

## Writing Op-Eds, Small Personal Essays and Blog Posts (SUMAK5460)

Scheduled Meeting Time: TUESDAY, 6:10-8:00 pm

3 Credits | Location: Pupin Hall, Room 425

**Please note: this is an in-person class. For the safety of all, we will be observing social distancing in seating arrangements and, of course, mask-wearing. Alas, the Covid pandemic is not fully over and these cautions are prudent.**

**Instructor:** Professor Claudia Dreifus, Instructor of Practice, SUMA, ([cd2106@columbia.edu](mailto:cd2106@columbia.edu)) **Office Hours:** Two hours before the class lecture and also by special appointment. Office location: TBA

**Teaching Assistant:** Raghavi Sharma, ([rs4207@columbia.edu](mailto:rs4207@columbia.edu)) **Office Hours:** By appointment

**Response Policy:** Available by Email and/or telephone midweek. Will respond within 24 hours. Please send duplicates of all inquiries to Professor Dreifus and Ms. Sharma.

### Course Overview

The class is designed to give students exercises and guided experiences in producing and marketing publishable opinion essays. That's the bottom line.

In the last two decades, newspapers, magazines and websites have opened up their pages to reader contributions. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Scientific American*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg News* and the websites of NBC News and CNN, all have extensive op-ed sections where readers are invited to become guest columnists.

This development provides an unprecedented opportunity for sustainability and science students and faculty to connect with the general public about policy issues—and also to their personal passions. Op-eds provide a relatively new pathway for communication and advocacy.

With students with specific interests in climate change, sustainability, medical practice and public health policies, this course is meant to facilitate their ability to move their concerns beyond the university and into the public square. The language of both the business world and the academy is often different from that of the mass media. Even the basic forms are different. Moreover, in fields like sustainability and climate change, the issues are frequently difficult to effectively illustrate in a way that the general public can easily connect with. This frank reality limits the effectiveness of sustainability professionals and scientists to win public support for critical initiatives.

This professor, with a lifetime of experience in the mass media, is convinced that academically trained professionals' benefit from learning how to write in a different language from that they are accustomed to.

Journalistic writing is very different from academic writing; it has its own conventions and protocols. This course aims to teach this specialized language so that our students can gain a larger forum on matters like climate mitigation, conservation biology, green roofs, urban farming, ecologic waste disposal, environmental justice, and pandemic prevention.

The aim is empowerment. We want to give Columbia students, faculty and staff the tools that will permit them to enter this ever-widening sector of the public square.

Currently, there are few comparable courses offered either at Columbia or at any university in New York.

Traditional journalism classes have been mostly pegged to future journalists. We hope to turn non-journalists into published writers and by focusing on this one journalistic form. By guiding class members through different types of opinion essays, we'll give them the means to produce the op-eds that editors seek.

Moreover, we'll teach the students how to successfully place their essays with editors.

Our target markets are mainstream media, Internet journals and community publications.

This is a workshop for Columbia-based scientists, social scientists, sustainability managers, conservation biologists, future NGO workers, and medical professionals seeking to produce opinion pieces and personal essays about their work.

In short, this is a journalism course for non-journalists, with an emphasis on how to do opinion-based features.

The main prerequisite is a willingness to experiment with popular forms and a desire to reach new readers.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE PROFESSOR:**

For two decades, Professor Dreifus produced and wrote the "Conversation with..." feature in the Tuesday science section of the *New York Times*. Before that, she was a contributing writer to the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*.

Today, she writes for the *New York Review of Books*, *the Nation*, *CNN* and *Quanta* magazine.

Ms. Dreifus' own op-eds and personal essays have appeared in the *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *the Nation*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *State of the Planet*.

She is the author or co-author of six books and her work is collected in numerous anthologies.

The American Society of Journalists and Authors has honored Professor Dreifus with a "career achievement award," and Sigma Xi, the national honorary society of research scientists has installed her as an honorary member for "transforming" science journalism.

In 2010, Professor Dreifus and her husband, political scientist Andrew Hacker, published "Higher Education," a widely reviewed 271-page op-ed on America's post-secondary educational system.

Last Spring, the School of Professional Studies, honored Professor Dreifus with the Dean's Excellence Award for Teaching.

### **Teaching Assistant**

Raghavi Sharma (rs4207@columbia.edu) is a second-year MPA student at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) focusing on environmental policy and Tech, Media and Communications. Prior to joining SIPA, she worked in journalism for nearly three years at *The Wire*, a digital news media outlet based in New Delhi. **Office Hours:** TBA

### **Learning Objectives**

This is a course for graduate students in the sustainability management program, enrollees in the various SPS specializations, and where there is room, for graduate students in the sciences from across the Columbia community.

With this opinion writing intensive, by the end of the semester, students should be able to write an op-ed or a letter to the editor that will stand a good chance of finding publication.

By mastering the various types of op-eds and targeting their submission to appropriate markets, some will be printed in mainstream media or on internet sites. Classwork might be submitted to markets like the *Washington Post*, *Medium*, the *New York Times*, *State of the Planet* and SPS's own blogsite, *Tomorrow's Minds at Work*.

Regardless of the forum, students who do achieve publication, will be rewarded by an increase in their final grade.

Even if the students do not publish their op-eds within the semester's time frame, they will have an understanding of the form and learn skills that they can deploy later in their professional lives as scientists or sustainability professionals. They will know how to do an op-ed when policy issues come up that they wish to comment on. Over all, students can expect their professional skills will be enhanced.

Writing is not just a matter of talent—though talent, of course, helps. But it is often a matter of practice—of doing a lot of it and improving because of practice. By asking the students to write frequently and, when necessary, to rewrite their work, their writing in this class and in all their others, is likely to improve. Improvement of writing skills, in general, is a goal.

While other science journalism courses, including the one offered at SPS in the Spring, offer training in a variety of news forms, this one focuses the entire semester's work on opinion writing.

Class sessions on persuasion and debate will give them further skills that will be useful, generally, in advocacy. One needs to make a good argument when writing a successful op-ed. But one needs the same skill when appearing on television as an expert, testifying before a legislature, lobbying for a cause. Enrollees can expect to gain more confidence in their ability to effectively persuade.

Moreover, by learning journalistic techniques of research for their opinion pieces—e.g. interviews with original sources and protagonists on an issue, successfully deploying appropriate statistics, the incorporation of citations into narrative—the students may become far more facile story-tellers in whatever forms or venues they are working in.

### **WHAT STUDENTS CAN EXPECT FROM THIS COURSE:**

- Even if they don't intend to become professional writers, their writing will improve.
- They will gain skills in argument and exposition that will help them communicate their research and their policy passions to the general public.
- Students will create professional level journalism that can be published and added to a portfolio or CV.
- Participants in the workshop will learn the techniques of journalism, useful skills in many other disciplines.
- Class members will learn how to submit their work for publication.
- In many instances, they will find publication for their work. Members of Professor Dreifus' classes have published opinion pieces in the *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Fatherly*, *Medium*, the *Public Interest*, the *Morningside Post* and *State of the Planet*.
- Their contributions to blogs, websites and social media will have greater impact because of enhanced readability.
- And that will help them produce successful letters to the editor whenever they write them.
- In short, members of this class will gain new tools for participating in public policy discussions. Their voices and ideas will be amplified.

### **MORE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- 1) Discuss, summarize, and defend research and policy passions to the general public.
- 2) Distinguish different types of opinion essays (op-eds on policy questions, op-eds proposing new ideas, personal essays about matters of interpersonal relationships or remembered experience), as well as hybrids of the various forms.

- 3) Analyze the content and structure of other writers' work, and identify the needs of editors and publications.
- 4) Formulate a convincing argument that is effective in science and academic communication.
- 5) Plan the marketing and publishing of work in real-world publications.

## Readings

Most of the reading will be contemporaneous op-eds and opinion essays from mass media that illustrate specific issues and lessons. If, for instance, the deregulation of energy providers in Texas is an issue in the news—as it was in late February, then we would read published op-eds on that issue and discuss what was effective about them. Or not. If Miami's lack of preparation for the hurricane season is newsworthy in the Fall, then we might locate and read some op-eds on that.

Because it is always useful for student writers to read well executed examples of the form they are studying, students would be asked to read the opinion pages of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* daily. They would be asked to consult with popular op-ed providers like *Medium* and the *Atlantic*, too.

Each week, they will be asked to post on CourseWorks the work of columnists and op-ed writers whose work they appreciate and to explain why it appealed to them. Students will be asked to leave commentary on their classmates' choices.

This professor has also created several original "tip sheets" for the students to guide them in their studies. They will be distributed at appropriate sessions in the semester.

These books will be referred to in lectures. Most are available in paperback or on Library Reserves.

- *Writing to Persuade* by Trish Hall, Norton/Liveright
- *Making Sense of Science, Separating Substance from Spin* by Cornelia Dean, Harvard University Press
- *Writer's Market: 2022—The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published, Writer's Digest*
- *Public Influence: A Guide to Op-Ed Writing and Social Media Engagement*, Mira Sucharov, University of Toronto Press
- *Arguing with Zombies: Economics, Politics and the Fight for a Better Future*, Paul Krugman

- *Black Voices in Commentary*, the Trotter Group
- *Bad Feminist*, Roxane Gay
- *Modern Love, Revised and Updated: True Stories of Love, Loss and Redemption*, Daniel Jones, editor

#### **NEWSPAPER AND WEBSITE OPINION READINGS:**

- The New York Times
- The Wall Street Journal
- The Guardian
- The Washington Post
- Medium
- The Atlantic
- State of the Planet
- Tomorrow's Minds at Work (SPS)

#### **ADDITIONAL READINGS:**

##### ***The Best Op-Ed Ever:***

Abraham Verghese's "Close Encounters of the Human Kind"

[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/18/magazine/18lives.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/18/magazine/18lives.html?_r=0)Links to an external site.

##### ***Advocacy:***

"Oppenheimer Shows the Danger of Politicizing Science, Kai Bird, New York Times, July 18, 2023

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/17/opinion/kai-bird-oppenheimer-christopher-nolan.html>

##### ***Personal Essay:***

##### ***Policy Proposals:***

"Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Knows How to Fix Housing" – Ross Barkan

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/04/opinion/public-housing-faircloth-amendment-repeal.html>

### ***Arguing a Position:***

“It’s Not Possible to ‘Win’ an Argument With Robert F. Kennedy Jr.” – Farhad Manjoo

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/23/opinion/rfk-jr-joe-rogan.html> Links to an external site.

### ***Using a Newspeg to Make a Point:***

“The Myth That May Have Doomed the Titan” – Naomi Oreskes

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/28/opinion/titanic-titan-oceangate-innovation.html?searchResultPosition=1>

### ***Reportage Op-Eds With Policy Pegs:***

“Australia Is Committing Climate Suicide”, Richard Flannigan, *New York Times*:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/03/opinion/australia-fires-climate-change.html>

“Want to Do Something About Climate Change: Follow the Money”, Bill McKibben and Lennox Yearwood, *New York Times*:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/11/opinion/climate-change-bank-investment.html>

**RESOURCE LIST:** A lot of what you’ll need for the course and for your future as a writer can be found here: <https://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/2636>

## **Resources**

### **SUPPORT FOR YOUR WRITING:**

This is a hands-on course where you will get guidance in producing multiple types of opinion writing. There is a special emphasis on producing opinion pieces relating to contemporary issues in sustainability and the environment.

The professor and the teaching assistant will each be available for coaching for at least two hours weekly. Emergency sessions are also possible.

For additional support, we urge students to make use of the excellent coaches available through the Columbia University Writing Center. SIPA students who’d appreciate a second eye can obtain free writing tutorials through the SIPA Dean of Students’ office.

We also urge class members to form writing circles where they read their work to each other outside of the classroom.

### **ADDITIONAL STUDENT RESOURCES:**

#### ***Columbia University Information Technology***

Columbia University Information Technology (CUIT) provides Columbia University students, faculty, and staff with central computing and communications services.

Students, faculty, and staff may access University-provided discounted software downloads (<https://columbiait.onthehub.com/>).

### ***Columbia University Library***

Columbia's extensive library system ranks in the top five academic libraries in the nation, with many of its services and resources available online: <https://library.columbia.edu/>. Some feature-writing source works used in my feature writing class will be posted within the "library reserves" feature of Canvas.

It is possible for students to gain access to thousands of newspapers and magazines through the Columbia University Library system. Please familiarize yourself with the process.

### ***SPS Academic Resources***

The Office of Student Affairs provides students with academic counseling and support services such as online tutoring and career coaching: <http://sps.columbia.edu/student-life-and-alumni-relations/academic-resources>

### **Course Requirements (Assignments)**

In this course, we write at least three different types of opinion essays—an op-ed on a policy question, one that proposes a new idea, a personal essay about a matter of interpersonal relationships or one based on a remembered experience.

Students' opinion essays will be graded on their originality, the persuasiveness of their argument, the quality of the writing, the appropriate use of expert sources and statistics, the accuracy of information presented, the coherence of the essay's structure, and the originality the compelling nature of the storytelling.

We will also consider op-eds that include journalistic reportage and that are hybrids of the various forms. These hybrids will be graded on the same basis as the simple opinion essay, but will also be required to effectively fuse the different genres into one seamless essay.

Between two drafts of each type of piece, we will have speakers from the opinion desks of major media, talking about what they do, what they seek and how to submit appropriately for publication (**L3**). Student participation and engagement with these guest speakers will be evaluated based on originality and topicality of the questions posed to guests.

There will also be sessions on effective science and academic communication and on how to make a convincing argument. Activities completed during this session will be evaluated based on critical thinking and analysis, application and synthesis of lecture/discussion and reading topics, as well as thoughtful consideration and responsiveness to posts by other students.



In between regular class sessions, students will be asked to use Canvas/Courseworks as a means of communication about their ongoing work. Drafts of op-eds will be posted. As will interesting op-eds gleaned from newspapers and websites. Workshop members will be asked to leave helpful comments on drafts, including ideas for structure, stronger source material, more convincing arguments. Students will also be asked to evaluate published opinion pieces and leave critical notes on Courseworks on why these op-eds work or how they might be written differently.

Beyond op-eds, other forms of public communication will be attempted—including a Letter to the Editor and a Blogpost. These additional assignments will be evaluated based on critical thinking and analysis, application and synthesis of lecture/discussion and reading topics, as well as thoughtful consideration and responsiveness to posts by other students.

Finally, students will receive a lecture on strategies for marketing their essays and will gain experience in submitting their work to real world publications. Publication is not required. But it will be encouraged and supported. Extra credit will be given to students who succeed in publishing their classwork.

### **IN PREPARATION FOR THE FIRST SESSION:**

Make arrangements to discuss your goals and interests with Professor Dreifus in an in-person session on campus during office hours.

Please leave a biographic blogpost on CourseWorks for your classmates. For maximum benefit to the students, the enrollment is limited to fifteen students.

Out of the possible registrants, please choose an “affinity study partner,” someone in your time zone or neighborhood you can bounce ideas off of, check in with and read your drafts to. Writing almost always looks better on paper or pixels when it has been read aloud.

**EMAIL:** Students are asked to email their completed assignments on the Saturday before every class to Professor Dreifus ([cd2106@columbia.edu](mailto:cd2106@columbia.edu)) and Raghavi Sharma ([rs4207@columbia.edu](mailto:rs4207@columbia.edu)) in addition to uploading the assignment on Courseworks. Students are also asked to read their colleagues' filings on Courseworks and leave supportive comments. **Deadline Firm.**

### **Evaluation/Grading**

The main focus of the course is, after lectures on particulars, the writing of specific types of opinion essays.

On the whole the standards will be those of professional journalism—which means that all opinions, no matter how personal or original, must be supported by facts. Of course, libel and malice are prohibited. In each essay, the class assistant and I will look for skillful story-telling, persuasive argument, a viable story structure with a beginning, middle and end, newsworthiness and yes, good grammar and correct spelling.

In addition to these standards, other factors may contribute to grading. Any student whose class work is published will get an additional upwards “tick” for their final grade. I will also consider the kind of progress a student has made over the semester with their writing. If a student has moved from B minus work to something in the A category, their discernable effort might further improve their grade. Hard work and the application of lessons should be rewarded.

The professor seeks to have the students competing against their earlier work, not each other.

Attitude will matter somewhat too. The classroom standards are those of a newsroom. That means a collegial and supportive tone to all discussions and it, above everything, means filing on deadline.

The grading will be done by me, in consultation with the class assistant. Of course, peer response is a factor that will be taken into account, but since the over-riding standards are those of mainstream journalism, it is appropriate for a working journalist to make the final decision.

**A NOTE ON TIMELY FILING:** In order for students' writing to be graded and considered in time for Tuesday's class, it is vital that assignments be filed on Canvas by Saturday night. **Firm.**

**ANOTHER NOTE ON FORM:** As in journalism, all filings must be clean, grammatical and as far as possible, in “ready to print” form. That means, of course, with a headline and a by-line.

**A SEPARATE NOTE ON PACE:** We will move as quickly or as slowly as the class' progress requires. That, of course, means the schedule below is not set in stone. As that late 20th century philosopher John Lennon had it: "Life is what happens when you're making other plans."

**ADDENDUM:** it is always difficult to put a numeric grade on a creative enterprise. This is a writing workshop, not a lecture/exam course. The professor will apply the standards of journalism to her reading of each submission.

In considering a final grade, some additional factors may be computed. Among them, did the student's work improve over the semester? Did they try hard? Students who move a great distance in the twelve sessions will be rewarded as much as students who come to class with facile and practiced skills. This is a way of encouraging students to compete against themselves rather than each other.

Students who are creative in marketing their work—e.g. finding publication for their essays—will also be rewarded with a higher grade. The professor's usual practice is to move the grade of a published writer up a tick—an A minus might be elevated to an “A”, for example. If the student's class produced essay is published in major media like the New York Times Opinion section, that would be considered a home-run and would be thusly noted. That might well merit an “A plus.”

The final grade will be calculated as described below:

### **FINAL GRADING SCALE**

#### **Grade Percentage**

**A+** 98–100 %

**A** 93–97.9 %

**A-** 90–92.9 %

**B+** 87–89.9 %

**B** 83–86.9 %

**B-** 80–82.9 %

**C+** 77–79.9 %

**C** 73–76.9 %

**C-** 70–72.9 %

**D** 60–69.9 %

**F** 59.9% and below

<b>ASSIGNMENT</b>	<b>% Weight</b>
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750-word op-ed	20%
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900-word short personal essay	20%
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750-word advocacy op-ed	20%
300-word blog post	15%
100-word letter to the editor	10%
Participation	15%

## Course Policies

**UNIVERSITY WIDE PUBLICATION POSSIBILITIES:** Your professor encourages you to publish with some of Columbia’s excellent on campus media outlets—State of the Planet, SIPA News, Consilience, The Columbia Spectator, Columbia News, The Public Policy Review, the Morningside Post.

You are also encouraged to participate in the Earth Institute’s new initiative on science and sustainability communication. More information on that effort can be found here: <https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2019/10/18/climate-sustainability-communications-network>.

### **CANVAS/COURSEWORKS AS A COMMUNICATION MEDIUM:**

Class members are asked to post their essays on CourseWorks and to leave helpful critiques for their colleagues there.

They are also asked to post op-eds they’ve seen and liked in the “Discussion” file there.

Think of CourseWorks as the equivalent of the “water cooler” at an office.

Strong writing and improvement of those skills is what we’re looking for—but we also appreciate students who are willing to support their classmates, participate in constructive critiques, and those who go the extra mile to break new ground in the form.

Whenever realistic, students are asked to submit their classroom work for publication. That can mean anything from mass-circulation magazines to the in-house publications at Columbia University and SIPA. Students are encouraged to find online publishers for their work, a particularly rich and growing market for opinion essays.

For example, the website [undark.org](http://undark.org) is often open to new writers if the work is good. Scientific American’s blog has an open-to-readers opinion section that may be the perfect place for what students in this class produce.

The Earth Institute has a website/magazine-blog, State of the Planet. Students are encouraged to submit appropriate class work there. The School of Professional Studies

supports a blog, "Tomorrow's Minds At Work," where students and faculty can, with the guidance of staff editors, publish their writing. Class members are urged to submit their opeds to these markets and also to neighborhood community newspapers.

Writing is key to success in this class. We believe that writing is like gymnastics: The more you do, the more you achieve. Thus, class members will be asked to write often. What may be different from other courses is that they will often be asked to do guided rewrites of their original submissions.

On the whole, we're looking for enthusiastic writers and curious reporters, but also students who will improve their skills over the semester.

**THE USE OF ROBOTIC A. I. TECHNOLOGY IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN:** Because this is a course in teaching students how to write their own op-eds, letters to the editor and small personal essays, we cannot accept any manuscripts that were produced with the aide of A.I. Aside from the obvious fact that when you use a robot to write, you are not writing, the A.I. produced composition may contain factual errors and fabrications.

#### **CLASSROOM INTEGRITY:**

Because the heart of this course is opinion and communicating it, we would ask that all students respect differing opinions.

At the same time, it grieves the professor to have to state outright that op-eds based on untruths, slander, or stereotyping, can have no place in the classroom.

#### **PRIVACY:**

Because some students may discuss or write about very personal or controversial matters, we ask that all class members pledge to maintain the privacy of our deliberations and not discuss or cite them elsewhere. We would like for class members to feel that they can discuss difficult matters freely. We will not be recording class sessions and request that all members refrain from doing so with their private technology. To paraphrase a popular meme, "What happens in class, stays in class."

#### **COLUMBIA INTEGRITY:**

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research and writing.

As stated in your Sustainability Management registration packet, Columbia University functions at the highest levels of integrity and demands the same from its students.

It goes without saying that plagiarism, "recycling" of previously produced works, the employment of intellectual products created by others will not be tolerated.

## ***Participation and Attendance***

I expect you to come to class on time and thoroughly prepared. I will keep track of attendance and look forward to an interesting, lively and confidential discussion. If you miss an experience in class, you miss an important learning moment and the class misses your contribution. More than one absence will affect your grade.

## ***Late work***

Work that is not submitted on the due date noted in the course syllabus without advance notice and permission from the instructor will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for every day it is late (e.g., from a B+ to a B).

## ***Citation & Submission***

All written assignments must, cite sources. Unlike in academic writing, footnotes and often links, are not permitted. Instead, you must back up your source material by incorporating the citation in your essay's copy.

All submissions must have a headline and a byline and be posted on CourseWorks—as well as sent to the Professor via email at [cd2106@columbia.edu](mailto:cd2106@columbia.edu).

## ***School Policies***

### ***Copyright Policy***

Please note—Due to copyright restrictions, online access to this material is limited to instructors and students currently registered for this course. Please be advised that by clicking the link to the electronic materials in this course, you have read and accept the following:

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

### ***Academic Integrity***

Columbia University expects its students to act with honesty and propriety at all times and to respect the rights of others. It is fundamental University policy that academic dishonesty in any guise or personal conduct of any sort that disrupts the life of the University or denigrates or endangers members of the University community is unacceptable and will be dealt with severely. It is essential to the academic integrity and

vitality of this community that individuals do their own work and properly acknowledge the circumstances, ideas, sources, and assistance upon which that work is based. Academic honesty in class assignments and exams is expected of all students at all times.

SPS holds each member of its community responsible for understanding and abiding by the SPS Academic Integrity and Community Standards posted at <http://sps.columbia.edu/student-life-and-alumni-relations/academic-integrity-and-community-standards>. You are required to read these standards within the first few days of class.

Ignorance of the School's policy concerning academic dishonesty shall not be a defense in any disciplinary proceedings.

### *Accessibility*

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student's disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please visit the University's Health Services website: <https://health.columbia.edu/services/ods/support>.

### *Class Recordings*

All or portions of the class may be recorded at the discretion of the Instructor to support your learning. At any point, the Instructor has the right to discontinue the recording if it is deemed to be obstructive to the learning process.

If the recording is posted, it is considered confidential and it is not acceptable to share the recording outside the purview of the faculty member and registered class.

**Bonus Sessions:** Professor Dreifus is currently negotiating a private tour for class members to the New York Times' Museum. More information TK.

Raymond Zhong, star reporter of the New York Times' Climate Desk, has agreed to talk to class members about what he does and how he got to do it, at a yet unspecified time in October. Again, more information TK.

### **Course Schedule/Course Calendar**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Activities/Assignments for this module</b>
9/5	<b>What is an op-ed?</b>	<b>The Best Op-Ed Ever:</b> Abraham Verghese's "Close Encounters of the Human Kind"	Complete readings. The best way to learn this form or any form: read good

A discussion of the form, its conventions, and the various types of op-eds and opinion essays that one can write. To prepare, students should read different types of op-eds.

**Advocacy with a Personal Peg:**

“How Rescuing Frogs Inspires How I Fight for Change,” Belle Boggs, NYTimes, September 3, 2023.

**Policy Proposals:**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/04/opinion/public-housing-faircloth-amendment-repeal.html>

**Reportage Op-Eds With Policy Pegs:**

“Australia Is Committing Climate Suicide”, Richard Flannigan, New York Times.

“Want to Do Something About Climate Change: Follow the Money”, Bill McKibben and Lennox Yearwood, New York Times.

Speakers—second half of class, the editors of State of the Planet, Consilience, Tomorrow’s Minds at Work and the Morningside Post.

**Required reading:** *Writing to Persuade*, Trish Hall

examples and ask yourself, “how did he/she/they do it? Take it apart. Use only quality sources. With op-eds, that means in most instances, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

**Assignment 1:** Post on CourseWorks an op-ed or a work by a newspaper columnist that you like and explain why it spoke to you. Due September 10.

**Assignment 2:** Develop an idea for your own op-ed. Due September 10.

Attend the Live Session

**Assignment:** Write a 750-word op-ed that is targeted to a market like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or the blogs of an NGO, like State of the Planet or the National Resources Defense Council. Due September 17.

**Persuasion.**

In most op-eds, the writer is seeking to win the reader over to an argument, a policy idea, or a point of view. In this session, we’ll discuss how to be persuasive in one’s writing.

What are the elements of a

9/12

None



good argument? How does one convince the skeptical? What is appropriate proof? Can one use material found on Twitter and other social media? When does one use statistics? What about fairness? Does an op-ed need to be balanced?

Since this is opinion, are there any assertions that are best avoided?

For practice, we will go into breakout groups and debate several controversial contemporary matters that are currently in the news. Students will be asked to give the best argument for and against—as in a debate.

### **Workshopping the Op-Ed**

9/19 Class discussion of the first assignment. What worked? What didn't? None

Attend the live session.

**Assignment:** Rewrite your first draft. Due September 24.

Attend the live session.

<b>The Short Personal Essay</b>		
9/26	<p><b>First hour:</b> workshop on second draft</p> <p><b>Second Hour:</b> Introduction to short personal essays.</p>	<p><i>Bad Feminist</i>, Roxane Gay</p> <p><i>Modern Love, Revised and Updated: True Stories of Love, Loss and Redemption</i>, Daniel Jones (Ed.)</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Write a 900-word short personal essay. Due October 1.</p> <p>Attend the live session.</p>
10/3	<p><b>Field Trip–Live Interview</b></p>	<p>Professor Dreifus will be doing a live interview with Cat Bohannon, the author of “Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution” at Book Culture. Seats will be reserved for class members.</p> <p>Venue: Book Culture.</p> <p>Bring your questions to the live interview</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Write a second draft of your short personal essay. Due October 8.</p> <p>Attend the live session.</p>
10/10	<p><b>Personal Essays</b></p> <p>Workshop on short personal essay.</p>	<p>Two personal essays by the professor that deploy personal experience and factual reporting to make an argument.</p> <p>“NYU Eats the World”, by Claudia Dreifus, <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i>.</p> <p>“A Group of Mexican Immigrant Women Were Sterilized Without Their Consent. Can a New Film Bring Justice Where the Courts Failed?” by Claudia Dreifus, <i>The Nation</i>.</p> <p>Attend the live session.</p>
10/17	<p><b>Advocacy</b></p> <p>What works? What doesn't? How does one create a viable “story” out of what may be some very dry facts and assertions? When is it appropriate to</p>	<p>None.</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Write an advocacy op-ed in an area where you are expert. Word limit: 750 words. Due October 22.</p> <p>Attend the live session.</p>

do such  
advocacy? What  
is appropriate  
expertise? How do  
you make a  
complex policy  
point in a word  
limited essay?

10/24 **Workshop of  
policy advocacy  
op-ed** None

**Assignment:** Write a  
100 word letter to the  
editor on a subject  
you've produced an  
op-ed on. Due  
October 29.

Attend the live  
session.

11/1

Attend the live  
session.

11/7 **No Class:  
University  
Holiday** It's election day. Be sure to vote.

11/14 **Cousin of the  
Op-ed: the Letter  
to the Editor** None.

**Assignment:** submit  
your letter to an  
appropriate  
publication. Due  
November 19.

Workshop on  
letter to editors.

Attend the live  
session.

11/21

11/28 **Catch up on  
assignments**

## **Wrap-up and Celebration**

12/5	Together, we'll be celebrating the progress this class has made over the semester. Pandemic permitting, we will do what is traditional in Professor Dreifus' writing classes: have an evening of assessment and a Dutch Treat supper at her home near Lincoln Center. Students are urged to bring a dish from their home country or county for the communal table.	None.	Attend the live session.
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### **School Policies and Expectations:**

**Accessibility Statement** – I want you to succeed in this course. Contact [disability@columbia.edu](mailto:disability@columbia.edu) for learning accommodations.

**Names/Pronouns** – You deserve to be addressed in a manner that reflects your identity. You are welcome to tell me your pronoun(s) and/or name (if different from University records) at any time, either in person or via email.

**Discrimination** – We embrace the diversity of gender, gender identity & expression, sex, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion, disability status, family status, socioeconomic background, and other visible and non-visible identities. Columbia University does not tolerate unlawful discrimination, discriminatory harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, or sexual exploitation and all such conduct is forbidden by Columbia University Policy.

**Duty to Report** – You deserve a University community free from discrimination, harassment, and gender-based misconduct including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation. It is therefore University policy to require Columbia faculty and staff to report to EOAA any instance or allegation

of prohibited conduct involving any undergraduate or any graduate student that is disclosed to, observed by, or otherwise known to that employee. This requirement to report is in place to help ensure that students are provided appropriate resources and to allow the University to mitigate harm to our community.

**Confidential Resources** - There are confidential resources on campus who do not have a Duty to Report, including:

- Sexual Violence Response & Rape Crisis/Anti-Violence Support Center (SVR)
- Ombuds Office
- Medical Services
- University Counseling and Psychological Services
- University Pastoral Counseling
- Columbia Office of Disability Services

University employees working in a confidential capacity will not report information shared with them.

**Inclusion** - In the M.S. in Sustainability Management program, faculty and staff are committed to the creation and maintenance of “inclusive learning” spaces – classrooms and other places of learning where you will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals are provided equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed.

In our Sustainability Management K4100 classroom, all students are welcome regardless of race/ethnicity, gender identities, gender expressions, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, disabilities, religion, regional background, Veteran status, citizenship status, nationality and other diverse identities that we each bring to class.