ESM 437: Writing Skills for Environmental Professionals Syllabus

"The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe" - Gustav Flaubert

🍎Instructor: Alexandra Phillips (she/her)
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🏢Office: Bren Hall 4426
📅Office Hours: Thursdays, 4-5 pm
⏱️Class Time: Wednesdays, 12:30-1:45 pm
🏫Class Location: Bren Hall 1424

🍎Teaching Assistant: Anna Perko (she/her)
💌 Email: annaperko@ucsb.edu
🏢Office: Bren Hall 1016
📅Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3-4 pm
⏱️Lab Time: Fridays, 9-11:30 am or 12-2:30 pm
🏫Lab Location: Bren Hall 1510

I. Course Description

This ten-week, graduate-level course is an intensive introduction to writing skills students will encounter in environmental jobs. Weekly lectures will focus on key types of environmental writing ranging from technical to creative with target audiences across members of the public, scientists, and policymakers. Each week, students are expected to read and reflect on examples of effective environmental writing, practice free writing activities, and come to labs with drafts ready for peer feedback. ***A large focus will be on proposal writing, where students can choose between writing a MESM, MEDS, Eco-Entrepreneurship, or Communications Capstone proposal. Other students may write an NSF GRFP or equivalent.*** In place of a final, students will submit a portfolio that includes their proposal and two other refined pieces.

II. Eligibility

This class has no prerequisites and is open to any graduate students at the Bren School, including the MESM, MEDS, and PhD programs. Due to the time needed for each student to receive feedback, the course is limited to 30 participants. For PhD students, we recommend this class for 1st or 2nd-year students, especially those working on an NSF GRFP or similar proposal. Junior and senior undergraduates interested in environmental writing are encouraged to petition to participate; to petition, send a copy of your unofficial transcript and the UCSB form to the instructor, cc-ing academics@bren.ucsb.edu.

III. Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- 🔎 Identify examples of effective (and ineffective) environmental writing
- 📚 Translate environmental science stories into various written formats
- 🖼️ Strategically reframe environmental messages for different audiences
- 🌎 Plan, research, and write a proposal for an environmental project
- 📝 Refine written products from peer and instructor feedback
- 💼 Create an initial science writing portfolio with multiple pieces
- 🎓Discover diverse careers that use environmental writing skills

IV. Inclusion Statement

Every student has a unique background and perspective. As a classroom, we should strive for an inclusive atmosphere that respects this diversity. While taking this class we ask students to:

- Provide fellow students with feedback that is kind, thoughtful, and constructive
- Respect peers by actively participating during labs in group feedback sessions
- Share own values, experiences, and beliefs but remain open to the views of others
- Communicate respectfully (in disagreements, challenging the idea, not the person)
- Share responsibility for including all voices (if you have been speaking often, hold back; if you have been hesitant to talk, look for ways to speak up)
- Avoid playing devil's advocate for the sake of conflict - ask genuine questions to receive genuine answers

V. Accessibility Statement

Students with disabilities may request academic accommodations for assignments online through the UCSB Disabled Students Program at http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/. Please make your requests for accommodations through the online system as early in the quarter as possible to ensure proper arrangement; for certain accommodations, DSP requires at least 10 days notice.

VI. Communication Lab Access

All students are encouraged to use the Environmental Communication Lab (Bren Hall 1016) throughout the course to collaborate on writing assignments. The lab space includes computer workstations, whiteboards, large tables, couches, rentable creative equipment, and environmental writing and design resources. Office hours with the instructor and TA will be held in the Environmental Communications Lab.

VII. Grading

Grading for ESM 437 is based on student participation, reading reflections, in-class and lab assignments, and a final portfolio.

- ***15% Class Participation:*** Students are expected to attend each class and lab. If students cannot join a class or lab due to illness or other excused absences, they must email the instructor within 24 hours and attend office hours to make up participation.
- ***25% Reading Reflections:*** Weekly readings and reflection questions will be posted on Canvas and must be completed by Thursday at midnight.
- ***25% Lab Assignments***: To receive full credit for a lab assignment, students must come to the lab with a genuine draft of the assignment and participate in peer feedback.
- ***35% Final Portfolio:*** There will be no final exam. Students will submit a polished version of their proposal and two other products from the laboratory assignments.

VIII. Reading Materials

As fiction mastermind Stephen King said: "*If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot*." Throughout this class, we will read excerpts from various environmental science publications and writing reference books (reading lists available in each lab assignment). You do not need to purchase any of these titles. Physical

copies will be kept in the Bren Environmental Communications Lab and the UCSB library and digital copies of relevant sections will be posted electronically on Canvas.

IX. Class Schedule

Lecture slides and lab assignments will be posted on Canvas weekly. Links are included below, but note that assignments and slides may still be under construction.

📝Week One: Elements of Writing | September 30 - October 4

Lecture

- Course expectations, schedule, and policies
- Vocabulary, voice, composition, and dialogue
- Editing your own and others' writing

Lab

- Readings from *On Writing* and *Elements of Style*
- Examples of environmental journalism
- Interviewing a classmate and writing a student spotlight

🧬Week Two: Translating Environmental Science | October 9 - October 13

Lecture

- The art of the metaphor
- Audience specific messaging
- The power of removing jargon

Lab

- DDT readings from Silent Spring to the LA Times
- Translating Bren papers to the public

📚Week Three: Literature Reviews | October 16 - October 20

Lecture:

- Zotero reference management
- How to find and vet sources
- Tips for writing environmental literature reviews

Lab

- 1-2 page annotated literature review on proposal topic
- Bibliography of 10+ sources made with Zotero

📑Week Four: Technical Environmental Writing | October 23 - October 27

Lecture

- Elements of research proposals
- Tools for outlining and brainstorming

Lab

- Examples of successful proposals
- Draft of environmental research paper or proposal

📖Week Five: Environmental Storytelling | October 28 - November 1

Lecture

- Types of science stories
- Evidence of storytelling impact
- Storytelling improv game

Lab

- Excerpts from popular environmental books
- Writing a short story

📱**Week Six: Social Media Campaigns | November 4 - November 8**

Lecture

- Comparison of social media platforms
- How posts go viral
- Identifying a brand's key messages

Lab

- Reflections on successful environmental media movements
- Creating an environmental social media campaign

🎨**Week Seven: Creative Environmental Writing | November 11 - November 15**

Lecture

- Tips for narrative writing
- Impacts of environmental fiction
- Outdoor poetry writing

Lab

- Reading modern poetries, essays, and graphic novels
- Writing an environmental poem, essay, or comic

🏛️**Week Eight: Writing for Policymakers | November 18 - November 22**

Lecture

- Listening for values
- Identifying your "ask"
- Beyond the information deficit model

Lab

- Reading excerpts of reports by IPCC, NASEM, etc.
- Writing an environmental policy memo

🦃**Week Nine: Thanksgiving Break! | November 25 - November 29**

💼**Week Ten: Environmental Writing Careers | December 2 - December 6**

Lecture:

- Panel with local environmental writers Matt Kettmann, Sonia Fernandez, Gabriel de la Rosa, and Jeremy Jacobs

Lab:

- Readings from speakers
- Questions for panelists
- Extra feedback session for final portfolios

X. About the Instructors

Anna Perko is a second-year MESM student at the Bren School specializing in Pollution Prevention and Remediation and Environmental Policy with a focus in Strategic Communication. Anna has a background in pharmaceutical development and is passionate about leveraging the tools of policy to address the issues of pollutants in the environment. She is also intent on furthering her use of creative and technical communication skills to converse with and bring awareness to the public on actionable environmental matters. She earned a BS in biology from Wake Forest University and worked for two years as a research scientist at Vivtex, a startup focused on enhancing the delivery of oral pharmaceuticals.

Alexandra A Phillips is an assistant teaching professor in environmental communication at the Bren School at UC Santa Barbara. Here, she runs the communications focus for the Masters of Environmental Science and Management program. She also researches the effectiveness of science communication to students, the public, and policymakers. Although Alex is an oceanographer and geoscientist by training, she is also a professional photographer and graphic designer passionate about making environmental science communication more beautiful and impactful. She holds a BA in biology from the College of Creative Studies at UC Santa Barbara and a PhD in Geochemistry from Caltech. Before joining the Bren faculty, she completed a postdoc at the Large Lakes Observatory and worked as a professional science communicator at the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis. Alex was also the first AAAS congressional fellow in climate science, where she spent a year writing environmental policy for US Senator Alex Padilla.