

SUMMER 2021
DRAFT SYLLABUS, as of May 21, 2021

WRITING ABOUT GLOBAL SCIENCE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Summer, B Session

Course No: SUMAPS5180_D01_2021_2

Meeting Location: Zoom ID 955-3103-109-8

Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday 6:10 — 8:00 (June 29 – August 5)

Instructor: Claudia Dreifus

Cd2106@columbia.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 4-6 p.m, Thursday: 4-6 p.m., or by appointment.

Teaching Assistant: Robert Rubsam

rjr2161@columbia.edu

Office hours: TBA

Zoom ID: 925 527 5656

OVERVIEW:

Students will be asked to produce approximately four different types of feature articles about scientific subjects during the summer semester: an op-ed, a question and answer style interview, a profile and a long form narrative feature story or investigative report on some scientific question. Because the continuing CoVid-19 crisis may make face to face reporting difficult, a final project can be a long personal essay on some aspect of the pandemic.

On the whole, the class will be organized around lectures about each genre of writing and then a class assignment in that style. Students, like professional journalists, will sometimes be asked to produce rewrites of their submissions.

Students should plan on using their weekends this summer for writing and reporting as best they can or at least reporting their stories remotely. It's going to be hectic, but fun.

And it's going to be a bit of an experiment. We're teaching this course on Zoom. That's new territory for us. Our bottom line: we endeavor to use the technology creatively. We hope to make the class a compelling experience, even at a distance.

With vaccinations and the pandemic somewhat receding, your professor and teaching assistant will seek to make personal contact possible. Professor Dreifus, who is fully vaccinated, is willing to have face to face individual office hours with fully vaccinated students who agree to the terms of the Columbia Compact.

Depending on the state of the pandemic during the summer, Professor Dreifus will also endeavor to hold some in person class sessions for those students in New York City in Central Park. These will be optional and additional to our regular Zoom sessions, which will be available to both distance learning students and those based in New York.

In this extraordinary situation we all find ourselves in, Professor Dreifus endeavors to try to make the course as normal and impactful as possible.

The main requirement for participation in the course is a defined interest in writing for magazines, newspapers or the internet. This is not a remedial writing course; it's also not a course for the timid or inflexible. It's going to involve getting off campus, though perhaps only virtually. Optimally, we'd like for you to into the community, learning from people about science related stories and combining real-life information with academic learning.

The pay-off is in a lifetime of skills that students will be able to use in multiple ways—even if they don't ever publish professionally. For instance, they will write more readable blog posts and be able to draw more readers to their personal or corporate websites. Or, they may find that their op-eds and letters to newspaper editors have a stronger chance of seeing publication.

Grades are based on writing skills, improvement of those skills, attendance, reporting enterprise, and the meeting of deadlines. We ask that all registrants give the course the same seriousness and commitment that they might give to a job.

Publication of class work will win extra consideration at grading time and we will do much to encourage it. In this era of internet magazines, newcomers can find markets

with comparative ease. Many, many students in previous editions of this class have had classwork published professionally.

Because this class is formatted as a workshop, students will be asked to produce stories and possibly rewrites. They are also asked to read and critique each other's work--gently and honestly.

Because we are not meeting regularly in person, Canvas and CourseWorks and the sites we set up there will be a kind of town square. You'll be invited to leave your comments, notes and critiques there. We ask you to check your Canvas/Courseworks page regularly and participate in the materials and exercises we leave there.

To some degree, we're going to be employing the "flipped classroom" model of education, which means that some of the learning will come from your own efforts.

At the same time, classroom participation and attendance are important factors in determining a final grade--even in a virtual classroom.

Lateness in filing assignments impedes the entire class' progress, and unfortunately, must be penalized in grading.

RULES OF THE ROAD AS WE ZOOM THROUGH THE SEMESTER:

When we hold this class full time on campus, we try to conduct it as if we were in a newsroom.

The same will be true for our Zoom classroom. In fact, at this pandemic moment, many news products are being produced by teams working at a distance. With that in mind, we ask that registrants function within this class as they might in their real world offices.

Because we want people to speak openly about their work, we ask that class members keep all discussions confidential. People may want to speak and write about sensitive matters and everyone should feel that their explorations will be protected. While Zoom offers the potential for recording class sessions, we ask that no one do that.

RESPECT. Arthea Franklin had it right.

Though there is no mandated or correct format to our deliberations, civility, good manners and decency are always expected. As well of a commitment to keeping your colleagues work, ideas and expressions within the workshop's boundaries. People may sometimes be exploring personally sensitive topics. So, unless stated otherwise, "what happens in class stays in class."

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is an interdisciplinary workshop for scientists, sustainability managers, future NGO workers and journalists seeking skills in communicating 21st century global science to the public.

Scientists will be given journalism skills; journalists will learn how to use science as the basis of their story-telling. Students currently working in the business world or the public sector will, by doing actual journalism, see what the news looks like from the other side of the desk.

Our standards and methods will, at all times, be those of mainstream journalism.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The course is designed to give students exercises and real-world experiences in producing feature stories on global science topics. While most scientists and international affairs professionals have been trained to write in the style of peer-reviewed journals, we will focus on science journalism, learning how to translate global science into accessible true stories that reach large audiences.

Science is performed by passionate individuals who use their intelligence and determination to seek answers from nature.

By telling their histories and uncovering the drama of discovery, we believe that there are ways for science to be successfully communicated to readers who might otherwise fear it.

Currently, there are no comparable courses offered. Traditional science journalism classes generally target future journalists; but we hope to turn non-journalists into published writers. Our approach blends science, policy, international affairs and journalism. We are willing to discuss advocacy, too.

With mass media more open than ever to freelance contributions, with new forms of media proliferating and with internet journalism increasingly open to beginning journalists, we see opportunities for the scientifically-interested to tell their stories—if they have the proper skills. With these new opportunities in mind, we will be crafting our story-telling to meet the demands of new media and the internet.

Es Pang, a student in this class three years ago, saw the listicles she made for the course, reproduced on BuzzFeed. Not surprisingly, she earned a high grade. Today, she leads the Asian-American civil rights organization, Holler Back.

The expansion of internet blog sites by mainstream news organizations has provided remarkable new opportunities for students to be published and develop portfolios.

Students from Claudia Dreifus' previous courses have seen their class work published on the Atlantic.com, NYTimes.com, Science Times/the New York Times, World Policy Journal blogs and the (London) Guardian and of course, the Earth Institute's own, State of the Planet.

The School of Professional Studies has recently inaugurated its own blogsite, Tomorrow's Minds At Work. During the last semester, Editor Carolyn Henley published many opinion pieces produced by students as part of their coursework.

State of the Planet recently published some of the personal essays produced in the Spring semester edition of this class.

<https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2020/06/12/search-nature-crisis-beyond/>

[Links to an external site.](#)

<https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2020/06/12/diplomat-isolation-coronavirus/>

[Links to an external site.](#)

<https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2020/06/05/going-back-home-coronavirus/>

[Links to an external site.](#)

Ultimately, we hope to show a climatologist how to get their op-ed into The Washington Post and to help an aid worker from South Sudan place her first-hand report on desert environments into Marie Claire magazine.

We will welcome students from Columbia University's master's degree program in Sustainability Management, the sponsors of the course, but also from the various graduate science, environmental, sustainability and medical programs—as well as those studying humanitarian affairs, bioethics, public health, human rights, migration policy, conflict resolution and international media and advocacy.

SUMMER IS SPECIAL:

The tone of this workshop is a little less formal than the same course given in the winter. The ambiance is more intimate. Because of this, if students have unavoidable travel needs, we will try to work to accommodate them.

AND THE SUMMER OF 2021 IS EVEN MORE SPECIAL: The CoVid-19 pandemic is the biggest science based story in our lifetime. In our class, we will try to use it to understand how science is covered by mass media and to produce stories that are related to trends and events we are witnessing. If you like and if it is appropriate, you can write about some of the new science issues that the pandemic is producing. We are living in the middle of the biggest science story of our lifetimes and we might as well document what we are seeing.

Journalists are skilled at making lemonade from lemons. That's going to be our task.

VACCINATED?

Both Professor Dreifus and Robert Joseph Rubsam will be available for in person outdoors office hours sessions with vaccinated New York students. For out of town students, we will be making "getting to know you" telephone appointments for mid-June. If you are an out-of-town registrant, please forward your phone number. We want to connect with you before the semester begins.

METHOD OF EVALUATION:

The main prerequisites are a desire to write communicatively and a willingness to experiment with popular forms.

A fluid knowledge of written English is important, but students who have trained as journalists, scientists or NGO professionals in non-English speaking countries are very welcome. Whenever possible, attempts will be made to meet the needs of students for whom English is a second language.

Because we are looking to create interesting non-fiction literature with science at its heart, we seek students with enthusiasm for both science and mass communications.

Students registering for this course should be willing to try to write in a style different from what they may have been trained for; they should also be willing to find their material through interviews, investigation and observation.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING:

It's not easy to quantify a creative endeavor. What I look for is talent, skill, originality, resourcefulness, promptness in meeting deadlines, a collegial attitude in class participation—and of course, improvement of skills over a semester.

The magazine writing student who got up at five in the morning to approach Lee Bollinger—then new to Columbia—about an interview while he took his morning run, got an “A,” even though her written English wasn't perfect.

COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:

The course will address how to write various types of popular science articles of varying lengths, including how to research these pieces from top to bottom. During class, some of the students' work will be read aloud. Students are asked to offer helpful criticism to each other and work together on solving reporting problems.

Great writing skills and improvement of those skills is what we're looking for—but we also appreciate students who are willing to support their classmates, participate in constructive critiques and who are willing to go the extra mile to do creative research for their pieces.

Whenever it is realistic, students are asked to submit their classroom work for publication. That can mean anything from mass circulation magazines to the in-house publications at Columbia University and SIPA.

Students are encouraged to find Internet publishers for their work.

The Earth Institute has a website (State of the Planet), as does the Sustainability Management program and students are encouraged to submit appropriate class work there. SIPA students can publish sometimes on SIPA News, the Morningside Post and the various student-led policy magazines. Many students have published stories that originated in class in Columbia University's Consilience: A Journal of Sustainability.

The School of Professional Studies has just inaugurated a blog for student and faculty writing, Tomorrow's Minds At Work. Many students from Professor Dreifus' classes have published there.

We will also be submitting exceptional work for consideration by the editors of the various blogs at the New York Times and at different digital media sites—such as BuzzFeed and Medium.

Writing is key to success in the course. We believe that writing is like gymnastics: the more you do, the better you get—so we spend a lot of time reading good science writing and practicing the craft.

We're looking for enthusiastic writers and curious reporters, but also students who will improve their skills over the semester. An improved/dedicated writer can be assured of a fine grade. Handing in assignments on deadline is critical. Because participation is a major aspect of this workshop, students are asked to attend all regular sessions.

I am available during Zoom office hours for one-on-one coaching and will also mentor students through their larger projects.

Robert Rubsam, the curriculum and grading assistant, is also available either by appointment during his office hours or by special arrangement. His presence in the course provides an additional resource for enrolled students.

ABOUT THE TEACHING ASSISTANT:

Robert Rubsam is a writer and journalist from New York's Hudson Valley. He is currently finishing his MFA in Fiction Writing at Columbia University's School of the Arts, and is at work on a novel.

His reporting and criticism has been published in The New York Times Magazine, The Baffler, Commonweal Magazine, and Texas Monthly, among others.

E-MAIL: Students are asked to email their completed writing assignments to Prof. Dreifus at cd2106@columbia.edu as an attachment on the Sunday before class by noon. Also cc Robert Rubsam (rjr2161@columbia.edu).

Because of the limited time-span of this course, there can be no flexibility on deadlines.

Stories are also to be simultaneously mounted up on CourseWorks so that your classmates can read them.

We ask that you read your colleagues' submissions, make notes on them, post them on CourseWorks and bring helpful comments to class. Part of your classwork and your eventual success comes from reading and critiquing the works of others. Because your participation is a key element of the course, absences from class lectures are discouraged.

A NOTE ON TIMELY FILING: In order for students' writing to be graded and considered in time for Tuesday evening it is vital that assignments be filed on CourseWorks by Monday at noon, FIRM.

This requirement is not aimed at ruining students' weekends, but to give the professor enough time to evaluate the entire class' problems and progress and construct a lecture tailored to the group's needs.

A SEPARATE NOTE ON PACE:

We will move as quickly or as slowly as the class' progress requires. That, of course, means the schedule below is not set in stone. As that late 20th-century philosopher John Lennon had it: "Life is what happens when you're making other plans." Please consider this syllabus provisional. It is very much a living document and a work in progress that is subject to change.

WEEK-BY-WEEK TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

SESSION ONE — TUESDAY JUNE 29: INTRODUCTIONS

First hour: The Difference — How does science journalism contrast with academic writing and everyday business writing? How does it differ from standard feature writing?

In this introductory session, we will identify current scientific topics that lend themselves to features for newspapers, magazines and the Internet.

We'll discuss the story structure of the science feature. What are the elements of a compelling science story?

How does one transform numbers and findings into a literary narrative? How does one create a simple story without 'dumbing down' the content? Why does the work of successful science communicators such as Elizabeth Kolbert, Neil Shubin, Bill McKibben and Brian Greene have wide appeal? What are they actually doing?

Why did the late Nobelist at Rockefeller University Gunter Blobel tell his post-docs, "If you can't explain it to your grandmother, don't bring it to me"?

Second hour: What exactly is an op-ed? Are science op-eds different from other sorts of opinion pieces? What markets will print a science-based op-ed? What are the mechanics of submission? What is the difference between a short personal essay and an op-ed? Can one write a personal essay about a scientific topic? How?

You can also read these sample op-eds if you would like to see some more great examples.

Please be sure to read this oped, an eye witness report on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for class. Please dissect the essay. Why do you think, if you do, it is successful?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/18/magazine/close-encounter-of-the-human-kind.html>

And these examples of the form:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/03/im-black-climate-scientist-racism-derails-our-efforts-save-planet/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/opinion/trump-cabinet-covid.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/12/opinion/a-fierce-famine-stalks-africa.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/04/opinion/covid-19-survivors-effects.html>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/18/what-lithuania-can-teach-us-about-grappling-with-confederate-statues/?fbclid=IwAR0c64FB67VuRmDVHX5tL7sQ6sFnIqhjmWd9WIJZmScaFID-SUp2H>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/opinion/coronavirus-masks.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/12/opinion/making-google-the-censor.html?ref=opinio>

Because Op-Eds involve argument and a convincing argument at that, be sure to read this interview by your professor with political scientist/climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe that appeared on Undark. Dr. Hayhoe's common sense rules for presentations also apply to written pieces:

<https://undark.org/article/an-evangelist-for-climate-science-five-questions-for-katharine-hayhoe/>

Here's also an op-ed written by the former op-ed editor of the New York Times, Trish Hall. The uncomplicated advice remitted here comes from her Norton book, "Writing to Persuade: How to Bring People Over to Your Side":

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/25/opinion/sunday/writing-advice.html>

Here's a link to a blogger who has excerpted William Zinnser's advice on good science writing; it's a nice primer:

<http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/05/27/william-zinsser-on-writing-well-science/>

Towards the end of this session, editors from various Columbia based journals and blogs will speak briefly about their editorial requirements and how to submit your work.

We will be hitting the ground running this semester!

Assignment: Start writing a 750 word opinion essay on a topic of interest to you.

SESSION TWO — THURSDAY JULY 1: THE SCIENCE-BASED OP-ED/STORY STRUCTURE

First Hour: Story Structure. Professor Anya Schiffrin, Director of Columbia/SIPA's Technology and Media Concentration will present her tips for journalistic writing.

Second Hour: Identifying good vs. bad science writing.

Assignment: Write a 750-word science-based op-ed that is targeted to a market like the New York Times, the Washington Post.

This assignment will involve a fast turnaround. Due date: MONDAY, July 5 at NOON

For advice on how to structure this and all your other assignments, please look over the PowerPoint presentation by Professor Anya Schiffrin, the Director of the Technology Media and Advocacy Program at SIPA. It will be posted on CourseWorks/Canvas. Also, take a look at this recent news story from the New York Times. Can you diagram the story structure according to Prof. Schiffrin's powerpoint presentation? What does the lede look like? Where is the nut graf? The subject, of course, is CoVid.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/world/europe/coronavirus-spread-asymptomatic.html>

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Resource: Claudia Dreifus's SPS Interview with Harvard's historian of science Naomi Oreskes:

[Distrusting Science: How We Got This Pandemic with Naomi Oreskes](#)

Resource: for a sense of how the best reporters work, view Claudia Dreifus' video interview with Donald McNeil, Jr., the New York Times science reporter who covers pandemics:

SESSION THREE — TUESDAY JULY 6 : Op-eds Workshop and the Zen of the Interview.

First hour: Discussion of student op-eds.

Note: Any student with a grade of less than A-minus will be asked to attempt a rewrite to raise your grade. Rewriting is central to the journalistic process. Everyone does it. This is what makes your work better and more readable

Second hour: Prof. Dreifus will lead a discussion on interviewing. Check CourseWorks for Claudia Dreifus' tips for interviewing.

Reading for next session:

Introduction to Scientific Conversations: Interviews on Science from the New York Times—please check Courseworks.

At NYTimes.com, you can find the following examples of short form interviews by Claudia Dreifus:

“A Conversation with Carl Safina,” by Claudia Dreifus, New York Times

“A Conversation with: Stephen Hawking,” by Claudia Dreifus, New York Times

“A Conversation with: Jennifer Eberhardt,” by Claudia Dreifus, New York Times

And here are some long forms: 3500 words, E.O. Wilson, Quanta Magazine:
<https://www.quantamagazine.org/edward-o-wilson-finds-hope-in-selfless-ants-and-ecology-studies-20190515/>

An Interview with Jennifer Doudna, New York Review of Books:
<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/01/24/the-joy-of-the-discovery-an-interview-with-jennifer-doudna/>

Contrast, Profile of E.O. Wilson, Audubon Magazine:
<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/september-october-2015/eo-wilson-wants-us-leave-half-earth>

SESSION FOUR — THURSDAY JULY 8: Op-Ed Rewrites and Interviews

Special focus: what makes a good lede?

Further discussion of interviewing, with respect to the assigned reading, as well as the upcoming interview assignment.

Assignment for next week:

Start working on your interview!

Op-ed rewrites are due MONDAY JULY 12 at noon.

SESSION FIVE — TUESDAY JULY 13

First hour: Discuss process of rewriting op-eds. Discuss progress on interviews.

Second hour: A Live Zoom Interview with [another speaker]. (Tentative date.)

SESSION SIX --THURSDAY JULY 15: Translating Science From Research to Story

We will look at a journal article and discuss how to translate complex science to a piece of popular writing.

To do at home: View the film, “Spotlight,” a fictionalized drama on the true story of how a special investigative group at the Boston Globe broke the child abuse scandal by Catholic clergy in the Boston area. The film touches on many of the ethical issues investigative reporters face when they take on sensitive and difficult topics.

Resource: Politico asks some bioethics questions related to CoVid press coverage:

https://www.politico.com/amp/news/2020/06/05/drugmakers-media-coronavirus-303895?fbclid=IwAR1YzIQISXP5CYcHIBLYTwXMEu_YzJLxbzHzW5qyi3J3QkDIUd46csy73O4

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Resource: Ivan Oransky asks procedural questions about science coverage during the pandemic in the Columbia Journalism Review.

https://www.cjr.org/opinion/pandemic-science-publishing-journals-how-to.php?fbclid=IwAR0PiGqTZrZEYrU7DMpvEZ1A_L4mkxRwhwTbCloXKYk6OCzIAKImbn5pLGQ

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Assignment for next week: A Q. and A. style Interview. Due on Monday, July 19 at noon

SESSION SEVEN—TUESDAY JULY 20: SCIENCE JOURNALISM ETHICS IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC.

First Hour: First Hour with Robert Rubsam: Round robin on student interview pieces.

How to transform an interview into a profile. What other research and reporting do you need?

[Conversation with Margaret Sullivan, Washington Post Media Columnist](#)

- Explaining a Difficult Scientific Concept. This story does it well. What is the reporter doing?

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2020/06/29/coronavirus-mutation-science/?arc404=true>

SESSION EIGHT —THURSDAY JULY 22: OUR VIRTUAL EDITORS' NIGHT, PLUS

First hour: review of pending assignments with Robert Rubsam.

Second hour: Editors Night, Virtually.

Assignment: Profile due Monday July 26 by noon.

SESSION NINE — TUESDAY JULY 27, FINISHING UP OLD PROJECTS/STARTING ONE FINAL NEW ONE.

1) Group discussion of students' profiles.

2) Discuss pitching and getting published.

3) Introducing the Personal Essay

Read an exemplary personal essay by a student from last semester:

SESSION TEN, THURSDAY, JULY 29--LET'S GET PERSONAL: THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY.

Robert Rubsam will discuss the craft of personal writing.

Claudia Dreifus will lecture on when it works and when it doesn't.

And why? How does one do personal writing about a science based subject? (Hint: science is everywhere in our lives--our job is to make it visible and real.) Where has science touched your life? With the pandemic? With climate

change? With the kind of data you use or collect? With how you make your living or how you work?

Below: Though we won't be doing this type of story, an investigative reporter who has covered CoVid, explains how she works.

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/2020/06/23/stephanie-lee-unravels-the-conflicts-of-interest-behind-a-controversial-covid-19-study/>

ASSIGNMENT: First draft of Personal Essay or Final Reporting piece due on Monday, August 2 by noon.

NOTE: In usual times, this course culminates with the writing of a long form narrative story on a science based topic. Unfortunately, with the CoVid-19 pandemic making the kind of in-person research required for the genre difficult to do, we'll, in some instances be writing personal essays instead. As we are all living in the midst of the biggest science story of our lifetimes, writing about your personal experience with the pandemic, is a good starting point. How have you been coping? What have you learned in the last six months?

LONG FORM NARRATIVES: Nonetheless, you may want to acquaint yourself with some first rate long form stories and check them against the techniques described in Anya Schiffrin's powerpoint. We won't be doing a long form in this class this semester, but we will be discussing the genre. So here are some examples to consider.

Here are a few to consider.

The New York Times Sunday Magazine pulls out all stops to go multimedia on the history of climate change
politics.<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/01/magazine/climate-change-losing-earth.html>

Elizabeth Rosenthal's report in the New York Times, on "The Odd Math of Medical Tests" has a perfect structure. See it here.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/16/health/the-odd-math-of-medical-tests-one-ecg-cardiogram-two-prices-both-high.html>

A story on the water wars in Arizona in New York Times Magazine:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/magazine/the-water-wars-of-arizona.html?searchResultPosition=9>

A longform piece on Leprosy from the NYT Science section:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/health/leprosy-india-disease.html?searchResultPosition=3>

The Death Penalty: Claudia Dreifus, “Women on Death Row,” Ms. Magazine, (Available in Library Reserves.) 4500 words.

Resource: Solutions Journalism, Handbook, available free to you on-line and produced by Sarika Bansal and Samantha McCann, alumni of Prof. Dreifus' Feature Writing Class at SIPA.
<http://solutionsjournalism.org/tools/solutions-journalism-toolkit/>

SESSION ELEVEN, TUESDAY AUGUST 3—Interim discussions of Long Forms. Progress reports.

Compare Cell article with New York Times. Analyze how one tells a story vs. how the other presents findings. Take apart an academic paper and then translate into journalism.

SESSION TWELVE, THURSDAY AUGUST 5. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Further discussion of long-form journalism.

Discuss strategies for developing and selling your work.

Think about mixed media and new media supplements to your written stories—i.e. podcasts, videos, slideshows, blogs that you might create to enhance your story.

Final draft due AT CLASS TIME.

Assignments Due:

July 5: Write a 750-word science-based op-ed that is targeted to a market like the New York Times, the Washington Post, or the blogs of an NGO like the National Resources Defense Council or Carnegie Council on Ethics.

July 12: Rewrite op-eds, and work on your interview.

July 19: A Q. and A. style interview.

July 26: Profile.

August 2: First draft of personal essay or long form narrative on science topic.

August 5: Final draft of personal essay or long form.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

There are no required textbooks for this course. The titles below will be helpful to you in your science journalism and are a suggested addition to your personal libraries.

“Am I Making Myself Clear: A Scientists Guide to Talking to the Public,” Cornelia Dean

“Writing to Persuade: How to Bring People Over to Your Side,” Trish Hall

“Writer’s Market, 2020” Writer’s Digest Books

“The Craft of Science Writing,” edited by Siri Carpenter

“Explaining Research,” Dennis Meredith.

“The By-Line Bible: Get Published in Five Weeks,” Susan Shapiro

“Merchants of Doubt,” Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway.

“Sustainability Management: Lessons from and for New York City, America, and the Planet,” Steven A. Cohen.

FILING PROTOCOL: Please always file your stories with a generic headline and a by-line. In addition to posting your story into the appropriate file on Courseworks, be sure to send Claudia Dreifus and Robert Rubsam a Microsoft Word copy via email. Should you not be able to make a specific assigned deadline, please request a deadline extension. Your helpful commentary under stories that have been filed on CourseWorks

is appreciated. In this “distance learning” course, your notes and comments help build community among the class members.

LIBRARY RESERVES:

Some feature writing source works used in my magazine writing class will be posted within the "library reserves" feature of CourseWorks.

Though these are not science stories per se, they may be of use to you in looking at story structure and detail.

Students can also access hundreds of magazines and newspapers for free through the Columbia University library system.

Access to the New York Times and the Washington Post, highly necessary for this course, is also available through our library.

SUGGESTED PUBLICATIONS TO READ:

The New York Times

The Washington Post

The Wall Street Journal

Scientific American

Undark

Pro Publica

Stat

Climate Action News

Yale360

STATE OF THE PLANET: The Earth Institute publishes a blog/online magazine, “State of the Planet” with much interesting news of E.I. research and faculty. The weekly column of the SUMA program’s founder, Steven Cohen, is posted there. What Professor Cohen has managed to do is develop a regular column on sustainability issues that is read by thousands of interested citizens. We’d like you to check in with State of the

Planet each week and to study how Professor Cohen produces his feature. What makes it different and interesting?

Please keep in mind, if any of your course work is publishable or nearly so, State of the Planet editors would like to have a look at it. They will work with you on editing. Many students from this class have published there. Sarah Fecht, a former editor at Popular Science, is a content manager at State of the Planet and she welcomes your pitches.

Reach out to her at SFecht@ei.columbia.edu.

MEDIA THAT STUDENTS IN CLAUDIA DREIFUS' CLASSES HAVE PUBLISHED IN:

The Atlantic.com, New York Times/Science Times, New York Times/The Local, New York Times/ The Green Blog, Consilience, The National (UAE,) the Guardian (London,) Quartz.com, State of the Planet. New York Times, Q Magazine (Australia,) the Bronx News, Communique, the Morningside Post, the Martha's Vineyard Times, the Trenton Times, Conservation, the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed. Tomorrow's Leaders Today.

DIVERSITY IN REPORTING: The ideas and accomplishments of under-represented groups have often been neglected in both the world of science and in the reporting of it.

One step is to self-correct by seeking to be more inclusive in sourcing your science stories. The Open Notebook offers these suggestions.

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/finding-diverse-sources-for-science-stories/>

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

BIOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE PROFESSOR:

I am the regular interviewer of the New York Review of Books,, a contributor to the New York Times Science Times section--and a writer for Quanta,Undark, Smithsonian, Scientific American.

I also produce and moderate the Science Talks series at the 92nd Street Y.

This class was initiated ten years ago as a way of teaching scientists stronger communication skills. It was one of the first university-based classes, if not the first, with this aim.

The American Society of Journalists and Authors has honored me with a "career achievement award," and Sigma Xi, the National Honorary Society of Research

Scientists has made me an honorary member for "transforming" how science is covered in my New York Times interview column.

My two trade books about interviewing, "Interview," and "Scientific Conversations," are used in journalism courses worldwide.

Jennifer Doudna, the discoverer of CRiSPR gene editor and a Nobel Prize winner told the Boston Globe, that Scientific Conversations was her favorite summer science read last year..

Here's what she said, "This is an awesome collection of 38 interviews, published originally in the Science Times section of the New York Times, that captures the wonder and excitement of scientific discovery. As an outstanding journalist and a relative outsider to science, Dreifus elicits from her subjects the passion, frustration, inspiration and, ultimately, the joy of doing science. Her writing reminds me of the work of John McPhee: deep and expansive with a sense of fun. A great read!

My classes have had consistently high student ratings in course evaluations.

Through the SUMA program, I also give one on one op-ed coaching and a special Saturday all day workshop on op-ed writing in the Fall and Spring.. Alumni of the class are welcome to register for both.

I will also be giving a SUMA course in the Fall strictly focused on op-ed and blog writing.

ONGOING SCI/COMM NETWORK AT COLUMBIA: The Earth Institute has launched a science and sustainability communications initiative under the leadership of former New York Times reporter, Andrew Revkin. The initiative offers many opportunities for skill building, activism and networking with other environmentally concerned students, staff and faculty.

Contact Andrew Revkin at ar667@columbia.edu for more information.

COLUMBIA INTEGRITY:

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School of Professional Studies, where the SUMA program and this course is based, provides some useful resources online.

We strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research and writing.

As stated in your Sustainability Management registration packet, Columbia University functions at the highest levels of integrity and demands the same from its students. It goes without saying that plagiarism, "recycling" of previously produced works, the employment of intellectual products created by others, will not be tolerated.

A FINAL WORD:

This syllabus is provisional. As the workshop progresses, it will, most certainly, be revised as we go along.

As the late great John Lennon had it, "life is what happens when you're making other plans." So is any creative endeavor.

Rob's Suggestions:

Books:

Uninhabitable Earth by David Wallace Wells

A Most Remarkable Creature by Jonathan Meiburg

Under a White Sky by Elizabeth Kolbert

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Darwin Comes to Town by Menno Schilthuizen

Underland by Robert Macfarlane

Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake

Op-Eds:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/14/opinion/climate-disasters.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/24/opinion/coronavirus-vaccine-cost-pfizer-moderna.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-alive-dead.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/opinion/covid-symptoms-gorillas.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/opinion/bears-ears-trump-biden.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/opinion/climate-change-himalayas.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/opinion/covid-dementia.html>

Longforms:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/10/magazine/school-reopenings-rhode-island.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/magazine/laos-agent-orange-vietnam-war.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/magazine/the-lawyer-who-became-duponts-worst-nightmare.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html>

Interview with Alan Alda: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwFJIQualPM>