

**Michigan State University
School of Journalism**

COURSE SYLLABUS

JRN 472: Environmental, Science and Health Reporting – Spring 2026

Class hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 3:00 – 4:50 PM

Class location: Communication Arts Building 237

Instructor: Iasmim Amiden dos Santos (she/her)

Email: amiden@msu.edu

Office: 348 CAS Building

Office hours: [Book a time with me; you may choose to meet in person or via Zoom.](#)

“Thinker”

The harvester of waste

I use words to compose my silences.

I don't like words

weary of informing.

I give more respect

*to those who live with their bellies on the
ground,*

like water, stone, and frog.

I understand well the accent of waters.

I give respect to unimportant things

and to unimportant beings.

I value insects more than airplanes.

I value the speed

of turtles more than that of missiles.

I carry in me a delay from birth.

I was equipped

to like little birds.

*I have an abundance of being happy because
of this.*

My backyard is bigger than the world.

I am a harvester of waste:

I love leftovers

like good flies.

I wish my voice had the shape of a chant.

Because I am not from informatics;

I am from inventionatics.

I only use words to compose my silences.

– Manoel de Barros

COURSE OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

Thank you for your interest in this course. Throughout the semester, we will learn together about environmental journalism – its concepts, processes, and practices – through multiple perspectives and approaches, including traditional Western journalism, science journalism, solidarity journalism, solutions journalism, and decolonial journalism.

The main task of this course is for you to practice environmental reporting – grounded in our discussions of these different approaches, as well as the environmental topics selected for the course – with the goal of producing professional articles for [Great Lakes Echo](#). Great Lakes Echo is the [Knight Center for Environmental Journalism's](#) award-winning nonprofit environmental news service that publishes stories by students, faculty, and professional journalists. For this

reason, our geographic focus is the Great Lakes region. Stories are often republished by multiple news outlets in the region and across the country, making this course an opportunity for you to build or expand your professional portfolio.

In addition, if you are not already familiar with journalistic practice, this course offers an opportunity to engage with skills such as interviewing, writing, dialogue, and critical thinking – skills developed through journalistic practice that are transferable to other areas, including research and coursework in other disciplines.

Above all, this course is an invitation for you to discuss, experiment with, and practice environmental journalism, including approaches that go beyond traditional modes.

Environmental journalism has been experiencing changes in the face of challenges such as climate change, extractivism, and violence against Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups. These challenges raise questions about whether we should interrogate the status quo of the practice and challenge ourselves to imagine different possible futures that take into account the entanglement of power structures that inevitably shape how we are acted upon and how we act in and for the world. This course will touch on these and other interconnected issues.

We will have two types of weekly meetings. One will be a class session focused on discussion of preselected environmental topics or journalistic skills applied to environmental journalism (Tuesdays, with some exceptions). The other will be newsroom practice dedicated to environmental reporting and writing (Thursdays, also with some exceptions). [By the end of the semester, each student will have at least four written stories to add to their portfolio. Graduate students enrolled in this course will have additional requirements, including the completion of two critical essays.](#)

In this course, our goals include:

- Read, discuss, and explain key concepts related to environmental journalism
- Develop critical thinking skills around environmental issues and journalism
- Develop familiarity with reading, interpreting, and reporting on scientific studies related to environmental topics
- Apply different perspectives and approaches to environmental reporting, including solidarity journalism, solutions journalism, and decolonial journalism
- Become comfortable engaging with and interviewing a wide range of sources, including scientists, policymakers, government officials, and members of rural and Indigenous communities
- Explore different forms of storytelling for different audiences (e.g., multimedia, social media)

PARTICIPATION & CLASS DYNAMICS

Participation is a major part of your development in this course – and also of the development of the course itself. For this reason, I expect that you will complete the readings I recommend for each class, ask questions, and engage in discussions with me and your classmates. I also hope that you will bring ideas, share materials that you think are relevant to the day's topics and activities, and be willing to participate in pair and group discussion exercises. **Everyone has something to contribute.**

Since this is a journalism class, I expect that you will keep up with news and ongoing discussions about environmental topics and current events, and be ready to share them with the class at the start of each session (for example, you might highlight what you liked in a particular story – its framing, sources cited, etc.).

Regarding readings, you will notice that many are not yet listed in the syllabus. That's because we will build this list together. I will have some suggestions, but you will also be able to recommend readings for the class. This way, we can bring in multiple perspectives on environmental and journalism issues and engage in respectful discussion. Disagreement is healthy, as long as it is expressed respectfully.

This course does not require any textbooks. However, I recommend that you check the course content and syllabus regularly on D2L, as I will update them with readings, resources, and useful links. For example, you should have the [*Associated Press Stylebook*](#) bookmarked in your browser, as you will use it to format your reporting.

On days dedicated to newsroom practice, I expect that you will use class time to work on your stories. I will work with you throughout the process. We will also do peer review exercises, giving you the opportunity to edit your classmates' work and have your work reviewed by them, allowing for co-learning and collaborative improvement.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

In addition to participation, you will be evaluated in this course based on four environmental stories you will produce. The final story will be completed in groups and will include a multimedia component (e.g., social media posts, videos, comics, podcasts, etc.). You will also be evaluated on peer reviews, which involve reviewing your classmates' story drafts and having your own work reviewed by them, as well as on a short critical essay on one or more of the approaches to environmental journalism discussed in the course, applied to a real-world context of environmental coverage. Graduate students are required to complete two critical essays; undergraduate students are required to complete one.

I expect you to submit all assignments on time. All assignments are due by 7:00 PM on the dates listed in the syllabus. If, for a relevant reason, you believe you will not be able to submit an

assignment on time, please notify me in advance so that we can agree on a new deadline or discuss other options, in order to avoid a zero for the assignment. Deadlines are important in journalism, and we aim to practice that professional standard in this course. That said, I understand that unexpected situations arise, and I ask that deadline extensions be requested only in cases of genuine need. Frequent late submissions may also affect your participation grade.

You will have the option of extra credit. Extra credit opportunities may take different forms and will be discussed on a case-by-case basis. All submissions must be made on D2L, with the exception of story pitches, drafts, and peer reviews, which will be submitted via our [Google Drive folder](#).

Assignments will be graded on a scale from 0 to 100, based on qualitative evaluation, including adherence to deadlines. Evaluation criteria will include, but are not limited to, depth of reporting, quality of writing, use and diversity of sources, and overall journalistic rigor. Detailed instructions for each story will be provided in class before you begin, and the guiding questions used for evaluation will be shared at least one week before the assignment is due.

Grade distribution:

Story 1 – 15%
Story 2 – 15%
Story 3 – 15%
Story 4 (Group story) – 15%
Peer reviews – 10%
Critical Essay – 10%
Participation – 20%

Grading scale:

93 – 100% → 4.0
85 – 92% → 3.5
77 – 84% → 3.0
69 – 76% → 2.5
63 – 68% → 2.0
57 – 62% → 1.5
50 – 55% → 1.0

ATTENDANCE

I expect you to attend class prepared and willing to participate in discussions and activities. However, I recognize that life happens outside the classroom, and I encourage you to let me know in advance if you need to miss a class. Missing class without a relevant justification will affect your participation grade, and I may not be able to provide the same level of guidance on the development of your stories as I would if you were present in class. [For more details, please refer to MSU's attendance policy here.](#)

UNIVERSITY/COURSE POLICIES & RESOURCES

Accommodations: We, as instructors, along with Michigan State University, are committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Requests for accommodations by students with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) at 517-884-RCPD or [online](#). Once your eligibility for accommodations has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services

Accommodation (VISA) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or at least two weeks prior to the date an accommodation is needed. Requests received after this timeframe will be honored whenever possible.

Mental health: Mental health concerns or stressful life events may affect academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate fully in coursework and daily activities. Support services are available to help you address these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the range of confidential mental health services available on campus through [Counseling & Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#).

Academic dishonesty: Please familiarize yourself with the university's policy on academic integrity. Not knowing what constitutes cheating or plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse. Any work you submit for this course must be your own original work. Submitting work that was completed, in whole or in part, for another class is not permitted. [Please refer to Michigan State University's academic integrity policies here](#). If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, [please watch this instructional video provided by the MSU Libraries](#). Additional resources on plagiarism are also [available here](#).

Learning environment: I will work with you to create a classroom environment that is conducive to everyone's learning and co-learning. We expect to treat one another with respect and to remain open to conversations that may challenge our perspectives. I have made a conscious effort to diversify the syllabus and to remain flexible with course content, taking into account our co-construction of knowledge, dialogue, and learning, which may guide us toward paths different from those we imagined at the beginning of the course.

Religious observance policy: I am sensitive to the observance of religious holidays, in accordance with university policy. Please notify me at least two weeks in advance if there is a conflict between a religious holiday you observe and the academic requirements of this course. I will work with you to make the necessary arrangements so that you can complete the required work. The university policy can be found [here](#).

Use of Artificial Intelligence (adapted from MSU AI policy): The use of Large Language Models (LLMs) has become widespread, including in newsrooms and classrooms. For this reason, it is important not to ignore their ubiquity, but rather to learn how to use them appropriately. LLMs are not a substitute for human judgment, reporting, or critical thinking. In this course, you may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Pinpoint) if you choose to do so, but only critically, thoughtfully, responsibly and professionally, and **ONLY for the specific purposes that were collectively defined early in the semester as an environmental newsroom:**

- Locating sources related to your reporting topic
- Narrowing internet searches
- Summarizing large data sets (e.g., constitutional law documents)

- Transcribing interviews
- Generating captions for audiovisual stories or audio versions of written stories
- Spotting grammar and AP style errors

You are responsible for any information you submit that is based on or informed by AI use, including ensuring that it does not violate intellectual property laws, contain misinformation, or include unethical content. We will discuss and follow additional recommended practices and MSU policy, such as those available [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Privacy disclosure: Stories, visuals, podcasts, TikToks, and other materials you produce in this course are intended for posting on *Great Lakes Echo* and may also be reposted, reprinted, or rebroadcast by other news media outlets, environmental and industry organizations, public agencies, and related entities. For example, *Capital News Service* redistributes *Great Lakes Echo* stories with a Michigan focus to approximately 45 newspapers and online news outlets across the state. Articles with an agriculture focus may also appear on The Food Fix, a project of MSU's Global Center for Food Systems Innovation.

Communications: We will use D2L and email for all course-related communications.

Contact the J-School Director: We want you to have a rich and rewarding learning experience in the School of Journalism. Please feel free to contact the School Director, Dr. Tim Vos, at any time to share positive experiences or ideas, or to raise concerns. You can reach him directly via this [form](#), or visit the School office in Room 305 of the Communication Arts & Sciences Building to say hello or schedule an appointment.

COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

Tue, Jan 13	Our Identities & The Art of Interviewing • Getting to know each other • Practicing some interviewing techniques Materials:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip36_qnjYsA (Tips for interview)
Thu, Jan 15	Great Lakes Echo: Introduction • Familiarizing yourself with Great Lakes Echo stories • Assigning desks • Conceptualizing your Story 1 idea Materials:  https://greatlakesecho.org/  Associated Press Stylebook Readings:  https://medium.com/@blazej.kupec/how-journalists-find-stories-and-write-articles-2174e902591c (Tips from journalist Blažej Kupec)

Tue, Jan 20	Part I – Meeting the Great Lakes: Geography, Landscapes, Environmental Issues (Guest Lecture: Dr. Ava Francesca Battocchio, Assistant Professor Of Journalism At Medill – Northwestern) Materials:  Geography of the Great Lakes Region (Available on D2L) Part II Pitch your Story 1 idea in class (Please upload your story pitch here)
Thu, Jan 22	Peer Review – Story 1 (in class)
Tue, Jan 27	Epistemology, Ontology & Environmental Journalism Understanding environmental journalism: What it is and how we approach it Readings:  Milstein, T., Mocatta, G., & Castro Sotomayor, J. R. (2023). Media and ecocultural identity. In A. López, A. Ivakhiv, S. Rust, M. Tola, A. Y. Chang, & K.-w. Chu (Eds.), The Routledge handbook of ecomedia studies. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003176497-29 (Available on D2L)  (Optional) Neuzil, M. (2020). The development of environmental journalism in the Western world (pp. 19–37). In D. B. Sachsman & J. Myer Valenti (Eds.), Routledge handbook of environmental journalism. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351068406-3 (Available on D2L)
Thu, Jan 29	Story 1 Draft in class
Tue, Feb 3	AI in Environmental Journalism: Opportunities, Challenges, and Critiques (Guest Lecture: Silvia Dalben Furtado, Phd Candidate & Assistant Instructor, School Of Journalism And Media, The University Of Texas At Austin) Materials:  https://amazonminingwatch.org/en?areaType=countries&areaId=AMAZ&areaName=entire-amazon&zoom=4.07&lng=-60.63&lat=-4.88 Readings:  https://pulitzercenter.org/blog/amazon-mining-watch-expands-use-ai-monitor-illegal-gold-mining  (Optional) https://earthjournalism.net/genai-guidelines-for-environmental-journalism#:~:text=Journalists%20must%20ensure%20that%20AI,editorial%20justification%20for%20its%20inclusion (A great resource to save in your browser!)
Thu, Feb 5	Story 1 Due (Submit by 7:00 PM via D2L)
Tue, Feb 10	Science Journalism Reading, interpreting, and reporting on scientific studies Materials:  The Conversation – https://theconversation.com/us

	 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk9qWiA3qT4 (Advice for young science journalists) Readings:  https://theconversation.com/why-we-see-hope-for-the-future-of-science-journalism-111244 (The future of science journalism)
Thu, Feb 12	Pitch Your Story 2 Idea (in class) (Please upload your story pitch here)
Tue, Feb 17	Interviewing Scientists • Live exercise with graduate students from FW 895 on outreach and engagement
Thu, Feb 19	Peer Review (Sharing ideas) – Story 2
Tue, Feb 24	What Does an Environmental Journalist Do? (Guest lecture: Dr. Gisele Souza Neuls, Journalist And Environmental Communicator, And Communications Lead At Trase)
Thu, Feb 26	There will be no class. I will have one-on-one meetings via Zoom with each of you. This week, you should also work on your drafts for Story 2 and give written feedback to your peer's story drafts.
Mar 3 & 5	No Class – Spring Break
Tue, Mar 10	Part I - Interviewing the Environment • Practicing descriptions & Understanding multiple ways of telling environmental stories Part II • Story 2 Due (Submit by 7:00 PM via D2L)
Thu, Mar 12	Part I – Solidarity Journalism (Guest lecture: Dr. Anita Varma, Assistant Professor In The School Of Journalism And Media At Ut Austin) • Learning a different approach to environmental journalism Readings:  Varma, A. (2025, January 6). Mainstream media faces a credibility crisis: My journalism research shows how the news can still serve the public. The Conversation.  Varma, A. (2021, December 8). Solidarity eclipses objectivity as journalism's dominant ideal. Nieman Journalism Lab. Part II • Pitch your Story 3 idea in class (Please upload your story pitch here)
Tue, Mar 17	Solidarity Journalism Recap & Ecofeminist Journalism Readings:  Serafini, P. (2019). Community Radio as a Space of Care: An Ecofeminist Perspective on Media Production in Environmental Conflicts. <i>International Journal of Communication</i> , 13(2019), 5444–5462.

Thu, Mar 19	Peer Review (Sharing ideas) – Story 3
Tue, Mar 24	Disinformation Systems & Framing in Environmental Stories Readings:  Chen, L. (2024). Combatting Climate Change Misinformation: Current Strategies and Future Directions. <i>Environmental Communication</i> , 18(1–2), 184–190. https://doi-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1080/17524032.2023.2299756
Thu, Mar 26	Story 3 Draft & Peer Review (in class)
Tue, Mar 31	Solutions Journalism (Guest lecture: Carolina Gil Posse, Senior Director of Programs and Strategy for Latin America, Health Without Harm) Readings:  https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/who-we-are/solutions-journalism  https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/7-ways-to-stay-smart-on-your-sojo-journey-31e3ff9e2217
Thu, Apr 2	Story 3 Due (Submit by 7:00 PM via D2L)
Tue, Apr 7	Extractive (Colonial) & Decolonial Journalism Readings:  Amiden dos Santos, I., & Takahashi, B. (2025). Decolonial Agents in La Coyuntura — Narrated Roles of Independent Media Journalists in Bolivia and Peru. <i>Journalism Studies</i> , 26(14), 1663–1682. https://doi-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2546846  (Optional) Mislán, C., Oduolowu, D., & Zielinski, I. (2025). Extractive Journalism: Conceptualizing extractivismo in climate and environmental journalism. <i>Media, Culture & Society</i> , 47(8), 1619–1635. https://doi-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1177/01634437251351793
Thu, Apr 9	Pitch Your Story 4 Idea (Please upload your story pitch here)
Tue, Apr 14	Working on Story 4
Thu, Apr 16	There will be no in-person class. You should use this time to do interviews and work on Story 4.
Tue, Apr 21	Part I – Interviewing Indigenous Peoples & Field Work Materials:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJ-ZweW8kXA (How Indigenous Journalists are Decolonizing Journalism)  https://riic.ca/reporters-checklist/ (Reporter’s checklist) Part II – Story 4 Working on Story 4
Thu, Apr 23	- Sharing Drafts – Story 4 - Wrap-up discussion

April 28	• Story 4 Due: April 28 (Submit via D2L)
April 30	• Critical Essay Due: April 30 (Submit via D2L)

Acknowledgements: This syllabus was developed based on prior versions of this course taught by Prof. Bruno Takahashi.