Journalism & Society: Science, Politics and the Environment

JOUR-UA 9503 DC1; ENVST-UA 9503 DC1

In-Person ideally/Hybrid and/or Zoom if Needed
Mondays 6:15-9:15 p.m. US EDT + Daylight Savings

Fall 2020
We know that you may be taking courses at multiple locations this semester. If you are enrolled in this course 100% remotely and are not a Go Local/Study Away student for this course site, please make sure that you've completed the online academic orientation via NYU Classes so you are aware of site-specific support structure, policies and procedures. Please contact the site academic staff (dc.academics@nyu.edu) if you have trouble accessing the NYU Classes site.

If you are attending in person, you will be assigned a seat on the first day and are expected to use that seat for the entire semester due to NYU COVID-19 safety protocol.

Instructor Information
- Seth Borenstein, science writer
- Cell: 202-841-4530
- Home office: 10305 Parkwood Dr., Kensington, MD
- Virtual office hours upon request, via Zoom, or Google Hangouts (borenbearslist@gmail.com).
- Seth.borenstein@nyu.edu or sb4314@nyu.edu (responses may be from sborenstein@ap.org)

Course Information
- JOUR-UA 9503 DC1; ENVST-UA 9503 DC1
- Journalism & Society: Science, Politics and the Environment
- Mondays 6:15-9:15 pm, room B205 and Zoom link via NYU Classes
This will be a hands-on course examining the idea of truth and spin in Washington D.C., politics, governance, journalism, science and society. It will be part overview and lecture on topics central to the course and part active reporting and writing. Spin is the Washington art of taking a biased interpretation of an issue or event and making it seem truth-y even when it’s not quite factual. This is a user’s guide for reporters and non-journalists alike. Learn how to spot and dodge the misleading factoid and the incomplete truths, along with the history and reasoning behind manipulation of information. Advice from those who practice spin, those who successfully avoid it and what it’s like to be stuck as a victim of spin. Also, with the proliferation of fake and bias news sites, this course will be a guide that helps students navigate the minefield misinformation, even from officialdom. This is also an introduction to journalism class and how it interacts with politics, policy and society. Students will learn to write in journalistic style, which is quite different from academic writing. It is writing shorter, simpler and objectively.

Course Overview and Goals

Students will write frequently, often in class and on deadline. To take advantage of the unique Washington location, events and distinct attitude in the city, students will participate in press conferences and go to public hearings on Capitol Hill. This class will have two special focuses: Washington journalism and the 2020 presidential race and the Trump administration’s handling of environmental/science issues. Invited guest speakers are scientists and journalists from around the globe, mostly remotely with the possibility of in-person. Coronavirus protections can of course change plans. The course also will simulate the real newsroom atmosphere in that plans may change at a moment’s notice because of breaking news. The news cycle will at times determine what is discussed and worked on during class. There will be at least one class that is not on the syllabus and will seem to be out of the blue. That is on purpose. This class will be a broad taste of journalism for the non-journalist and students will learn how to write news. Be warned, this syllabus is a flexible guide that will be changed frequently like the news. Some of it may change because of guest speaker’s changing schedules and breaking news. We will fact check one or more of the presidential and/or vice president debates and that will involve class participation on a non-Monday evening or more than one. Instructor will be flexible with student schedules for that.

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- Students will learn how to spot and handle spin and understand how and why it is done in Washington.
- Students will learn how to get to the essence of truth and ask incisive questions.
- Students will learn how to write in journalistic style about government, science.

Course Requirements

Class Participation
You are expected to attend class in person or remote synchronously. Ask questions, give opinions, challenge instructor and guest speakers. Take part in in-class exercises. Participation is 25 percent of final grade. No cell phone use in class unless specifically told otherwise. Laptops should be brought to class every day unless told otherwise.

Test & Quizzes
There will be a midterm exam, open book and open computer, that consists of 10 questions and is 8% of your final grade. Your final exam will be an in-class writing assignment.

Assigned Readings
There are three textbooks. You will have to read only parts of two _ On Writing Well and Merchants of Doubt _ but the entirety of the third: All The President’s Men. There are several readings online (from newspapers and magazines) that are assigned and in the reading portion of the Topics and Assignments grid below. The readings often will not be discussed in class because they are foundational readings. The instructor assumes you have read them and then we will jump from there in lectures. Not reading them puts you behind in discussions and the midterm exam includes questions from readings. However, do not be upset if the readings are NOT discussed in class.

Grading of Assignments
The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments/Activities</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-final writing assignments</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td>Non-writing other (Fact check, you decide, Congressional hearing chat)</td>
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Letter Grades
Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter Grade</td>
<td>Points</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>80-83</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>2.33</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>74-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>70-73</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>Below 65</td>
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View Grades
Instructor keeps a current spreadsheet on grading and shares grades at midterm

Course Schedule
Here’s the [Zoom link via NYU Classes](#)

Topics and Assignments
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading and Assignment Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td><strong>Overview.</strong> Everything is about story telling. Media, politics, the truth and storytelling in Washington and Society. The importance of stories. Stories in journalism. Telling stories. Stories that inform. Stories that spur to action. Stories that entertain. Stories that spur change.</td>
<td>READING: None, but you can get started on All The President's Men and/or Merchants of Doubt.</td>
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<td>SPECIAL DAY:</td>
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<td>Wednesday Sept. 9</td>
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<td>Session 2</td>
<td><strong>Writing like a journalist.</strong> Keeping it short and simple. Being objective. Hands-on in class lecture and lots of writing. Writing obituaries as a start. Edna Buchanan. The Miller Chop</td>
<td>READING: For Session 2: Read chapters 2 and 3, Simplicity and Clutter, of Zinsser. NYT article online and: Sun Sentinel article online and: Orlando Sentinel article online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday Sept. 14</td>
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<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading and Assignment Due</td>
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| Session 3 Monday Sept. 21 | **Part One: Polling and election night:** AP polling editor and decision desk editor Emily Swanson  
**Part 2: What is truth?** And where do we find it? Reporting. In this class we take what is an entire major (or at the very least an entire course) and figure it out in one three-hour session. How do we know what is true and what is not? What about incomplete truths? Is a partial truth also a partial lie? Is even the concept of truthiness true? Is truth relative? Are your relatives truthful? If your mother says she loves you, should you check it out (old journalism saying)? Who can you trust? How do you trust? And if that’s not enough, what is the meaning of life? Did Washington chop down a cherry tree? | DUE FOR SESSION 3: Your obituary.
You will need to write a story from guest lecture. |
| Session 4 TUESDAY Sept. 29, TIME TBA (one hour before debate starts) NOT MONDAY | **Fact Checking Live: Part One:** Instructor will talk about how to fact check politicians, government. Pay close attention.  
**Part Two:** Class as a whole will fact check the live presidential nominee debate from Cleveland. | DUE FOR SESSION 4: Article on Swanson guest lecture.  
Read the following articles:  
AP Fact Check: [Trump exaggerated comeback online](#)  
AP Fact Check: [Elections article online](#)  
AP Fact Check: [Big Story article online](#)  
AP Fact Check: [Herald Extra article online](#)  
AP Fact Check: [Big Story Clinton article online](#)  
AP Fact Check: [US News article online](#)  
AP Fact Check: [Yahoo article online](#)  
First three chapters of Merchants of Doubt |
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<tr>
<td>Session 5 SPECIAL WEDNESDAY, Oct. 7, TIME TBA</td>
<td>Watch Vice Presidential debate as a class with Jesse Holland’s journalism ethics class.</td>
<td>You will write a regular news story from the vice presidential debate. DUE OCT. 14.</td>
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<td>SPECIAL Session 6 SUNDAY YES SUNDAY Oct. 11. We meet at 1 pm at NYU/DC lobby.</td>
<td><strong>Washington political and journalism scandal tour.</strong> How truth wins out over hypocrisy sometimes in Washington when it is exposed. A walking narrated tour of some of Washington's scandal and journalism (and sometimes both at once) spots _ not all, we only have three hours and will still cover more than five miles walking. It's a further introduction to Washington with an emphasis on how the story was broken, covered and changed life, policy or politics. Scandals include sex, drugs, money and lying. All that’s missing is the rock and roll.</td>
<td>For special Sunday class: Bring pen/pencil and notebook, metro pass and wear good walking shoes and weather appropriate clothing. Reading for Session 6 : Read New York Times: <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/us/politics/2020-gary-hart.html">Gary Hart's downfall</a> and Vanity Fair: <a href="https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2005/04/shattered-glass">Shattered Glass</a>.</td>
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<td>Monday Oct. 12 NO CLASS (Cancelled to make up for Sunday's tour)</td>
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<td>EVEN WITH NO CLASS: Story on Vice Presidential Debate is due on Wednesday Oct. 14 Read first four chapters of All The President’s Men anyway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading and Assignment Due</td>
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<td>Monday, Oct. 19</td>
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<td>Session 8</td>
<td>Part one: Fake information. Don’t call it fake news, it’s not news. How to recognize disinformation. Part two: Midterm exam</td>
<td>ASSIGNMENTS DUE: File Freedom of Information Act request, cc the instructor. Read these stories on false information: <a href="#">AP article online</a> and <a href="#">AP article online</a> and: <a href="#">Buzz feed article online</a> and: <a href="#">Buzz feed article online</a> Story from guest lecture due.</td>
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<td>Monday, Oct. 26</td>
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<td>Session 9</td>
<td>Case study: Smoking. Science and how industry and special interests put science on trial, using the concept of doubt, starting with smoking. More in-class writing and editing.</td>
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<td>Nov. 2</td>
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<td>Week/Date</td>
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<td>Reading and Assignment Due</td>
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<td>Session 10 Nov. 9</td>
<td>Part one: Election aftermath. Part two: You Decide. We'll talk about decision making by editors/managers. Why some stories are promoted as more important than others. Then, you will be assigned to play editor for your own website. You will be divided into teams and make your own website concepts and decide what should be put on it and what shouldn’t. Grade for in-class performance.</td>
<td>Finish All The President’s Men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 11 Nov. 16</td>
<td>Reporting on Race. Guest lecturers TBA. One will be a journalist who covers race. Another will be a journalist who covered protests.</td>
<td>You will have to write a story from guest lectures. DUE: Story idea for final project, include potential sources/interviews and databases to use.</td>
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</table>
| Session 12 Nov. 23 | Reporting scary science stuff. Part one: Reporting on coronavirus. Part two: Reporting on climate change. | Due this class:  
1. Story from guest lecturers on race.  
2. Read these stories on false information: [AP article online](https://example.com)  
And [AP article online](https://example.com) and: [Buzz feed article online](https://example.com)  
And: [Buzz feed article online](https://example.com) |
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<th>Reading and Assignment Due</th>
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<tr>
<td>Session 13 Nov. 30</td>
<td><strong>What is risky, really?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Presented in a game show format with teams competing to see who is smarter about risk. Risk, perceptions and fear and how to put everything in context. From terrorism to nuclear power to natural disasters. Cost benefit analyses and the statistical value of your life. How do the professionals analyze risk? How is risk communicated by politicians and officials. How do the media convey risk? Which is riskier: terrorism or the flu? (Each year more people die of flu than in 40 years of global terrorism. Yet the government spends far more money on terrorism than the flu.)</td>
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<td>Session 14 Dec. 7</td>
<td><strong>Guns, Ethics and putting it all together.</strong>&lt;br&gt;As the gun control debate evolves, we’ll examine how guns, violence and the Second Amendment fit with what we’ve learned. Have gun rights advocates learned from the cigarette and climate battles? Then what about ethics. What can you do with this knowledge? What should you do? What shouldn’t you do? How this all fits in everyday life. Using reporting and writing skills when you are not a journalist. What it all means. This is a course wrap.</td>
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</table>
Session 15  
TBA  

**Final Exam.** It will be an in-class writing assignment. Done live. You will get information. You can conduct email interviews.  

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<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading and Assignment Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 15 TBA</td>
<td><strong>Final Exam.</strong> It will be an in-class writing assignment. Done live. You will get information. You can conduct email interviews.</td>
<td>Final Project Due</td>
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**Required Textbooks & Materials**


**Optional Textbooks & Materials (may be added as news changes/breaks)**

- David Farenthold's Pulitzer Prize winning coverage  
- The stories of Jeff Horwitz.  
- Murrow versus McCarthy Video.  
- Gary Hart's Downfall.  
- Vanity Fair: Shattered Glass.  
- Elizabeth Kolbert, the New Yorker, Annals of Science, Climate of Man part 1, April 25, 2005.  
- Fact Check.org on swift boat ads.  
- Americans for Non Smokers Rights on Steve Milloy.  
- AP Fact Check, Trump Won Presidency Lost Popular Vote.  
- AP Fact Check, Trumps Distortion – Clinton.  
- AP Fact Check, Overstatements in Trump's Economic Speech.  
- AP Fact Check, Clinton Email Claims Collapse Under FBI Probe.  
- AP Fact Check, Ted Cruz Misstates Science of Climate Change.  
- AP Fact Check, Climate Science Most GOP Candidates.  
- James Dellingpole, The Final Nail in Coffin of Anthropogenic Global Warming?  
- Borenstein, The AP, Statisticians Reject Global Cooling.

**Resources**

- **Access your course materials:** NYU Classes (nyu.edu/its/classes)  
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** Bobst Library (library.nyu.edu)  
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** NYU Writing Center (nyu.mywconline.com)  
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** IT Help Desk (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)
Course Policies

Hygiene/Physical Distancing policies
- Students will be assigned/choose a seat on the first day of class. For NYU COVID-19 Safety protocols, please use the same seat for the duration of the semester.

Attendance and Tardiness
Studying at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers or online through NYU Classes if the course is remote synchronous/blended, is expected promptly when class begins. Unexcused absences will affect students' semester participation grade. If you have scheduled a remote course immediately preceding/following an in-person class, you may want to discuss where at the Academic Center the remote course can be taken. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

Reporting Absences:
1. Report the absence to NYU DC Academics via the online absence form.
2. Contact your instructor of the class(es) affected.
3. Follow up with NYU DC Academics (dc.academics@nyu.edu) to provide any necessary documentation regarding the absence.

Absences can ONLY be excused if they are reported using the form above (this is a key step, but there may be other conditions—see below—such as providing documentation, as well).

You can use the online Absence Form to report absences for both medical and non-medical reasons (see below).
- Students should NOT approach their class instructor for an excused absence (you need to consult with a member of the Academics team instead). However, students should contact their class instructor to discuss catching up on missed work.
- Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to address any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Medical Absences:
- If you are unable to attend a class due to ill health, you must provide details of your illness and class(es) missed to NYUDC staff using the online Absence Form WITHIN 24 HOURS of your first missed class.
- Please do not use the form to report a medical emergency or to request urgent assistance. In a medical emergency, call 911 and ask for an ambulance. NYU DC staff are available and happy to offer additional support, whatever time of day, especially if
you’re hoping to make a doctor’s appointment. If you would like to speak to a member of staff to request support with a medical problem, please call the NYU Washington, DC emergency phone.

**Non-Medical Absences:**
- If you have to miss class for an unavoidable, non-medical reason you must provide use the online Absence Form at least SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the date(s) in question.
- If in doubt about whether your reason might be approve-able, please speak to a member of the NYUDC Academics staff (dc.academics@nyu.edu).
- NYU DC adheres to the University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

NYU DC staff carefully monitor student attendance and absence records. In most cases, full completion of the online Absence Form will be sufficient to excuse your absence. However, in certain circumstances (such as a missed examination/presentation or missing multiple days of class) you will need to provide additional information and arrange a meeting with a member of NYUDC academics team about your absence before it can be excused.

**Classroom Etiquette/Expectations**

**Things to consider:**
- Please be mindful of your microphone and video display during synchronous class meetings. Ambient noise and some visual images may disrupt class time for you and your peers.
- If you are not using your cell phone to follow the lesson, cell phones should be turned off or in silent mode during class time.
- Make sure to let your classmates finish speaking before you do.
- Please do not eat during class and minimize any other distracting noises (e.g. rustling of papers and leaving the classroom before the break, unless absolutely necessary)
- If deemed necessary by the study away site (ie COVID related need), synchronous class sessions may be recorded and archived for other students to view. This will be announced at the beginning of class time.
- Students should be respectful and courteous at all times to all participants in class. Consider using the chat function or “raise hand” function in order to add your voice to class discussions especially if leaving the video on presents challenges.

**Final Exams**

Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Should there be a conflict between final exams, please bring it to the attention of the site Academic representative as soon as this is known to facilitate alternate arrangements. Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave the site before the end of the finals period.

**Late Assignment**

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.
2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed.
3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.
4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.
5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.
6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.
7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

Incomplete Grade Policy

An “incomplete” is a temporary grade that indicates that the student has, for good reason, not completed all of the course work. This grade is not awarded automatically nor is it guaranteed; rather, the student must ask the instructor for a grade of “incomplete,” present documented evidence of illness, an emergency, or other compelling circumstances, and clarify the remaining course requirements with the instructor.

In order for a grade of “incomplete” to be registered on the transcript, the student must fill out a form, in collaboration with the course instructor and the academic administration at the site; it should then be submitted to the site’s academic office. The submitted form must include a deadline by which the missing work will be completed. This deadline may not be later than the end of the following semester.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the lecturer. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

NYU Academic Integrity Policies and Guidelines
NYU Library Guides

Religious Observances
Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the local Academics team in writing via email at least 7 days before being absent for this purpose.

Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging and Equity

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “...not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU DC, we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

• fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and

• promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavors.

Moses Accommodations Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented and registered disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (+1 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance. Accommodations for this course are managed through the site sponsoring the class once you request it.

About Your Instructor

Seth Borenstein is a national science writer for The Associated Press, the world's largest news organization, covering issues ranging from climate change to astronomy. For the first half of 2020 he is on special assignment as the delegate reporter and tracker for The Associated Press. He is the winner of numerous journalism awards, including the National Journalism Award for environment reporting in 2007 from the Scripps Foundation and the Outstanding Beat Reporting award from the Society of Environmental Journalists in 2008 and 2004. He was part of an AP Gulf of Mexico oil spill reporting team that won the 2010 George Polk Award for Environment Reporting and a special merit award as part of the 2011 Grantham environment reporting prizes. He was part of a team of finalists for the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Columbia space shuttle disaster. A science and environmental journalist for more than 20 years, covering everything from hurricanes to space shuttle launches to ice melting in Greenland and a funeral for a glacier in Iceland, Borenstein has also worked for Knight Ridder Newspapers' Washington Bureau, The Orlando Sentinel, and the Sun-Sentinel in Fort Lauderdale. He is the co-author of three out-of-print books, two on hurricanes and one on popular science. He has flown in zero gravity and once tried out for Florida Marlins (unsuccessfully).