

## **BIOL / ENTM 4015 – Conservation Biology – All Sections “Hot Topic” Assignment (Oral Presentation & Writing Assignment 2)**

This assignment is your chance to delve deeply into a topic of particular interest to you. It involves turning in a formal Written Report on a recent article in the news (a.k.a. “Hot Topic”) and giving a formal Oral Presentation to the class. The topic should be relevant to the “big picture” of Conservation Biology (*e.g.*, how does it relate to the major threats to biodiversity or to global concerns) and it should contain a controversy (*i.e.*, alternative viewpoints; in other words, Why is there disagreement?).

Hot Topics should originate with an article in a reasonably reputable news source. For example, you could use a science journal (*e.g.*, *Conservation Biology*, *Nature*, *Science*), a newspaper (*e.g.*, *New York Times*, *The Baton Rouge Advocate*), a news magazine (*e.g.*, *Newsweek*, *Time*), or a popular magazine that covers relevant stories (*e.g.*, National Geographic). Alternatively, the topic may originate with a broadcast news report (*e.g.*, on BBC, NPR) or an online equivalent of the aforementioned potential sources. You will then research the topic further, using a variety of additional sources (this should include at least 5 written sources, including at least 2 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles, but resources like Wikipedia are not valid sources for an academic paper). If you are in doubt about using any particular source, please ask us.

Before you begin to craft your Written Report and Oral Presentation, get your topic approved by both Becky Carmichael & Jonathan Myers (your TAs), to be sure it hasn’t already been chosen by someone else and that it is an appropriate topic.

**Written Report:** Your Written Report should be 5-pages in length, based on the instructions given below. Your report should be in Times New Roman, 12-pt font, double spaced, 1-inch margins, and should include a heading with your name and a title at the top of the first page. Be sure to cite sources for ideas and information. Remember that direct quotes are rarely necessary. You should be able to paraphrase the information you gather, and give credit to the sources you used.

A copy of the original news source should be turned in (either electronically or as hard copy to your TAs).

Here are your guidelines:

- 1) Begin with a brief summary of the topic without injecting your opinion; you’ll give your thoughts later. Also, describe how your specific chosen topic relates to the “big picture” of Conservation Biology. In other words, why is your topic relevant to conservation and why should the world care?
- 2) Explain why the topic is controversial (*e.g.*, ambiguous or contradictory evidence? definitions in dispute? supporters disagree about values, assumptions, beliefs? proposed legislation?). Be sure to specifically identify the supporters and detractors. Avoid vague references like “some people” and “others;” tell us who they are.
- 3) Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the viewpoint presented in the original news source. Describe and evaluate alternative viewpoints (for example, which information is fact, well supported theory, or opinion?).

- 4) Comment briefly on the reliability of the original news source, as well as the principal additional sources you use. If you are in doubt about how to assess reliability of sources, please ask us.
- 5) Provide a description of how the topic affects (or is of particular interest to) you (*e.g.*, What personal experience do you have with it, if any?)
- 6) Taking elements 1 through 5 into account, give a justified explanation of why you agree or disagree with the original news source.
  
- 7) Optional: You are encouraged to use one page of your report to write a formal response to the news source (for their Editorial Section) or to write a letter concerning your topic to a Person of Authority. This exercise can be thought of as an opportunity to express your concerns as a citizen in a democratic society. Whatever your topic is, figure out someone to communicate with about it. That “someone” can be a legislator (*e.g.*, Governor Jindal, Senator Landrieu), a company (Georgia Pacific Timber Co., Shell Oil), or some other person, company, or organization. Choose the authority where you will get the most “bang for your buck.” For example, writing President Obama about lack of education on environmental issues will not have the same effect as contacting a superintendent or biology teacher in the state. If you decide to address your letter to a government official, consider which departments and offices are most appropriate. You may have more of an impact writing to a member of the LA Dept. of Natural Resources than to the Governor. The recipient of your letter should be someone or group who can take action regarding your topic.

If you chose to write such a letter, we encourage you to submit it once we have had a chance to look it over (and Becky has examples of letters from previous semesters that generated responses). In any case, formal business format should be used. For some examples of business format, see:

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/BusinessLetter.html>

Your motivation and purpose in writing the letter should be clearly stated. Your goal is to grab and keep the attention of the person (or persons) you are contacting. Saying that you have been assigned to do this for a class will have less impact than saying you were motivated by reading about or researching the subject in the class.

Sources should be as reliable and unbiased as possible. Supporting your arguments with sources adds credibility and increases likelihood of action. Solutions should be proposed for topics raised, if they exist. If a program of action has worked in another region, for example, tell them about it.

- 6) Include a Work Cited section for your sources (this should include at least 5 written sources, including at least 2 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles). Use the citation format of the peer-reviewed journal *Conservation Biology*. The Work Cited section is in addition to the 5 pages of your essay itself.

**Oral Presentation:** Your Presentation should contain elements 1-5 mentioned above for your Written Report. The overall Oral Presentation should be 6 minutes long, with 4 minutes for questions and discussion at the end. We are strict about the 6-minute length; in other words, presentations that are either too long or too short will have points deducted, so you need to practice ahead of time.

Use PowerPoint to enhance your presentation with slides. To prepare for your presentation, you should discuss it with your Discussion Section prior to your formal presentation in Lecture Class.

## **Due Dates:**

### **Written Report**

Submit your essays electronically via Moodle (no hard copies are required). Although we anticipate that you will go through multiple drafts to produce the version of the written assignment you submit, we will refer to the first draft you submit as your “first draft.” This draft is the best version of the paper you can put together without in-depth faculty feedback. Your first draft is due by 4:30 p.m. on March 26<sup>th</sup> (if you are enrolled in BIOL / ENTM 4015).

You will receive comments and a grade on your first draft and then you will revise your first draft (to potentially improve your grade). The effort we expend making comments will be proportionate to the effort you spend on your first draft, so if you work hard, we will be more motivated to provide you with feedback to help you improve the second draft. The second draft will be due two weeks after you receive the first draft back (with comments that should help you improve).

### **Oral Presentation**

Your TAs will provide a sign-up sheet for the dates of your informal presentation to your Discussion Section and your formal Oral Presentation in Lecture Class.

## **Points (70 total for the assignment):**

### **Written Report (40 points)**

Your submitted drafts will be evaluated on:

- 1) Clarity of organization, logical flow, and compelling arguments – 10 points
- 2) Use of references and other sources – 10 points
- 3) Technical merits (*e.g.*, grammar, spelling, *etc.*) – 10 points
- 4) Overall quality – 10 points.

We will grade both of your drafts and use the highest grade for your final grade on the project, so a good first draft works to your advantage. You must turn in both drafts on time to receive credit for this assignment.

### **Oral Presentation (30 points)**

In your Discussion Section:

- 1) For helping evaluate and provide feedback on other students' presentations – 5 points
- 2) For soliciting and using informal feedback – 5 points

In Lecture Class:

- 1) Clarity of organization, logical flow, and compelling arguments – 10 points
- 2) Overall quality (PowerPoint slides, speaking style, *etc.*) – 10 points

**Outside opportunities for feedback on your own drafts:** We encourage you to seek feedback from Colleen H. Fava, Coordinator of the College of Basic Sciences Communication Studio (BASC CxC; see contact info. below) as you complete the assignment. We also encourage you to use the studio (which has a projector and a comfortable work space) to practice your presentation and receive feedback.

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