

Issues in Science and Technology Journalism

VIBS 657-600— Fall 2019

Mondays 8:45-11:30 am, VIDI 208

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Office hours: Whenever my door is open or by appointment. **To set up an appointment, first consult the link on the eCampus course homepage.** If none of the times listed there work, then please email me to see what other times I might be available.

Syllabus & Course Policies

Welcome to VIBS 657! This course serves as a gateway to the Science and Technology Journalism program and, as the title suggests, is designed to give you a sense of the issues you will face as a professional in the science communication field. As we will see, “issues” is a broad term that will require the entire semester to unpack. Even then we will necessarily leave a lot of ground uncovered. To give you some idea, though, we will be covering issues such as:

- Constraints faced by science writers and editors
- The many roles of the journalist in the scientific enterprise
- Strategies for communicating science effectively
- The professional environment of science communicators
- The scholarly literature on science communication

We will pursue these goals largely through readings and in class activities. As such, it is expected that you attend class each week, that you complete assigned readings before arriving, and that you actively participate.

Readings for the course will be taken from a variety of sources. As much as possible they will come from freely available materials posted to eCampus as needed. There are, however, some books we will read from extensively enough that they can't be covered through fair use and you will have to secure access to them either through the library or by purchasing them yourself. These include:

- *Science in Public: Communication, Culture, and Credibility*, by Jane Gregory and Steve Miller (Perseus, 2000)
- *Communicating Popular Science: From Deficit to Democracy*, by Sarah Tinker Perrault (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
- *Embargoed Science*, by Vincent Kiernan (University of Illinois Press, 2006)

Your grade in VIBS 658 will come from a combination of writing assignments, presentations, and class participation. Due dates for assignments will be announced in class. The contributions of the various components to your final grade will be as follows:

Writing assignments:	60%
Presentations and in class activities:	30%
Participation:	10%

A note about my grading philosophy

You are all graduate students with proven records of excellent academic achievement. You wouldn't be in this program if you weren't. I therefore expect "A" quality work from each of you and I work from the assumption that you will perform to those expectations. I see no reason, then, to fret about numerical grades in graduate classes. Instead, each of your graded assignments will receive one of three marks:

- √ Your work meets my expectations for excellent, graduate level performance.
- √+ Your work exceeds my expectations in some way.
- √- Your work doesn't meet my expectations.

Note that the most frequent reason students receive a check minus is because they neglected to address some key element asked for in a writing prompt, so please read prompts carefully. Your final grade for each course component, then, will be determined by the balance of checks on all assignments. If that balance comes out as checks or better, you'll receive an A for the class.

Attendance and Punctuality

Much of the substantive content in VIBS 657 comes about through in class discussions, presentations, and activities. Therefore, it's important that you attend each class unless you have a university approved excuse or otherwise make arrangements with the instructor in advance. It is also important that you arrive on time. Not only is this a professional courtesy, course activities are often planned with a specific number of students in mind. Showing up late or not at all can significantly affect the class dynamic. Keep in mind that parking near VENI is extremely limited. That will not change as the semester progresses so you need to plan accordingly. Arriving late or having an excessive number of unexcused absences will negatively impact your attendance grade in VIBS 657.

Schedule

There is not a set schedule for VIBS 657. I will assign readings each week that you're expected to read before coming to class. Prompts for assignments will be given in class and posted to eCampus.

Academic Integrity Statement

As the Aggie Honor Code states, "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do." It is expected that you will neither give nor receive unauthorized aid on work in this course. All writing for this course must be your original work. For Texas A&M Honor Council Rules and Procedures, please see <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>.

Counseling & Psychological Services

If you find yourself in a crisis situation you may go to the Student Counseling Service (979.845.4427) for crisis intervention anytime during business hours, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. After 4 pm or on weekends, you may call the HelpLine at 979.845.2700 (V/TTY), or go to the nearest hospital emergency room. For more information, please visit <https://caps.tamu.edu/>.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services at White Creek or call 845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.