

# LAS 6291/WIS 6934: Conservation Media

University of Florida, Fall 2025

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Wednesdays from 9:35am – 12:35pm, Room E252 CSE Building

Flexible office hours

PHOTOGRAPHY • FILMMAKING • MESSAGE FRAMING • STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS



## CONSERVATION MEDIA

SKILLS COURSE FOR THE TCD PROGRAM\*

### 1 Course Overview

This course will focus on media and outreach skills for conservation professionals. It will help students develop competencies in digital storytelling with a focus on digital photography, filmmaking, audio production, and social media marketing. To practice these skills, groups of students will be paired with an environmental organization that needs a conservation storytelling product. This organization or 'client' could be a local environmental organization that the instructor finds or an NGO that the students have worked with. With the instructor's guidance, they will work with this client to create a final product that applies best practices from strategic communications and meets the client's goals. The course will also expose students to the latest environmental communication research, including research on message framing, audience segmentation, and values-based marketing. All course activities can be conducted with smartphone cameras.

- 3 Credits, In Person
- Counts toward completion of the graduate certificate in Tropical Conservation and Development (Skills Course)

Course components will focus on:

- Digital photography and visual storytelling skills
- Conservation photography skills
- Filmmaking and video editing skills
- Basics of audio storytelling for radio and podcasting
- Social media marketing strategies
- Message framing and strategic communications
- Case studies of conservation-related media projects

**Course Prerequisites:** There are no course prerequisites, and no previous knowledge of photography is required.

**Textbook(s) and Equipment:**

- **REQUIRED:** *National Geographic Photo Basics: The Ultimate Beginner's Guide to Great Photography* by Joel Sartore and Heather Perry (**ISBN-13:** 978-1426219702); Approximately \$15.00 USD.
- Readings on Canvas
- A phone with a working camera (other cameras are welcome, but at a minimum students should have a smartphone with a camera).

## 2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, each student will be able to:

- Explain basic camera settings (focus, lighting, aperture, shutter speed) and how they influence image quality and appearance
- Utilize creative techniques, such as composition and lighting, to create more compelling images and videos
- Identify the basic elements of a photographic story
- Create a story map for a photographic story
- Use software to edit and enhance images
- Work in a team to produce a storytelling product (e.g., short film, photo essay) that meets the needs of a client
- Create a storyboard for a short film
- Explain the qualities of a good interview question
- Plan and conduct a video or audio interview
- Use software to create a short film that includes still images, video clips, and audio clips
- Plan an outreach/impact strategy for visual storytelling products
- Identify and utilize low-cost tools for visual design, photo editing, video editing
- Explain current challenges and opportunities in strategic communications for conservation
- Constructively critique images and other media products
- Describe message framing techniques for conservation
- Write a story pitch for a research or conservation project

- Explain the basics of branding and visual style for campaigns and organizations
- Develop a social media strategy for a project or an organization

### 3 Course Logistics

The course will meet in person each Wednesday unless otherwise noted in the syllabus.

#### Technology Requirements:

- A smartphone with a functional camera (other types of cameras are welcome (e.g., point-and-shoot, DSLR), but all modules will be taught so that a phone can be used).
- A computer or mobile device with high-speed internet connection.
- Latest version of web browser. Canvas supports only the two most recent versions of any given browser.

**If we need to meet online at any point, these online sessions may be recorded.** By sharing your video, screen, or audio during any synchronous online class sessions, you are consenting to being recorded for the benefit of students who cannot attend live as well as for class review during the current semester. If you have special circumstances or concerns about privacy, it is your responsibility to discuss it with your instructor.

## Description of Assessments & Activities

### Assignments

Students will be evaluated based on three sets of activities, each of which will be explained in more detail in class. Grades will be determined from these assignments for a total of 100 points.

|                                                       |                  |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| 1. <b>Participation</b>                               | <b>20 points</b> | Ongoing     |
| 2. <b>Mini-assignments</b>                            | <b>45 points</b> | Ongoing     |
| a. Favorite Photographer Discussion (5 points)        |                  |             |
| b. Assignment 1: Composition (5 points)               |                  |             |
| c. Assignment 2: Light (5 points)                     |                  |             |
| d. Assignment 3: Portraits (5 points)                 |                  |             |
| e. Assignment 4: Short Interview (5 points)           |                  |             |
| f. Assignment 5: Group Story Plan (5 points)          |                  |             |
| g. Assignment 6: Pitching (5 points)                  |                  |             |
| h. Assignment 7: Adventure Video (5 points)           |                  |             |
| i. Assignment 8: Reflection (5 points)                |                  |             |
| 3. <b>Final Storytelling Product and Presentation</b> | <b>35 points</b> | Due Dec 6th |
| a. First Look on 10/22 (5 points)                     |                  |             |

- b. Final Multimedia StoryMap (including at least 1 video story element of ~2 - 3 minutes in length) – (30 points)

Graduate students come to this course with varying amounts of experience in photography and media production. No previous experience in photography or media production is required. This course will start with the basics and will expose students to a range of storytelling techniques and skills. To help everyone achieve their goals, this course has a core of common readings, a series of short assignments spread throughout the semester, and a final project that will be completed in small groups. There are three options for the final project that students can select from. They will select the option in collaboration with the client they are working with to produce the final storytelling product.

1. **Participation** – Attendance is critical to this class. **One excused absence is allowed although not encouraged. Additional missed classes will mean a drop in grade (unless, of course, there is an emergency or illness with appropriate documentation).** All students are expected to read and engage in assigned materials prior to class and to participate actively during in-class discussions. Participation will be partly based on your comments and questions on select readings in Perusall (see Modules).
2. **Mini-Assignments** – There are eight mini-assignments that students will complete throughout the course. Details of each assignment will be discussed in class. These assignments are designed to help students practice and apply skills learned during class time on their own.
3. **Final Storytelling Product and Presentation** – Students will work in groups throughout the semester to produce a final storytelling product that applies the skills they have learned throughout the semester. Toward the beginning of the semester, groups will be paired with an environmental organization that needs a conservation storytelling product. This organization or 'client' may be a local environmental organization that the instructor finds or an NGO that the students have worked with in the past (please reach out to instructor to discuss ideas for organizations/projects). With the instructor's guidance, students will work with this client to create a final product that applies best practices from strategic communications and meets the client's goals. Groups will be encouraged to produce an ESRI Multimedia StoryMap that incorporates images, writing and at least one video of ~ 2 minutes in length. Other options can be discussed with the instructor on a case-by-case basis. Each group will present a 'First Look' on October 15th in class and will present their final project in class on December 3rd.

## Grades & Grading Scale

For information on current UF policies for assigning grade points, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

## 4 Learning Content and Weekly Schedule

| Week | Class | Themes                                                              | Reading (to be completed before class)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Assignment                                                                            |
|------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | 8/27  | - Introduction to Conservation Media<br>- Photography 101           | <b>WATCH:</b> Joel Sartore: Capturing Endangered Species<br>( <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka6FZ0b5lms&amp;t=444s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka6FZ0b5lms&amp;t=444s</a> )                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                       |
| 2    | 9/3   | - Photography 102<br>- Equipment<br>- Forming project groups Part 1 | <b>READ (BEFORE CLASS):</b><br>- Chapters 1 and 2 of Photo Basics Textbook<br>- Wright, A. J., Veríssimo, D., Pilfold, K., Parsons, E. C. M., Ventre, K., Cousins, J., ... & McKinley, E. (2015). Competitive outreach in the 21st century: Why we need conservation marketing. <i>Ocean &amp; Coastal Management</i> , 115, 41-48. | Online discussion about a photographer who inspires you<br><b>DUE 9/01 by 11:59pm</b> |
| 3    | 9/10  | Aperture                                                            | <b>READ (BEFORE CLASS):</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Assignment 1: Composition:                                                            |

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|   |      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visual Storytelling</li> <li>- Story Planning</li> <li>- Image Feedback</li> </ul>                                                 | - Chapter 3 and 4 of Photo Basics Textbook                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>DUE 9/08 by 11:59pm</b>                            |
| 4 | 9/17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to Filmmaking</li> <li>- Interview Demo</li> <li>- Image Feedback</li> <li>- Forming project groups Part 2</li> </ul> | <p><b>READ (BEFORE CLASS):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Johns, R., Raines, S., Moore, A., Hill, M., Lansky, P., &amp; Pathak, A. (2024). Dear Tampa Bay: Creating and Leveraging a Climate Resilience Documentary Film Using Story-Telling for Citizen Engagement. <i>Environmental Communication</i>, 1-17.</a></li> </ul> <p><b>WATCH:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dear Tampa Bay: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-X4EZi3QFg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-X4EZi3QFg</a></li> <li>- Florida Bear Tracks: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4ppY00usjY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4ppY00usjY</a></li> </ul> | Assignment 2: Light<br><b>DUE 9/15 by 11:59pm</b>     |
| 5 | 9/24 | <p>Guest Lecture: Sadie Hundemer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Land Ethics</li> </ul>                                                                         | <p><b>READ (BEFORE CLASS):</b></p> <p>TBD (See Canvas module for a link to readings from Sadie Hundemer)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Assignment 3: Portraits<br><b>DUE 9/22 by 11:59pm</b> |
| 6 | 10/1 | <p>Guest Lecture: Cynthia Barnett</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Environmental Journalism</li> </ul>                                                           | <p><b>READ:</b> TBD (See Canvas module for a link to readings from guest lecturer, Cynthia Barnett)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                       |

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| 7 | 10/8  | <p>Meet with your group for project planning and watch pre-recorded lectures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audio Basics</li> <li>- Podcasting 101</li> </ul> | <p><b>WATCH:</b> Pre-recorded lectures on Audio Basics and Podcasting 101 (see Canvas)</p> <p><b>LISTEN:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Episode 3 of How We Explore (with Mallory Dimmitt):<br/> <a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/expedition-leader-mallory-dimmitt/id1625920072?i=1000567565736">https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/expedition-leader-mallory-dimmitt/id1625920072?i=1000567565736</a></li> <li>- The Wild Ones episode on 99% Invisible:<br/> <a href="https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/wild-ones-live/">https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/wild-ones-live/</a></li> </ul> |                                                                       |
| 8 | 10/15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservation Photography</li> <li>- Ethics</li> <li>- Footage Feedback</li> </ul>                                                  | <p><b>READ:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- iLCP Ethics Code</li> <li>- Getting Closer by Melissa Groo</li> <li>- NPPA Ethics Code</li> <li>- Gregg, E. A., Kidd, L. R., Bekessy, S. A., Martin, J. K., Robinson, J. A., &amp; Garrard, G. E. (2022). Ethical considerations for conservation messaging research and practice. <i>People and Nature</i>, 4(5), 1098-1112.</li> </ul> <p><b>EXPLORE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Storymap Example from Aishwarya Sridhar</a></li> </ul> <p><b>WATCH:</b></p>                                                                             | <p>Assignment 4: Short interview<br/> <b>DUE 10/13 by 11:59pm</b></p> |

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|    |       |                                                                      | - Think Like a Scientist: Boundaries<br>( <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zrd8r-mXE1Y">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zrd8r-mXE1Y</a> )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 9  | 10/22 | - Framing and Strategic Communications<br>- First Look Presentations | <p><b>READ:</b></p> <p>- Chapman, D. A., Corner, A., Webster, R., &amp; Markowitz, E. M. (2016). Climate visuals: A mixed methods investigation of public perceptions of climate images in three countries. <i>Global Environmental Change</i>, 41, 172-182.</p> <p>- Kidd, L. R., Garrard, G. E., Bekessy, S. A., Mills, M., Camilleri, A. R., Fidler, F., ... &amp; Adams, V. M. (2019). Messaging matters: A systematic review of the conservation messaging literature. <i>Biological Conservation</i>, 236, 92-99.</p> <p><b>EXPLORE:</b><br/><a href="https://climatevisuals.org/">https://climatevisuals.org/</a></p> | <p>Assignment 5 <b>Group Story Plan for feedback</b> (upload to Canvas by 10/20 at 11:59pm)</p> <p><b>Presentation on Group Project – First Look (In Class on 10/22)</b></p> <p><i>Note: Each group should have done at least one photo shoot (or interview) at this point to present to the class for feedback</i></p> |
| 10 | 10/29 | - Narrative Persuasion<br>- Storyboards<br>- Pitching                | <p><b>READ:</b></p> <p>- McCormack, C. M., K Martin, J., &amp; Williams, K. J. (2021). The full story: Understanding how films affect environmental change through the lens of narrative persuasion. <i>People and Nature</i>, 3(6), 1193-1204.</p> <p><b>WATCH:</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Assignment 6: Pitch to 'The Conversation'</p> <p><b>DUE: 11/3 by 11:59pm</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|    |       |                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Snow Guardian<br/>(<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L72G8TLtTck">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L72G8TLtTck</a>)</li> <li>- Kokoly<br/>(<a href="https://vimeo.com/344745676">https://vimeo.com/344745676</a>)</li> <li>- Haulout<br/>(<a href="https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/the-new-yorker-documentary-haulout">https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/the-new-yorker-documentary-haulout</a>)</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                       |
| 11 | 11/5  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Photo Editing Basics</li> <li>- Video Editing Basics</li> <li>- Writing a Pitch</li> </ul>          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Assignment 6: Pitch to 'The Conversation'<br><b>DUE: 11/3 by 11:59pm</b>                                                              |
| 12 | 11/12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Telling your research story</li> <li>- Video feedback</li> <li>- Project check in</li> </ul>        | <b>READ:</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Toomey, A. H. (2023). Why facts don't change minds: Insights from cognitive science for the improved communication of conservation research. <i>Biological Conservation</i>, 278, 109886.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Assignment 7: Use Instagram or Adobe Express to edit together a one-minute video about your adventure<br><b>DUE: 11/10 by 11:59pm</b> |
| 13 | 11/19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning for Impact</li> <li>- Campaign Logic Models</li> <li>- Research in Visual Media</li> </ul> | <b>READ:</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shreedhar, G. (2021). Evaluating the impact of storytelling in Facebook advertisements on wildlife conservation engagement: Lessons and challenges. <i>Conservation Science and Practice</i>, 3(11), e534.</li> <li>- Swanson, S. S., &amp; Ardoin, N. M. (2021). Communities behind the lens: A review and</li> </ul>                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                       |

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|----|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |       |                                                                                      | critical analysis of Visual Participatory Methods in biodiversity conservation.<br><i>Biological Conservation</i> , 262, 109293.<br><br><b>SKIM:</b><br>- The Impact Field Guide and Toolkit |                                                                                                                    |
| 14 | 11/26 | No Class – Holiday Break                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                    |
| 15 | 12/03 | - Funding for Storytelling and Next Steps<br>- Final Project Review<br>- Celebration |                                                                                                                                                                                              | Final Project<br><b>DUE 12/06 by 11:59 PM</b><br><br>Assignment 8: Final Reflection<br><b>DUE 12/07 by 11:59PM</b> |

## Additional Resources and Readings:

### Podcasts:

- The Nature Photographer Podcast: <https://nanpa.org/resources/the-nature-photographer-podcast/page/7/>

### Articles:

Kidd, L. R., Bekessy, S. A., & Garrard, G. E. (2019). Neither hope nor fear: Empirical evidence should drive biodiversity conservation strategies. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 34(4), 278-282.

Lakoff, G. (2010). Why it matters how we frame the environment. *Environmental communication*, 4(1), 70-81.

Thomas-Walters, L., McNulty, C., & Veríssimo, D. (2020). A scoping review into the impact of animal imagery on pro-environmental outcomes. *Ambio*, 49(6), 1135-1145.

Common Cause for Nature: Report and Practitioner's Guide:  
<https://commoncausefoundation.org/resources/common-cause-for-nature-report-practitioners-guide/>

## 5. Policies and Requirements

The most up-to-date version of University of Florida's Academic Policies and Resources can be found at this link: <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.