

Please turn off phones before each class.  
Also, you'll be standing a lot; alert me if that's a problem for you.

GEOL 1342: Environmental Issues

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by appointment

**Requirements:** (I hate the word *requirements*. You are not "required" to do *anything*, including pass this course. You can do anything you want—and accept the consequences of your actions.)

**1.Purpose and Method:** This course immerses students in the process of researching and writing a proposal or article. The student is required to identify, research, write, edit (your own and one other), revise, fact-check (your own and one other), and prepare to submit an environmental/geoscience paper, proposal, or article of current interest. (Whether such paper or proposal is actually submitted is up to you; however, you are required to identify a possible target publication/submission, and prepare all necessary material.) The end product may be a traditional research paper, a white paper, a proposal, or long-form journalism. While each of these written forms have their own conventions, all will include significant, apparent, and verifiable evidence drawn from primary and secondary sources.

- Each student will be assigned a state or commonwealth. The student will choose a topic of interest within that state/commonwealth, pending approval by the instructor. The subject must be specific and include some demonstrable aspect of current research. “Current” is defined by two criteria: (1) Some aspects of the research question must involve topics/data/sources that have been published in the last year, and (2) such research/data/sources must have been cited by other researchers, according to Google Scholar. For instance, “Stormwater issues in Western Pennsylvania” is not specific enough; “Stormwater issues in Wilmerding, PA” is certainly specific, but yields no current research; the topic of “Stormwater issues in Allegheny County” would need to be narrowed, **but** provides several papers published in the last year, and these works have been cited by at least one other researcher.

- Each paper/proposal will include at least one in-person or zoom interview with a knowledgeable source. (Lessons on interviewing techniques will be included in the syllabus.)

- Finally, in addition to the final, publishable product and other assignments, each student will conduct a 6-minute oral presentation to the class, the instructor, and a guest evaluator.

**2.Assignments:** See syllabus. Get them in on time. **Make a backup** of everything you turn in. (This is good advice for the rest of your life, too.) I’ll only accept work that is thoughtfully considered. Thoughtless work will be returned.

**3. Class participation:** During the course, I'll copy professional work or student work, and we'll discuss them. We'll (**we'll**) discuss the writer's thinking, the subject matter, and how the writing/approach/methodology can be improved.

If this method is to succeed, it requires the participation of everyone. If you're shy, make an effort. (I'm shy, too, so I can sympathize.) Also: the kind of participation I expect is not, "It's an OK abstract." That's not participating; it barely qualifies as a sentence. I expect intelligent, cogent comments.

**4. Class attendance:** Attendance is not required, but class participation is, so unless you can think of a way around that conundrum, it's best to attend class. Continued absences will mar your grade. If something major (and I mean *major*) comes up and you'll be unable to attend class, please call or email me.

**5. Texts: There is no textbook.** I'll give you handouts for this course, but I also suggest you buy a good grammar handbook. The citation/formatting style of the student's target publication will be used as the final arbiter of stylistic conventions.

**6. Grading:** See below. To pass, you must complete each assignment by deadline. Each assignment will be copiously covered with comments. *Heed these comments* —they're there for a reason. And keep a folder of all your work, online or otherwise; we'll discuss your process during our multiple one-on-one conferences.

So: the requirements for passing this course are that you participate in class turn in your neat, well-considered work on time. That's it.

Your ability to pass this course is a combination of talent and progress. Talent is innate. Progress, on the other hand, is a product of how well you think, how hard you work and how well you take criticism. In this sense, we are all equals. We can, within our God-given capacities, improve.

I do not grade *potential*. You may show real promise, but I can only grade what you give me, not what you *could* have given me, if only you had more time. Each semester I'm inundated with countless excuses, ranging from hangovers to family crises. (As John Prine says, "If heartaches were commercials, we'd all be on TV.") If "something came up" and "it couldn't be helped," then why worry? If you miss a class or don't turn in a paper, it's up to *you* to make it all better. It is not up to me.

A final word: although this is a difficult course, it has its light moments. I'm a fun-loving person. Please do not hesitate to loosen your soul and smile a little. After all, it's the bravest among us who can laugh in the face of uncertainty.

### **The Road Less Travelled**

I am aware of my many faults; to catalog all of my sins would require a large database. Let me highlight comments from past students, focusing on the negative ones (how fun for me):

**The overwhelming favorite criticism: "We get a lot of feedback on our writing; almost all of it is critical."** This is true. And you'd think that acknowledging this truth would cause me to change my behavior. It does not. I don't know of any occupation or workplace that categorically evaluates one's research process; it almost always focuses on the results. Effective writing is judged by its success, without fanfare. What I *can* do is promise

comprehensive critiques and many conversations about your progress. I hope that's enough.

**The second-favorite criticism: "It's" a lot of work for an undergrad class."** Yes.

**The third-favorite criticism: "Much of the grading comes at the end of the term, so we never know how well we're doing."** This is true but misleading...and inevitable. The goal of this course is to teach you how to write a long-form investigation. I don't know "how well you're doing" until you've done it. Also, it's true that you won't know your final grade until it's, umm, final--but you will have many opportunities for discussion.

**Distant-fourth criticism: "We already know how to do research."** We'll see.

With that in mind, allow us to present what passes for a **GRADE RUBRIC:**

25%: final paper

20%: class participation and smaller assignments (article critique, Fred memo)

15%: peer editing / fact-checking

20%: presentations (both)

15% issue brief

5 % interview

94 - 100% = A

92-93% = A-

89 -91%= B+

86-88=B

84-85=B-

81-83=C+

79-80=C

Below C level is the same as below sea level: you're drowning. See me.

**Below C.** This means you missed classes and didn't turn in assignments. Except for plagiarism, this is the only way you can fail this class. In other words, you took up space that someone else could have used—someone who could have taken advantage of the opportunity.

**C:** You came to class. You handed in the work. You didn't participate much in classroom discussion. You followed orders.

**B:** You came to class regularly. You handed in the work, often showing interesting new solutions to difficult communications problems. You participated in classroom discussion. You began to recognize when your language failed to convey its intended purpose, and made some effort to change direction.

**A** I cannot tell you how to "get" an A, because I cannot predict the new and different ways you approach this material. You can recognize and articulate the dance between communicators and their audience; when confronted with difficult issues, you address them fearlessly and creatively, always learning, always experimenting, always mindful of the reader. In this way, the course becomes yours, not mine.

**NOTE:** I reserve additional grade points to use at my discretion, mostly for class participation, for work that shows unusual skill and/or execution, or for exceptional progress. If these points sound arbitrary, they are. A topic as subjective as writing cannot be reduced to numbers.

*As you can see, it is almost impossible to not pass this course, yet each year at least one student threatens to find a way. How? Funny you should ask.*

### **How to Do the Seemingly Impossible and Not Pass Collins' Course:**

- Don't come to class.
- Don't participate in class; don't participate, period
- Don't turn in assignments—ON TIME, INCLUDING DRAFTS AND PEER REVIEWS.
- Don't do the readings, EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE RIDICULOUSLY SHORT.
- Don't revise. Turn in the first thing that trips off the keyboard, even though it makes little sense and makes you look bad.
- Don't proofread.
- Don't care.

### **Academic Integrity**

*Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz, exam or paper will be imposed. (For the full Academic Integrity policy, go to [www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html](http://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html)Links to an external site..)*

To present (as one's own work) the ideas, representations, or words of another is to plagiarize. At the University of Pittsburgh, plagiarism may be punished by failure in a course as well as by suspension or dismissal from the University. To allow others to pass off your written work as their own is another form of the same practice, and may receive the same punishment. Because the charge of plagiarism is so serious, it is important that you learn how to work with the ideas and words of other people responsibly.

Fortunately, there are conventions for identifying what you have borrowed in your writing, from whom, and under what circumstances the borrowing took place. Recording your indebtedness to the work of others, whether published or otherwise, means knowing how to quote accurately, to paraphrase responsibly, and to cite sources correctly. We will discuss these issues. In the meantime, you must be careful in using the work of others; if you aren't sure, err on the side of acknowledgment. Use footnotes to indicate what you have borrowed and from where. We can discuss the proper form of acknowledgement at a later date.

I need to stress, however, that plagiarism is not to be confused with the sharing of ideas. All writers get advice from friends and colleagues. I strongly encourage that you talk to friends and classmates about the course and that you ask them to comment on your writing. If you develop a way to approach an assignment as a result of such conversation, you may indicate your gratitude to the people who have helped you by appending a paragraph of acknowledgments to your paper, describing the kind of help you received and from whom you received it. This is both a way of thanking these people publicly and setting the record straight. (For instance, I am indebted to David Bartholomae, Paul Kameen, Bill Hendricks, Joe Harris, William Smith, and countless others for their work on earlier versions of this document, and for allowing me to adapt their policy.)

**One last, important note: I reserve the right to use TurnItIn.com, an academic integrity website.** *Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com page service is subject to the Usage Policy and Privacy Pledge posted on the Turnitin.com site.*

**Statement on Diversity:** A strong commitment to diversity and inclusion is a fundamental value of the University of Pittsburgh and is critical to achieving our mission as a public research university. Diversity encompasses a broad range of differences and evolves over time. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), of which Pitt is a member, defines [diversity \(Links to an external site.\)](#) as *Individual differences (e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations).*

Fostering an inclusive and diverse community is vital as we aim for excellence in teaching and discovery. First, our mission as an institution on the forefront of discovery requires us to make our community the best possible environment for innovation and creativity and requires that we draw from among the most talented individuals in the world, regardless of social background, disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status, or gender identity and expression. Embracing diversity enables new sources of innovation. Second, diversity, opportunity, and inclusivity are important moral and social values in themselves and as part of our mission we must share our values with the local and global community. Third, our mission as an educational institution requires that we teach students these values through the experience of living in a community where the commitment to diversity is recognized and understood. We also know from experience that our commitment to diversity enhances each student's overall education. As a University, we recognize that an environment composed of individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives increases the exchange of ideas and expands intellectual development.

For these reasons, among others, we support access and promote excellence in education and research. We seek to promote equity as we act to remove barriers to the achievement of the full potential of all community members. We act upon a deep mission of social justice. And we acknowledge and welcome the broad demographic changes of our evolving society.

How do we reflect our commitment to diversity? We do so by intentionally recruiting and supporting a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff. By encouraging and fostering diverse research and creative teams. By devoting our full energy to bringing out the very best in our students and colleagues. And by creating a climate of respect that nurtures and supports their success and active inclusion in all aspects of University life. In doing so, we adopt the AAC&U's definition of [inclusion \(Links to an external site.\):](#)

*The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which*

*individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.*

Through our dedication to diversity and inclusion, we commit to empowering our students and colleagues as they learn and contribute to maximize the potential of each and all.

**Regarding students with disabilities:** *If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.*

**E-mail Communication Policy:** Your University of Pittsburgh email address ([username@pitt.edu](mailto:username@pitt.edu)) is the address used for all official University communication. It is the only email address that will appear in University publications such as the Student Information System (PeopleSoft), the Learning Management System (Canvas), and My Pitt ([my.pitt.edu](http://my.pitt.edu)). In addition, students will receive e-Bills at their University email address.

**Important:** Pitt Information Technology recommends that you do not forward your email to non-University addresses. The email authentication policies of other organizations can interfere with the delivery of legitimate email messages. For example, U.S. government agencies do not deliver email to forwarded accounts because of a federal directive to implement DMARC policies. If you forward your Pitt email to a personal account, please be aware that you may not receive emails from federal agencies at that forwarded account. This can include information about federal grants. However, if you send and read your University email through your Pitt Email (Outlook) mailbox, you will not be affected by these issues.

If you choose to read your email at another address, you remain responsible for all messages that are sent to your University address. Check your email provider's spam filter regularly to ensure you have not missed any important messages from the University.

### **Schedule --first four weeks: GEOL 1342 (*The following schedule is subject to change*)**

**Jan 8:** Intro, discussion of possible topics, assignment of states, editors/fact-checkers, summary of initial lit review framework; writing exercise

**Jan. 12:** Fred email re-write due via Canvas

**Jan 15:** Martin Luther King Day (off)

**Jan 22:** BRING LAPTOPS TO CLASS. BRING INITIAL RESEARCH IDEAS AND INITIAL LIT REVIEWS TO CLASS. READ *Milk production and eating patterns of lactating cows under grazing and indoor feeding conditions in central Thailand* (found on Canvas under "Files"). We'll discuss writing in the sciences; "elevator speech" /Three-Minute Thesis assigned; Jackson, *et al* article assigned; issue brief assigned