pearce, *The Guardian*, November 6th 2008. 2) “BP Labors to Cast Doubt on Spill Study It Dislikes,” by Bryan Gruley and Bradley Olson, Bloomberg Business, March 11th 2015. 3) Click around BP’s Gulf spill website, The Whole Story, at <https://www.thestateofthegulf.com/the-whole-story/>

Week 13 November 23rd, Energy: Coverage blends the old-fashioned skill of following the money and the newer challenge of reporting on the sustainability of our energy choices and sources. **Guest speaker: Long-time environmental journalist (and UF-CJC alum) Bruce Ritchie, energy reporter based in Tallahassee for Politico.**

Read ahead for class: 1) “Florida utilities say solar doesn’t work in the Sunshine State, but it sure does in Georgia,” January 30th 2015, and “Utilities their tune on solar power,” May 29th 2015, both by Ivan Penn in the *Tampa Bay Times*. 2) “Can Coal Ever Be Clean?” By Michelle Nijhuis, *National Geographic*, April 2014. 3) “The Dilbit Disaster: Inside the biggest oil spill you’ve never heard of.” This series by the five-year-old online publication InsideClimate News won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting for its cautionary tale preceding policy debate for TransCanada Corporation’s proposed Keystone XL pipeline, <http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2013-National-Reporting>

Week 14 November 30th, International Environmental Reporting: 21st Century globalism means we’re all connected to life, water, 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 Ghana. Climate change, species extinction, water strife, and all major environmental issues are at once local and global. Making the international connections offers great opportunities for journalists and also requires overcoming lots of assumptions about the rest of the world. (Including assumptions about the p-word, population growth. For example, many studies indicate the developed world’s consumption trumps population growth when it comes to contributing to climate change.)

Read ahead for class: 1) “Drowning in plastic: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is twice the size of France,” Richard Grant, *The Guardian*, April 24th, 2009; 2) View PBS Frontline video, “Ghana: Digital Dumping Ground.” 3) “Famine is a feminist issue,” by Lisa Palmer, Slate, April 10th 2014. 4) “India’s Vanishing Vultures,” by Meera Subramanian, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Spring 2011. 5) View, “China on the Brink: Photographer Sean Gallagher on an Environmental Crisis,” available on Sean’s website.

Week 15 December 5th, Sustainability and success stories. Humans have turned around major environmental crises, including acid rain at the global level; littering at the national level; the clean-ups of severely polluted water bodies from the Hudson River to Tampa Bay. Reporting on both steady progress and success is crucial to give people a sense of solutions – and hope for the future.

Read ahead for class: 1) “Birds flock to Restored Wetlands Along Kissimmee River,” Tom Palmer, the *Lakeland Ledger*, February 23rd 2010; 2) “When Sewage is Not a Dirty Word,” by Melinda Burns, *The Pacific Standard*, April 3rd, 2010. 3) “Envision 2050: The Future of Cities,” By Todd Reubold, *Ensisia*, June 16th 2014. 4) (Look at) “Great Lakes, Great Peril: A roadmap to restoration,” by Dan Egan of the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel*. After reporting on threats to the Great Lakes for six years, Egan decided to devote a series to the promise of restoration.

ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM CLASS POLICIES

Academic Honesty is expected at all times. As a UF student, you’ve agreed to comply with the University Honor Code. Please make sure you understand the code and consequences, which are here: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>. Any violations of this

code in Environmental Journalism class will be reported to the Dean of Students. You must also pay special attention to journalistic ethics and issues of plagiarism and copyright; please read and understand UF's College of Journalism and Communications statement on these matters: www.jou.ufl.edu/academics/bachelors/journalism/academic-honesty/

Class attendance and make-up exams: Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with UF policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Late tests/stories policy: All tests or stories must be submitted before our 10:40 class time on the day they're due. (I will figure out the test dates in a few weeks, based on where we are in the semester.) Stories/tests turned in later that day will be considered a day late. Your grade will drop one full letter grade for every day overdue.

Food and beverages: No food, please. Beverages in durable, reusable containers are OK. Please, no bottled water or any beverages in disposable containers. We'll talk about why.

Students with disabilities: All reasonable accommodations will be made. Should you need them, please register first with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) and provide appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Please follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course and instructor evaluations: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last weeks of the semester; you'll be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available for students at: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

Your instructor: Cynthia Barnett is an award-winning environmental journalist specializing in water, and this year's Hearst Visiting Professional at UF's CJC. She is the author of three water books: *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History* (2015); *Blue Revolution: Unmaking America's Water Crisis* (2011); and *Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.* (2007). Cynthia has written for the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *the Atlantic*, *Salon*, *Politico*, *Orion*, *Ensisia* and many other publications. She is a UF alumnus, with a bachelor's in journalism and master's in environmental history, and spent a year as a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan studying freshwater.