HU 3629: Science Writing  
Syllabus, Spring 2012

Instructor: Ann Brady, Ph.D., STC Program Director  
Office: Walker 329-A  
Phone: 487-2066  
Email: mabrady@mtu.edu  
Office Hours: 3-4 pm, M; 1-2 pm, T and Th; by appointment  
Texts: The Best American Science Writing 2011  
A Field Guide for Science Writers  
The Mismeasure of Man  
The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down  
Selected readings, posted on Blackboard

Class Time: 11:05-12:20 Tuesday/Thursday
Class Location: Fisher 126
Class Listserv: hu3629-01-l@mtu.edu
Guest Instructors: Joanna Schreiber, Ph.D. candidate, RTC  
jmschreiber@mtu.edu  
Katie Snyder-Marr, Ph.D. student, RTC  
ksnyderm@mtu.edu

Course Description

Science writing is a bridge between two communities: the scientific and the civic. Doing it well means knowing how to tell a compelling story and how to do the research that makes the story credible. Doing it well also depends on an awareness of complex audiences, some of whom love to learn about science and others who use scientific information to enhance their lives or apply it practically.

Stories about technology, sustainability, advances against disease, a deeper appreciation of the natural world, and the latest nutrition studies fill our pages and airwaves. Yet these reports often lack perspective or a skillful approach to help us grasp their significance. HU 3629 is thus designed to broaden your understanding of science writing and to guide you as you work toward becoming science writers.

Two professionals have agreed to discuss their views on writing as it offers a bridge between their work and the general public. Their areas of specialty are: biomedical ethics and chemistry.

Two graduate students in Rhetoric and Technical Communication will join us. Joanna Schreiber’s work is in rhetoric, ethics, and the workplace. Katie Snyder-Marr’s work is in rhetoric, science, and feminism.

Course Goals

1. To introduce you to some of the finest science writers of the 20th and 21st centuries
2. To discuss the genres, strategies, and practices that these writers use
3. To offer examples of the types of audiences who read science writing, their purposes and needs
4. To examine the backbone of science writing: narrative structure, rhetoric, and research
5. To give you practice in generating science narratives and to communicate them through a range of media
6. To engage you in the research necessary to tell these stories

More specifically, we’ll be reading reporters, staff writers, special correspondents, independent contributors, bloggers, and editors identified as the best science writers of 2011. We’ll also read longer works by scientists, researchers, and writers, who have won national recognition for “communicating science.”

Course Requirements

Readings
I expect you to read the texts assigned in the syllabus before the class meets and to be prepared to actively and thoughtfully discuss the topics for a given day. Expect to take quizzes and to respond to readings in Blackboard discussion posts. Additional readings may be assigned during the semester for which you will be responsible.

Assignments
Although I may modify the assignment topics and due dates during the semester, I plan to ask you to complete four substantive projects:

1. Discussing a specialized science subject for general audiences (essay)
2. Foregrounding logical fallacies in science (poster presentation)
3. Investigating a dilemma in science (pod cast)
4. Reporting field notes (your choice of media)

All of these will require shorter documents, such as project proposals or progress reports. See our Blackboard website for detailed instructions.

Document format
The default position for written pieces in this class is a professional font, appropriate for science writing; single spaced lines in paragraphs; double spaced breaks between paragraphs; all left-justified.

Email attention
Email me whenever you have a question. I stay in touch through class posts and individual messages. For instance, I send my comments about your drafts using email.

Blackboard
I use Blackboard as instructional support. All course materials, including the syllabus, calendar, selected readings, web links, and assignments are posted there. I use “Announcements” for updates and further explanation of assignments or readings, “Discussions” for reading replies.

If you need help with Blackboard management, contact me right away. You can also contact Blackboard support: Web: http://blackboard.mtu.edu; Email: courses@mtu.edu
Late work
I don’t accept late work unless you discuss your reasons with me well before it’s due.

Academic honesty
Unless the assignment calls for a collaborative effort, I expect that the work you submit to me will be yours. If you are referring to or using other sources—including work that you have done previously—acknowledge them, using the documentation style most appropriate for your major or for the context in which it will be used. Evidence of copied or plagiarized work is cause for serious disciplinary action by the University. If you have questions about using other sources, see me. I consider learning how to document sources a challenge; if you don’t remember how to do this—or never learned—this is the class to secure that skill.

Attendance
I expect you to attend every class meeting, ready to participate fully and thoughtfully. If you miss more than four of our classes—two weeks—I will drop your final grade. If you must be absent, please email me or speak with me in person.

Grading
I do not use points when grading. Instead, I use the rubrics below.

You can earn an A or B in this class if you complete all assignments and reach deadlines, do quality work, and show some genuine commitment. You’ll earn a C if you meet deadlines with satisfactory effort or if some of your assignments are incomplete. You’ll receive a D or F if your assignments are poorly executed or overdue, or if your attendance, participation, or effort is unsatisfactory.

Grading Standards
A—excellent. A work is an example of highly effective professional writing. It makes its purposes clear, reflects concern for its audience’s needs and responses, and is detailed, persuasive, effectively organized, exhibits appropriate format and tone, and is grammatically correct.

B—good. B work is effective and would succeed in most professional communication circumstances. It may lack the polish or effectiveness of an A.

C—adequate. C work is effective though it lacks features necessary to succeed completely with a professional audience. Its purpose may not be entirely clear, it may not be effectively organized, it may not exhibit an appropriate tone or format, or it entails grammatical errors that make it difficult to read or understand than necessary.

D—poor. D work does not communicate effectively for several reasons. It may display an inadequate understanding of purpose or audience. It may lack information or be unpersuasive. Its organization may be confusing or misleading, and its tone or format may be inappropriate. It may be difficult to understand or contain serious errors in grammar.

F—unacceptable. F work does not satisfy the requirements of the assignment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A—Excellent</th>
<th>B—Good</th>
<th>C—Adequate</th>
<th>D—Poor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meets assignment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Most aspects</td>
<td>Significant gaps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Interestingly and clearly advanced</td>
<td>Clearly advanced</td>
<td>May be good, but only implied</td>
<td>Ambiguous or absent, generic or trite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Valid and sufficient support</td>
<td>Some gaps or weak support</td>
<td>Some support, but weak or not clearly relevant</td>
<td>Poor support or connections not shown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>Original and creative</td>
<td>Demonstrates thought</td>
<td>Conventional or generic</td>
<td>Superficial or incomplete</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Logical ordering</td>
<td>Establishes and follows a pattern</td>
<td>Follows a pattern</td>
<td>Generally follows a pattern; some gaps</td>
<td>Unapparent pattern or hard to follow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>Coherent and unified</td>
<td>Usually coherent and unified</td>
<td>Some not coherent or unified</td>
<td>Incoherent or lacking unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Provided as needed</td>
<td>Provided as needed</td>
<td>Sometimes missing</td>
<td>Enough missing to cause confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>Correct and varied, according to meaning</td>
<td>Correct, with some variety</td>
<td>Correct, but elementary</td>
<td>Surface errors, such as comma splices or fragments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diction</td>
<td>Precise, correct, creative</td>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>Some debatable word choices</td>
<td>Frequent misuse of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>Very few mistakes</td>
<td>Misspellings confuse meaning</td>
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Additional Information

**MTU’s Policy on Discrimination and Harassment**

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair or the Affirmative Action Office (7-3310).

**Safe Place**

I am a member of Safe Place: "The GLBT Safe Place Program strives to reduce homophobia and heterosexism on Michigan Tech’s campus. Through education, advocacy, and awareness, the program contributes to an open campus climate that is safe and accepting to all members of the University community." I thus expect people to be respectful of one another in any class I teach.