

# JOUR 299 - Special Topics in Journalism Communicating Science and Environment

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Journalism Program, Department of Communication, Graphic Design and Web Development, Roger Williams University

## COVID-19 ADDENDUM

*Safety protections against the spread of the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) will affect your ability to physically visit places and meet with people during the delivery of this course. I have already put in place contingencies to help you develop your project and stories using online sources and apps, as well as calling and recording interviews in the phone or using an online app. such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. If you don't know how to approach a situation that might require your physical presence or to connect with a resource that might not be available online, please contact me as soon as you can and we will figure it out together.*

**PLEASE DO NOT RISK YOUR AND OTHERS' HEALTH AND LIVES TO DO ANY OF THE ASSIGNMENTS FOR THIS CLASS.**

## Class meetings:

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## Class sessions:

## Instructor Information:

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### Instructor

[Dr. Bernardo H. Motta](#)

### Email

[bmotta@rwu.edu](mailto:bmotta@rwu.edu)

### Office Hours

### Office Location

GHH 323

Office hours will be held through

Zoom (link will be provided before the first day of classes).

### Phone number

(865) 567-4145 (text)

## Welcome to JOUR 299 – Special Topics in Journalism – Communicating Science and Environment!

Before we start, please know that if you need anything to make your learning experience in this class more wholesome and successful, feel free to contact me. I try as hard as I can to make all my courses as accessible as possible to all students. Most of the materials we will use in this class are free or have a way you can access them free of charge through our library or through Bridges.

The information on Students Accessibility Services (SAS) at Roger Williams University can be found here <https://www.rwu.edu/undergraduate/academics/student-academic-success/student-accessibility-services-sas> or by email: [sas@rwu.edu](mailto:sas@rwu.edu) or calling: 401-254-3841. **If you don't have a computer or access to the internet, please let the CSAS staff know by sending an email to [csas@rwu.edu](mailto:csas@rwu.edu)** or you can call: 401-254-3841 and ask SAS for help.

If you are a first generation student, have limited access to house/food/services, have any number of other needs, or you are just having a tough time navigating the university system, you can contact them and they will help you with resources and connections.

We will be using many written, audio and audiovisual examples, so you can pick the formats that best adapt to your needs. Although I have little control of the physical space (GHH 103), it is somewhat flexible and spacious, so we can adapt it as needed.

### Course description & goals

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#### **Catalog's Description:**

JOUR 299 - Special Topics in Journalism

**Prerequisites:** [COMM 100](#) or [COMM 101](#)

*Examines topics from the various content areas of Journalism suitable for a first or second year level. Initiated by student demand, interest of instructor, or timeliness of offering. The course, not the topic, may be repeated for credit.*

*1-3 credits*

*Special Offering*

#### **Instructor's Description of the Course:**

This session of JOUR 299 will provide students with useful and applicable experience in communicating scientific information about environmental, environmental health, and environmental justice issues to lay audiences. Students will learn through a project-based, hands-on, live experience how to acquire information and knowledge, interview and collaborate with experts, connect with and learn from community members, and produce and distribute news and digital content for publication on specific topics related to environmental science, policy and justice.

## Learning Materials:

**This class will use many online resources, including podcasts, social media and websites from multiple journalism and environmental science and studies associations.**

- Bryson, B. (2003). *A short history of nearly everything*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.
- Estes, N. & Dhillon, J. (Eds.) (2019). *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gross, L. (2018). *The science writers' investigative reporting handbook: A beginner's guide to investigations*. Kensington, CA: Watchdog Press.
- Hayden, T. & Nijhuis, M. (Eds.) (2013). *The science writers' handbook: Everything you need to know to pitch, publish, and prosper in the digital age*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Sachsman, D. B. & Valenti, J. M. (2020). *Routledge handbook of environmental journalism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Taylor, D. (2014). *Toxic communities: Environmental racism, industrial pollution and residential mobility*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Wyss, B. (2019). *Covering the environment: How journalists work the green beat*. (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- There is a list of podcasts, readings and videos on our site on Bridges.

## Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to find, acquire and organize relevant scientific information using basic and advanced research and reporting techniques.
2. Students will be able to evaluate the quality and depth of acquired information and apply journalistic discretion in making decisions about the correct usage of such information.
3. Students will be able to use technology effectively to research, produce and edit a variety of journalistic and multimedia products.
4. Students will be able to appreciate, evaluate and describe contextual, cultural, and social elements relevant for different news stories about science and environment.
5. Students will be able to obtain, interpret, describe and illustrate data to explain complex scientific, academic, legal, and political and social issues.
6. Students will be able to assemble, compose, develop, produce, design, write and edit publishable news and feature stories, investigative projects and/or audio and audiovisual documentaries for public distribution and consumption.
7. Students will be able to effectively understand, distinguish, describe, discuss, and apply ethical and legal matters to their reporting assignments.

## Course requirements and grading

Students are expected to prepare thoroughly for class by reading assigned materials prior to class, to participate actively in class discussions, and to complete the assigned tasks. These activities should be completed on time and in a professional manner.

Whenever you need more time to complete an assignment in consequence of a serious impediment to its timely completion, you should inform the instructor as soon as possible. **If it is an emergency, make sure that the situation is stable first, and that you and others are safe and secure before reaching out to me. Your life, livelihood, and wellbeing are far**

**more important than any assignments for this class.** We can figure out how you can catch up once you are o.k.

The final grade is computed as follows:

**Assignments: 30%**

During this semester, you will work on variety of assignments, each building on the previous one, to complete a larger project. A few of the assignments will be specific steps you need to take to build your project while other assignments will be instrumental to help you acquire knowledge, skills, and techniques to execute the project.

**General grading rubric:** You will be graded by **completing each assignment satisfactorily** to move on to the next one. If you turn in assignments below expectations, you will be asked to redo the assignment until it is good enough or until we run out of time in the class. Each assignment will have its own criteria for acceptance while all assignments will only be accepted when the research you have done presents **enough solid evidence of your work and the presentation is both clear and fitting with the overall purposes of this course.**

**Critical Assessment: 20%**

Everything will go wrong and, then, it will go wrong again, until it works. This is the time for you to take a step back, think about all the readings and learning materials, all the classes, all the interactions with people in the community, all the sitting alone and rummaging through evidence, and consider the impact of every step you took on the community, on the audience, on the public/society, and on you.

**Professional ethics, work ethics, and moral conduct: 50%**

There are no excuses for unethical or illegal behavior. If you haven't done so yet, you **must** familiarize yourself with the many ethical and legal definitions for journalists and for students at Roger Williams University. Failing to complete your work in an ethical and legal manner, **whether you knew or not**, will result in failure for **this course and face all the ethical and legal consequences for doing so.**

I understand this is a place of learning and mistakes can happen. However, **any ethical or legal questions** during this course must be raised, addressed and resolved **before** you take the questionable action. There is no punishment for thinking and questioning, those are encouraged, but there are consequences for actions once they have been taken.

The list of references below should be **studied carefully**. You **will be tested** on their content before you produce any work and you will be held responsible for ethical or legal failures.

1. Roger Williams University Academic Integrity Standards:  
<https://www.rwu.edu/academics/academic-affairs/academic-standards>.
2. Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics:  
The SPJ Code of Ethics covers the main principles of journalism ethics and the online version of the code has links to many useful resources: <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>. You should take time to read both the codes and the references as often as possible.
3. Attribution:

Steve Buttry's article provides a good framework to avoid plagiarism and attribution mistakes: <https://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2011/10/31/you-can-quote-me-on-that-advice-on-attribution-for-journalists/>

4. Accuracy and fact checking:

Again, Steve Buttry has an article that provides a good checklist and a series of explanations about each item on the list:

<https://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2011/01/04/my-version-of-craig-silvermans-accuracy-checklist/>

## Digital Component

This class will rely heavily on electronic communication. Assignments must be submitted electronically. Students are required to check for electronic messages and postings daily, at a minimum.

## Tutorial services

**Tutorial Support Services (TSS)**, located the second floor of the Main University Library on the Bristol campus within the Center for Student Academic Success, provides peer and faculty tutoring at no charge for RWU students. The Math, Writing, Science, and Foreign Language Centers offer assistance Monday – Thursday 9 am – 8 pm; Friday 9 am – 3 pm; Sunday 2 pm – 8 pm.

## Accessibility services

RWU provides academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Students who wish to receive academic accommodations for this course must first register with [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#). The most commonly requested accommodations are extended time for testing and use of the SAS Testing Center. SAS will provide registered students with an *Academic Accommodations Authorization* form to share with each instructor. SAS is located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Main University Library in the *Jeremy Warnick Center for Accessibility* and is open from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday.

## Title IX at RWU

Roger Williams University fosters a campus free of power-based personal violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender-based discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as described above, either verbally or in writing, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact one of the three resources listed below:

- o The [RWU Counseling Center](#) – 401-254-3124
- o Health Services – 401-254-3156
- o [University Chaplain](#), Rev. Nancy Soukup – 401-254-3433
- o Additional information regarding your [rights and resources](#)

**Please note** that your professor is required to report to RWU administrators any conversation that indicates sexual violence, or any kind of gender discrimination, may have occurred on campus. In my role as faculty I value your trust, appreciate your candor, and will protect your privacy to the best of my ability, yet I am mandated to report abuse. I will help you find counseling and assistance if you

*are in need of help, but know that I must disclose any conversation that leads me to believe that your well-being might be compromised or that you have been the victim of abuse.*

### **Preferred Name Policy**

Roger Williams University has an optional Preferred Name Policy that allows you to update your name in our University records without requiring a legal name change. Students who might consider using such a change include members of our trans communities. You can update your name through your Student portal, then click on Student, then User Account. Preferred Personal Information should appear and you can update your name there. Should students have any questions or concerns, please reach out to the Register's Office or Gabby Porcaro in the Intercultural Center. 7

## Course Schedule and Flow:

**This course schedule will suffer alterations during the semester to adapt to students' learning needs, events of journalistic and/or educational importance and to realities on the ground related to the pandemic, political unrest, unforeseen crises, and any other reasonable accommodations necessary to the betterment of the learning experience.**

Simplified content skeleton:

Week 1:

Introduction to the course, developing community in the classroom, learning expectations and outcomes, class processes and procedures.

Introduction to the topic: Scientists, academics, communicators, journalists, community educators and the behind the scenes of the scientific process in environmental sciences.

Assignment 1: Identifying, following and networking with scientists, academic researchers, science communicators, environmental and science reporters, and community educators and activists.

Week 2:

Environmental science, police, politics and justice. The social underpinnings and interactions of the scientific processes.

From the ground up. Contextualizing science, environment and social movements.

Assignment 2: A timeline of social impacts of scientific developments in environmental topics.

Week 3:

Understanding the scientific process. Description, verification, and consensus and the scientific methods.

Communicating science and scientific communication: what they are and what they are not.

Assignment 3: Reading science and rewriting it to a lay public. The art and science of decoding scientific communication.

Week 4:

Meet the experts: who they are and where to find the best ones for your stories.

Ditching the old-white-guy-in-a-lab-coat stereotype. Inclusive science communication, environmental justice, and the problem of misrepresentation.

Assignment 3 cont.

Revisiting Assignment 1.

Week 5 and 6:

Deep dives into topics and case studies. We will use these two weeks to learn more about specific topics in environmental justice, science communication, and take field trips to local science research labs and other important locations.

Week 7:

Reporting a science-based story on environmental health and justice: the process. This week we will see all the stages of how to produce a story for multiple media formats. We will also establish a co-editing partnership, so students will learn editing techniques throughout the rest of the semester. Editing for assignment desk and content.

Week 8:

Meet the editors. We will talk to a group of editors and gatekeepers of science and environmental publications, shows and podcasts about how they select science and environmental stories for publication/broadcast, etc.

Meet the reporters. We will talk to a group of reporters about their main investigations in science, environment and environmental justice topics and how they produce them.

Assignment 4: Developing pitches.

Week 9, 10 and 11:

Investigating and producing a science-based investigation.

Assignment 5: Pre-production and production.

Assignment 6: Editing for content.

Week 12:

Words of wisdom. Crafting a narrative. Accuracy, truth telling, active descriptions, plots, characters, and the grammar of telling a compelling story about science and the environment.

Week 13:

Editing. Completeness, fact checking and legal/ethical liability, and copy editing.

Filing and publishing/casting.

Week 14 and 15:

Presentations, critical assessments and community talks.

Week 16:

Extra time for any reason. If not needed, we might take the time to do a broader reflection on the semester and how what they learned fits with their majors and overall life interests.

*Print this page, fill it out, sign, and return to your instructor:*

**Academic Integrity Undergraduate Pledge** We, the undergraduate students of Roger Williams University, commit ourselves to academic integrity. We promise to pursue the highest ideals of academic life, to challenge ourselves with the most rigorous standards, to be honest in any academic endeavor, to conduct ourselves responsibly and honorably, and to assist one another as we live and work together in mutual support.

**STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

I HAVE RECEIVED AND READ THE SYLLABUS FOR THE Spring 2020 MEDIA LAW COURSE COMM 310 .01

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_