

Syllabus

Course Information

Course Number: VIBS 657
Course Title: Issues in Science and Technology Journalism
Section: 600
Time: Wednesdays, 8:45-11:30 am
Location: VID1 121
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Details

Instructor: Yasha Hartberg, B.S., M.S., Ph.D.
Office: VID1 398
Phone: (979) 458-7816
E-Mail: yhartberg@cvm.tamu.edu
Office Hours: If my door is open, you're welcome to drop in for a visit! It is far more reliable, though, to set up an appointment. When making an appointment, please state your preference for in person or Zoom.

Course Description

Welcome to VIBS 657! This course serves as a gateway to the Science and Technology Journalism program and, as the title suggests, it's 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. Nevertheless, you will learn about: current issues; fundamental concepts in science and technology journalism; elements of communication theory; components of science and journalism; and philosophy.

Course Prerequisites

None

Course Learning Outcomes

Students in the Science and Technology Journalism program move on to pursue many disparate careers. No single course could hope to cover all the issues relevant to each of those trajectories. However, there are foundational issues that are essential to an understanding of how all these different parts fit together within the larger landscape of communicating the developments in science and technology to the public whose lives may be impacted.

Through lectures, readings, discussions, and writing assignments, students will come to better understand:

- 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
- How to juggle competing deadlines and other professional obligations

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

Readings for the course will be taken from a variety of sources. As much as possible, they will come from materials posted to Canvas as needed. We will also be reading two books, both of which Dr. Gastel and I are making available for you to borrow.

Finally, we will be reading from the latest edition of *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*. Traditionally, the new editions of this anthology come out in October. Things seem to be on track for the 2024 edition to come out on time, but we may have to use the 2023 edition. Either way, though, Dr. Gastel will be providing copies of this book for everyone to keep.

Grading Policy

Grading will be as follows:

95-100	outstanding; highly professional
90-94	excellent; approaching highly professional quality
85-89	generally solid but still would benefit from substantial revision
80-84	a reasonable start but still needs much more work
<80	below acceptable graduate student level

For all assignments, both content and crafting will be considered. An average of 89.50% or above will earn a final grade of A, an average of 79.50% to 80.49% will earn a B, and so forth.

Your grade in VIBS 657 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:

Midterm assignment:	25%
Final assignment:	25%
Miscellaneous assignments:	35%
Participation:	15%

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 me in advance. It is also important that you arrive on time. Not only is this a professional courtesy, but also 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. Arriving late or having an excessive number of unexcused absences will negatively impact your participation grade in VIBS 657.

Late Work Policy

Again, due dates for assignments will be announced in class. Professional life is filled with competing deadlines and conflicts with personal obligations, so you are expected to turn assignments in on time. That said, life happens, and another part of professional life is learning how to negotiate deadlines. If something comes up that will prevent you from meeting an assignment deadline, please let me know in advance so alternative arrangements can be made.

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reasons deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work,

should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case” ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, you will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University’s goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University’s [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in proper self-care by utilizing the resources and services available from Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS). Students who need someone to talk to can call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).