

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNICATION: WRITING AND REPORTING (ERSC 3502H)

Online Course Outline - Fall 2010

INSTRUCTORS: Ms. Lydia Dotto Primary: LS (LearningSystem) email; Secondary: lydiadotto@trentu.ca

SECRETARY: Ms. Deb Mills 748-1011 ext. 7199, ESC B202, dmills@trentu.ca

TEXT: No required text. Required readings are assigned each week and include selections from the reports “The State of the News Media” and “Science and Engineering Indicators”; a selection of scientific papers on environmental issues; a selection of media articles, including news and feature articles, opinion articles and letters to the editor; a selection of online news and documentary videos; selected media and environmental web sites and blogs; abstracts from NSERC grant proposals.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to help students develop an ability to communicate scientific information effectively to *non-scientific audiences*, including the general public, the media, policymakers, community stakeholders, businesses, workplace colleagues and others. The emphasis will be on written and broadcast communications, including print, television, multimedia and Internet-based formats.

The course will cover trends in mass media, public scientific literacy, the format and structure of popular science writing, news and opinion writing, translating scientific jargon into plain language, credibility of sources, researching and interviewing, political interference with science communication, whistleblowers and ethical issues.

Students will be required to do written assignments, including translating jargon and writing news and opinion articles in the style of popular science communication. They will also be required to participate in group activities and discussions in class, including writing exercises and discussing required readings. *Students must have the knowledge and technical ability to make use of computers and online resources, including online access to the Trent University library. Familiarity with the Learning System (WebCT) is essential.*

All activities -- assignments, readings and participation in discussions -- will be marked. Assignments will be managed via the online Learning System (WebCT.) Written assignments must be submitted as computer-generated documents in MS Word .doc or .rtf format. See the section on Assignment Formats below for details of the formatting guidelines.

Students wanting to pursue careers in environmental research, environmental policy, journalism, education, public relations or community outreach may find this course valuable.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

The primary method of communication with Lydia Dotto is through Learning System email. All correspondence *must* be sent through LS email; emails from other sources will not receive a response. If LS email is not operational for technical reasons, the secondary method of communication is Trent email: lydiadotto@trentu.ca.

Lydia Dotto does not have set office hours. Students wishing to meet with her individually should send a request through LS email and she will make arrangements for a meeting room and time. By appointment, she can also be available for a meeting after the weekly lecture.

ASSIGNMENTS:

ASSIGNMENTS	% OF FINAL GRADE	DUE
FALL TERM		
Attendance, readings and participation in discussions and exercises	30%	Sept. 15 to Dec. 8
Jargon – translate scientific terms and concepts into plain language	10%	Oct. 13 @ 4 pm
News article (~800 words) - draft for group review - final version	30% (30% deduction if draft not submitted on time)	Nov. 3 (draft) @ 9am Dec. 1 (final) @ 4 pm
Opinion article - an opinion column or blog (~800 words) - draft for group review - final version	30% (30% deduction if draft not submitted on time)	Nov. 17 (draft) @ 9 am Dec. 8 (final) @ 4 pm

Note: 25 % of the course mark will be returned to students before the drop date (Nov. 12)

LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS:

Week	Date	Lecture/workshop	Assignment Due	%
1	09/15	Introduction: course overview - objectives, assignments, familiarization with course procedures and requirements. Science literacy questionnaire.		
2	09/22	The context of popular science communication; media trends; audience trends; public science literacy; class discussion.		
3	09/29	Elements of good science communication: science in the media; scientists and the media; translating jargon, readability; class discussion.		
4	10/6	Elements of good science communication – formats and styles of popular writing, types of popular articles, criteria for popular articles, interviews & quotes; class discussion		
5	10/13	Elements of good science communication: writing opinion and analysis; review assignment criteria; assistance with assignments. class discussion.	Jargon	10%
6	10/20	Magazine writing; review assignments; assistance with assignments; class exercises and discussions		
Reading Week				
7	11/3	Writing for the Internet, blogging. Class discussion. Group exercise - feedback on news article drafts.	draft of news article for group review (30% deduction if draft not submitted on time)	
8	11/10	Writing for television and film: scientists on TV; writing for television; expert interviews; science news on TV; class discussions.		
9	11/17	Writing for television and film: documentaries; the science in science fiction. Group exercise - feedback on opinion article drafts	draft of opinion article for group review (30% deduction if draft not submitted on time)	
10	11/24	Reliable sources: reliability and credibility of sources; checking and assessing reliability of sources; class discussion.		
11	12/1	Political interference in science communication: silencing scientists; controlling the message; whistleblowers; freedom of information legislation; class discussions.	News article final	30%
12	12/8	Ethical issues, plagiarism, fabrication, bias. Wrap- up discussion; feedback on course; class discussion.	Opinion article final	30%

	(There may be a guest speaker - to be confirmed)	
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EVALUATION:

Final versions of the three written assignments (news lead/translating jargon, news article, opinion article) must be submitted by **4 p.m. of the due date**. Assignments turned in up to 24 hours after they are due will be accepted with a 10% penalty. Assignments turned in later than 24 hours after they are due will not be accepted and no marks will be given.

Student must submit first drafts of the news and opinion articles prior to the final due date. They will give and receive feedback on these drafts working in small groups in class. The instructor will also provide detailed feedback. ***These drafts must be submitted online and in class on time so they can be used in the working groups; there is no grace period.*** There will be a 30% deduction from the final mark if a draft is not submitted on time for group feedback prior to turning in the final version of these assignments.

Participation marks will be given for reading the materials assigned, handing in printed responses to specific questions about these readings and contributing to class discussions about the readings. You'll also receive participation marks for offering feedback to your fellow students on the drafts of the news article and opinion article assignments. As long as you follow instructions and provide substantive feedback and comments that are responsive to the questions asked, you'll receive the marks.

Special circumstances (e.g. illness) should be discussed with the instructor. Conflict with work in other courses or extracurricular activities will not be accepted as a reason for exemption from these requirements.

ASSIGNMENT FORMATS

The three written assignments -- news lead/translating jargon, news article, and opinion article -- **must** be submitted according to the following guidelines.

- use **MS Word .doc format**. **Do not use the .docx format**; if your version of Word produces .docx files, convert them to .doc before submitting your assignment. You may also submit assignments in .rtf (rich text format).
- do not use word processing programs other than MS Word unless they allow you to save and read documents in .doc or .rtf formats, including "track changes" formatting.
- the **format for naming** the electronic files you upload is as follows. Do not use any other format to name your files.

JARGON ASSIGNMENT: yourlastname_jargon.doc
NEWS ASSIGNMENT DRAFT: yourlastname_newsdraft.doc
NEWS ASSIGNMENT FINAL: yourlastname_news.doc
OPINION ASSIGNMENT DRAFT: yourlastname_opiniondraft.doc
OPINION ASSIGNMENT FINAL: yourlastname_opinion.doc.

- put your name and the name of the assignment at the **top left** of your text. It should look like this:
Jane Doe
News article
- use either **Arial or New York Times fonts, size 12**. Do not use unusual fonts -- they're difficult to read.
- the text of your articles should be **single-spaced and left justified** (do not justify the text on both sides.)
- do not put **extra spaces** between paragraphs
- do not use **columns**
- **one-inch margins** on left and right
- do not put **photos** in your assignments

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from a 0 grade on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University's Academic Integrity Policy. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent's Academic Integrity website to learn more: <http://www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity>.

ACCESS TO INSTRUCTION:

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and/or health consideration and feels that he/she may need accommodations to succeed in this course, the student should contact the Disability Services Office (BL Suite 109; 748-1281; disabilityservices@trentu.ca) as soon as possible. Complete text can be found under Access to Instruction in the Academic Calendar.