

## **J298: EARTH JOURNALISM: International Environmental Reporting -- 2019**

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This is a three-credit class aimed at learning about global environmental issues, devising strategies for reporting on them and telling the stories in a compelling way, whatever the medium. We combine developing deeper knowledge of the major environmental challenges of our time, through lectures by experts, with reporting and narrative techniques aimed at making you into an accomplished science-based reporter and story-teller.

Living as we now do in the so-called Anthropocene Era, in which human activities are having an increasingly significant impact on our local environment and the planet as a whole, it has become more important than ever to communicate and improve public understanding of global challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, the decline of oceans, tropical forests, fisheries and key ecosystems, environmental health, sustainable agriculture and food systems, and much more. But reporting on these topics – which often play out quite slowly and lack obvious news hooks – can be a huge challenge in its own right. They also often require a broader context: We'll explore where 'environment' intersects with politics, business, economics, technology and international relations.

Each weekly class will be divided roughly in half between a discussion of major thematic areas related to international environmental reporting and the often complex science and policy issues that underlie them, followed by a more practical session about reporting tactics and story-telling techniques for crafting accurate and engaging stories on these issues. This will include discussion of how to turn these global issues into local stories, how to address the international dimensions of local issues, and how to make them relevant to your particular audience. We will also focus on the multi-disciplinary knowledge necessary for environmental reporting—crossing into realms of science, geo-politics, finance and the law. Our guest experts will provide us a springboard from which to discuss topics in detail, and how to approach them journalistically. We will read relevant articles and papers, and analyze how they do, or do not, communicate effectively.

Students are expected to pursue reporting trips overseas aimed at producing stories, perhaps in collaboration with other students. These trips are expected to take place during spring break. Funding for travel grants will be made available to all students. Your participation in the class does not guarantee approval for a travel grant, which will be based on the merits of your story—your pitch of the story you hope to pursue. The pitches will be judged on their effectiveness in conveying the essential story to be pursued, your explanation of the story's significance, and the coherence of your

reporting plan, including your proposed budget. You will also be expected to propose likely outlets and the audience you hope to reach. This will be discussed further in class.

Students are expected to do substantial preparation for their overseas stories. This will include submitting a short memorandum outlining background to the themes of their chosen story and/or background on the country or region that might have some relevance to their proposed topic. This will be used to help provide a frame for the story—we will discuss framing and focus in more detail in class.

The aim of this course is to further develop your reporting and narrative skills and apply them to the complex convergence between science, economics, geo-politics and ecology. Pitching will be a critical ingredient of the course. You will be pitching your story to us, and to the class, as if trying to convince a panel of editors of the worthiness of the story you propose to pursue overseas. Instructors will also work with you individually. We will be working with you on the drafting of the pitches for stories, and this will factor into your grades, along with the quality of your final story, of course.

Students will have an opportunity to become a member of the [Earth Journalism Network](#) (EJN), a global community connecting thousands of professional journalists around the world who are actively reporting on all manner of environmental topics. You are encouraged to register on our [website](#) and join our [EJNet listserve](#).

Our goal is to make this class as interactive and useful as possible to students with all sorts of backgrounds interested in learning how to report on and communicate these important but challenging topics. It offers you new ways to understand the fundamental environmental conflicts and issues of our time, and how to approach them journalistically. Class discussion about relevant current events and your reporting ideas is greatly encouraged.

**REPORTING ASSIGNMENTS and GRADING:** It is expected that students will go on an individual trip during spring break to carry out original reporting on an international environmental issue. Students will first write a pitch (including a projected budget) explaining what story they plan to pursue, what makes it a good story, and where and how they will pursue it. If your pitch is approved, some funding for these trips will be made available for students to use. Funds will be allocated by the lecturers based on these pitches, and where possible, students will be assisted with overseas contacts, for instance via members and partners of the [Earth Journalism Network](#).

After spring break, you will produce at least two draft versions of your final story. The first draft will be due on April 13<sup>th</sup> and, following critiques and suggestions by the lecturers and classmates, a revised draft will be submitted before the last day of class.

Grades will be determined based on the pitch submitted for reporting trips, and the quality of the reporting assignments turned in by each student, which will be assessed based for their clarity, the coherence and appeal of their narrative, the strength and originality of your reporting and your

communication of the essential subject matter of the story, as well as on your ability to respond to and learn from editorial criticism.

Your attendance and class participation will also factor into your final grade. We understand you sometimes have other assignments, but it is important that you attend our class, which meets only once a week, on a regular basis. A portion of the class will involve discussion and critiquing of one another's work, and we hope for your engagement in that aspect, too.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS:** The mandatory texts for this class are:

***A LAND ON FIRE: The Environmental Consequences of the Southeast Asian Boom***, by James Fahn (Westview Press and Silkworm Books).

***THE END OF STATIONARITY: Searching for the New Normal in the Age of Carbon Shock***, by Mark Schapiro (Chelsea Green, paperback).

You will be assigned other articles/essays/chapters in preparation for specific classes. You are also strongly encouraged to follow current events and bring in interesting stories related to each weekly subject you come across for discussion during class.

**SCHEDULE – TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:** Generally speaking, each week we will focus on a different international environmental topic, usually with the help of a guest speaker. The idea is to mix discussion on technical/content issues with work on journalism skills and craft. Here is an outline of the weekly schedule. It is potentially subject to change, particularly the reading assignments, which we will update as needed.

Readings serve several purposes: to provide background information for your overall future reporting; to identify story-telling techniques used by the journalists to tell what are often complex stories; and, in some instances, to provide raw information as source material from which you may draw your own ideas for potential stories. Part of the discussion section of the class will involve reflecting on these readings, and what they suggest about the subject matter and/or journalistic strategies. As you read, be thinking of how what you discover in the process could be applied to your own stories, or help you to foresee future story lines and/or subjects. Also, consider whether you think the story works as it has been written or produced—and if so, why. And the reverse: Consider ways you could improve it.

**Jan 25 – Introduction to International Environmental Reporting** – The class will kick off with introductions to each other and a detailed look at the schedule and assignments for the class. James and Mark will lead a presentation and discussion on the importance of and challenges to environmental reporting, and on some over-arching strategies that can help in covering these topics. Ecological stress is increasingly a defining factor of life on earth, expressed in multiple forms and with a

multiplicity of consequences; we'll talk about how to approach this all-encompassing phenomena journalistically. We'll also consider the implications for journalists of the Trump administration's roll back of many global environmental initiatives. James will also lead an introduction to the Earth Journalism Network and the resources it offers that students and other journalists can tap into.

Assignments: Read the Introduction and Chapter 8, "North vs. South, Green vs. Brown" of *A Land on Fire*

Read the Introduction to *END OF STATIONARITY* (pg. ix-xix)

Other stories on environmental and science journalism:

["Stephen King, Ledes and Reporting on the Environment"](#) by David Poulson, Knight Center for Environmental Journalism

["Story Pitching Tips by Someone Who Reads Them For a Living,"](#) by Jessica Weiss, *IJNet*.

On international journalism: ["Who'd be a Journalist?"](#) by Hector Tobar, *NY Times*

["How 'Silent Spring' Ignited the Environmental Movement,"](#) by Eliza Griswold, *New York Times*.

## **February 1 – CLIMATE CHANGE – Guest lecture: David Romps/Professor of Earth and Planetary Science, UC Berkeley.**

Climate change is the biggest story of this century. It affects virtually every environmental issue you can think of and is already shaping our everyday lives, and reshaping economic, political, and business calculations. The media, however, has a difficult time covering the issues of climate change itself—largely a scientific matter---and its multiple implications through every sector of society. This class session will effectively serve as an introduction to the topic, which will arise repeatedly through the many subjects we cover all semester long.

Our guest speaker will offer insights into the most up to date climate science, offering a scientific grounding for what is going on now and what we can expect in the future.

In our discussion period, we will cover the state of international climate negotiations; the effect of President Trump's withdrawal of the United States from the process; the impact of climate change on everything from growing food to planning cities; and the multiple ways in which climate change is unsettling the political, economic and environmental landscape—and thus creating multiple entry points for journalists.

Assignments:

Read chapter 4, "Carbon in the Tank," and chapter 8, "The Coffee and the Cup," *THE END OF STATIONARITY*

Read ["Climate Change: Stationarity is Dead: Whither Water Management?"](#), by PCD Milly, et al, *Scientific American*

Read "[Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change. A Tragedy in Two Acts](#)," by Nathaniel Rich, with photographs by George Steinmetz, *New York Times Magazine*.

Read "[How to Report the Story of the Century](#)" by James Fahn, *SciDev.net*

Read "[When I Talk About Climate Change, I Don't Talk About Science](#)," by Andrew David Thaler, *Southern Fried Science*

Read "[How We Know It Was Climate Change](#)," by Noah S. Diffenbaugh, *New York Times*

Read "[Prying Open the Financial Risks of Climate Change](#)," by Mark Schapiro, *Newsweek*

Read "[The Biggest Story of the Century Needs More Coverage](#)," by James Fahn, *Scientific American*

Read, "[Pentagon Signals Security Risks of Climate Change](#)," Coral Davenport, *New York Times*

Read "[Cashing Out from the Climate Casino](#)," by Bill McKibben, *New York Times*

Check out [Anthropocene Magazine](#) and some of these climate related blogs and news sites: [Inside Climate News](#); the [Green](#) blog in the *NY Times*, [SciDev.net](#) on Climate Change, The [Daily Climate](#), [Climate Central](#), [The Third Pole](#); and the ongoing coverage of climate change from the developing world at [Earthjournalism.net](#)

## **Feb 8 – BIODIVERSITY AND WHY IT MATTERS**

**Guest Lecture: Erica Bree Rosenblum, Associate Professor, Environmental Science, Policy and Management, UC Berkeley.**

The delicate balance among and between species is being challenged by an unprecedented combination of forces, from climatic shifts to urban sprawl. The Earth is currently undergoing its 6<sup>th</sup> major extinction crisis in its history, this one being caused by human activity. Every year, an estimated 17,000 to 100,000 species die off, often before they can even be named and identified. The consequences affect not only the web of life that makes up our biosphere, but our food security, ecosystem services and the potential to develop life-saving drugs and inventions. Journalists covering these issues also have to be aware that conservation efforts aimed at preserving endangered species can create problems of their own in the form of conflicts with local communities.

Our guest speaker will address why biodiversity is critical to the health of human and other organisms, and the implications of species loss. Rosenblum is also an expert in dry arid climates, conditions which are becoming increasingly the norm in large parts of North America and around the world.

**Also: Preparation for Reporting Trips** Please be working on your Draft Pitches, which will be due next week. **This includes a brief, non-graded, 250-400 word sketch of the political, cultural, economic background of the place and situation you are hoping to report on. (We will explain this requirement in more detail in class)**

Assignments:

Read "Only the Haunted Jungles Survive", Chapter 5 of *A LAND ON FIRE*

Read "[Should Some Species Be Allowed to Die Out?](#)", by Jennifer Kahn, *New York Times Magazine*

Read "[Humanity 'Sleepwalking Towards the Edge of a Cliff': 60% of Earth's Wildlife Wiped Out Since 1970](#)," by Julia Conley, *EcoWatch*

Read "[The Insect Apocalypse Is Here](#)," by Brooke Jarvis, *New York Times*

Read "[How Trump's Wall Would Alter our Biological Identity Forever](#)," by Jennifer R.B. Miller, *Scientific American*

Read "[New Maps Show How Our Consumption Impacts Wildlife Thousands of Miles Away](#)," by Shreya Dasgupta, *MongaBay.com*.

Read "[Five African Countries Have Created an Information Exchange to Combat Wildlife Trafficking](#)," by Sue Palminteri, *Pacific Standard*

Reference Materials and Suggested Readings:

*The Sixth Extinction*, by Elizabeth Kolbert

*Conservation Refugees* by Mark Dowie

*The Diversity of Life* by EO Wilson

*The Song of the Dodo* by David Quammen

*The Rambunctious Garden* by Emma Marris

## **February 15 – ETHNO-BOTANY AND OUR HEALTH -- Guest Lecture: Thomas Carlson, Professor of Integrative Biology, UC Berkeley.**

Some of the most valuable resources on earth come from plants—not only in the food we eat, but in our medicines too. And most of those resources emanate from a narrow band of land around the equator, home to many indigenous peoples. Our guest speaker has traveled to and worked with many indigenous communities in trying to understand the medical potential of tropical plants, and integrating traditional healing practices into western ideas of medicine and human health.

Associated matters we will consider are the rising pressure from developing countries and indigenous communities for recognition of their contribution to what can become multi-million dollar commercial products in northern countries, the threats faced by such resources, and emerging conservation strategies.

**Today is also: Deadline for Draft Pitches.**

**Assignments:**

Read "[Return of the Fungi](#)," by Andy Isaacson, *Mother Jones*

Read "[Bioprospecting: Legitimate Research or Biopiracy?](#)" by Graham Dutfield, *SciDev.net*

Read, "[Chasing the Biggest Story on Earth](#)", interview of Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *The Sixth Extinction*, by Claudia Dreifus in the *New York Times*

**FEB 15-- DEADLINE:** First draft reporting proposal for your spring reporting trip is due (and the earlier you can get them in and reviewed, the more time you'll have to prepare for your trip). Instructors will comment and critique to assess your proposed international environmental story. This proposal is key to your obtaining approval to travel during the spring break. Consider this the first draft of your proposal, if further work is needed we will let you know. You'll also be expected to be doing advance reporting on your chosen topic, both in advance of, and after, your proposal submission.

## **February 22 – INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING: PREPARATION FOR YOUR TRIPS**

This session will be the beginning of your intensive preparation for your own stories. Co-Lecturers James Fahn and Mark Schapiro will lay out the steps you need to start clarifying your stories. We'll discuss some initial thoughts coming out of your pitches. And we will probe into the various places that you've identified you'd like to report on---how the conditions there (political, economic, cultural) might influence your reporting strategies. Also featured will be presentations by former Earth Journalism students who can share their experiences in pursuing their stories overseas—what went right, what went wrong, surprises they encountered along the road. We'll also aim to further sharpen your skills in interviewing, working with different sources and your pitching.

**Assignments:** Read "[The Unique Burden of Covering Climate Change in the Middle East](#)," by Mark Schapiro, *Pacific Standard*

READ "[The Messengers: How do we get People to Care About the Environment?](#)", by Brooke Jarvis, *Pacific Standard*.

Read "[In Greenland, the Only Certainty Is Change](#)" by James Fahn, *EarthJournalism.net*

## **March 1 – SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'GROW SMART'? -- Guest Speaker: Kristina Hill, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning and Urban Design, UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design.**

The world's urban population now exceeds its rural population, as the explosive growth of mega-cities in the developing world change the lives and opportunities of their inhabitants. Rapid urbanization is one of the most important changes in human history, but it gets relatively little press coverage. We'll explore the environmental challenges presented in cities, and new approaches that are changing how cities are organized in an effort to reduce their carbon footprint and increase their resilience to climate change.

Assignment:

Read Chapter 1, "Mango Madness" of *A Land on Fire*

Read "A Tale of Three Cities," chapter 5, in *THE END OF STATIONARITY*

Read "[Cities Move to Climate Talks Center Stage](#)," by Mark Schapiro, *Newsweek*

Review: [Sustainable Cities Collective](#) (portal for writing on urban sustainability).

### **March 8 – VERBAL PITCHES**

We'll take this opportunity to hear and discuss the stories you'll be doing during spring break. Be prepared to summarize to the class your story: Where you're going. What's the angle into the story? Why is it significant? Who are the major characters and where the major locales? How do you envision the frame, now, before you head out (We'll compare that to the frame when you return after your reporting) We'll then open up to a discussion with the class—which will become an editorial board for each of you before heading off on your Earth Journalism stories.

### **March 15 – FATE OF THE FORESTS -- Guest speaker: Rhett Butler, Editor/Founder of [MongaBay.com](#).**

The management and fate of forests is one of the most heated topics in the global environmental debate, as they play a vital role in terms of conserving biodiversity, mitigating climate change and regulating the water cycle, but control over them is jealously guarded. They also serve as home to indigenous people whose rights over forest resources are often ignored by both national and international authorities. How can the press juggle the views of all these stakeholders and report on what's actually going on in some of the world's most remote places? We will hear from Rhett Butler, Editor of Mongabay, the foremost site for sustained reporting on the environmental challenges facing tropical forests.

Assignments: Read "Guns, Trees and Refugees", Chapter 4 in *A LAND ON FIRE*

Read, "[GM's Money Trees](#)," by Mark Schapiro, *Mother Jones*

Check out the [MongaBay](#) website

Read, "[Mapping Rainforests to Fight Climate Change](#)," by Mark Schapiro, *Newsweek*

Read "[From SOS to SMS](#)" by James Fahn, *Columbia Journalism Review*

Check, out the [InfoAmazonia](#) data journalism platform on the Amazon and deforestation.

Reference Materials and Suggested Readings:

*Rich Forests, Poor People* by Nancy Piluso

*Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis* by Michael Williams

Review website of [Global Witness](#) on illegal logging

### **March 22 – Spring Break**

We will not hold class on this day, which will enable you to take an extra day for your travel (depending on your other class commitments; please discuss with any other professors who hold Friday sessions).

## March 29 – Spring Break

## April 5 – TELL US YOUR STORY

Just back from your spring reporting trip, tell us the story you've brought back, and how it has changed since your initial pitch. Capture its essence in 7 minutes. Instructors and the class will act as editorial board, with comments and critiques on the story and your revised pitch.

## April 12 – SEEDS AND THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE FACING CLIMATE STRESS -- Lecturer Mark Schapiro will discuss findings from his recently published book on the seeds we need to deal with climatic disruptions, and the struggle over who controls them.

This class will be devoted to exploring the severe environmental stresses now underway on global agriculture. We'll explore the implications of two converging forces: Just as climate change is increasing a spectrum of new environmental stresses on our agricultural lands, the seed industry is undergoing unprecedented rates of consolidation into the hands of a handful of multinational chemical companies. What is the impact of these converging forces for our future food security? We'll also expect to wade into one of the most controversial issues in this arena—the potential role to be played by genetically modified crops in addressing the rising food crisis.

### Assignments:

Read, a chapter from SEEDS OF RESISTANCE: The Fight to Save Our Food Supply ([Skyhorse/Hotbooks 2018](#)) that will be distributed in class.

["How Seeds from War-Torn Syria Can Help Save American Wheat,"](#) by Mark Schapiro, Yale 360

["Syrian Seeds Shake Up Europe's Plant Patent Regime,"](#) by Mark Schapiro, Food and Environment Reporting Network (FERN).

Read "[Can Dirt Save the Earth?](#)" by Moises Velasquez-Manoff, New York Times Magazine.

["How Change Is Going to Come to the Food System"](#) by Michael Pollan, *The Nation*.

View "[Ethiopia: A Battle of Land and Water](#)", by Cassandra Herrman and Beth Hoffman, *PBS NewsHour and Center for Investigative Reporting*

Browse the series [Panic-Free GMO's](#), by Nathanael Johnson, *Grist*

### Reference Materials and Suggested Readings:

["Pesticides – A Primer"](#) by the Pesticide Action Network

**DEADLINE: The first draft of your story is due on APRIL 19. Instructors will read and critique.**

## April 19 – ENVIRONMENTAL TRAUMA: HOW TO WORK WITH IT AND THROUGH IT (to be confirmed)

**Guest Speaker: Renee Lertzman**, psychologist and environmental scientist.

This will be a special session devoted to how best to contend with the often troubling news about environmental degradation. We'll be joined by Renee Lertzman, a trained psychologist who has been working with journalists, environmental organizations and universities to develop coping strategies to deal with the often traumatic impacts of reporting on environmental devastation and degradation.

**April 26 – PLEASE NOTE today's class will be held in Room 101, the Production Lab**

**BLUE STRESS: STATE OF THE OCEANS AND SUSTAINABILITY -- Guest speaker: Ken Weiss, formerly of the *Los Angeles Times* (to be confirmed)**

The declining health of the oceans is another major global challenge facing our planet. Overfishing is a major problem all over the world, with many fish stocks and coastal ecosystems in decline. Pollution and ocean acidification are also major problems. But how do you cover a crisis that goes largely unseen? Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Ken Weiss will help us to dive into these issues and come up with some answers. During the second half of our class, we will go into a broader discussion of sustainability and population.

Assignments: Read "[Altered Oceans](#)" by Ken Weiss and his stories on [Fish Farms](#) and [Fisheries and Population Growth](#) in the *LA Times*

Read "On The Edge", Chapter 6 of *A Land on Fire*

Read "The Oceans Are Warming Faster Than We Thought," by Angela Fritz, *Washington Post*

Read "[Hooking the Reader](#)" by James Fahn, *Columbia Journalism Review*

Read, "[The Inside Story of a Landmark Environmental Lawsuit Brought Against the U.S. Navy](#)," by Simon Worrall, *National Geographic*

Read this report on [ocean acidification and food security](#) by Oceana Watch: "[The Lawless Sea](#)," Mark Schapiro, *PBS Frontline/World*

Read [Beyond 7 Billion](#) by Ken Weiss, *LA Times*

Reference Materials and Suggested Readings

*Four Fish* by Paul Greenburg

*Cod* by Mark Kurlansky

Visit the [SeaWeb](#) website and the [NOAA Ocean Science](#) blog

**May 3 – Environmental Health and Justice** with guest speaker [Dara O'Rourke](#), associate professor of environmental science, policy and management, or Rachel Frosch-Moran, professor of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, UC Berkeley School of Public Health (To Be Confirmed)

**Also, Going Over Your Final Stories -- You will share your final stories with everyone before class, and during the second half of class, we'll start going over them one by one to offer final reflections.**

Environmental health and industrial pollution are rich terrain for journalists. Reporting on environmental health threats has become even more challenging as global supply chains have become more complex and global, and regulatory regimes diverge. We will consider the reporting strategies for following a trail from consumers in the United States to producers in other countries, and tactical strategies for reporting on the global dimensions of environmental health stories.

Assignments: Read Chapter 9, “Mercury Rising”, of *A Land on Fire*

Read Chapter 1, “Hard Power, Soft Edge” and Chapter 7, “Chemical Revolution” in *Exposed: The Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Products and What’s at Stake for American Power*, by Mark Schapiro [will be distributed in class]

Read [Environmental Health News](#) (provides ongoing coverage on environmental health)

Read “[How Rachel Carson Spurred Chemical Concerns by Highlighting Uncertainty](#),” by Andrew Revkin, *NY Times*

Review the sections on [Toxins](#) in the EJM Toolkit

### **May 10 – Going Over Your Final Stories (Cont.)**

**Having shared your final stories with the class, we will devote this day to continue going over them one by one and offering final comments and reflections. This will be our last class of the semester.**

**END**