

Workshop helps train Mexican journalists

Also: Environmental journalism TV course distinguishes Knight Center



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A few journalists walked carefully onto a large tarpaulin covering a giant pit of hog waste at a farm in the Sonoran Desert of Mexico. When they were convinced it would hold them, they bounced up and down on it as if it were an enormous trampoline.

The tarpaulin prevents methane gases from leaking into the atmosphere. The volume of gases trapped under the covering is measured and recorded by Mexican authorities. The farmers earn “carbon credits” for not discharging this pollution into the atmosphere and sell the credits on the Irish stock exchange.

By selling these carbon credits from their 8,000-hog farm, the farmers earn \$4,000 a day — more than \$1,400,000 a year.

Touring a hog farm in northwest Mexico may not seem all that glamorous. But the Mexican journalists were excited about the tour and scribbled notes about the farm into their note pads rapidly. Selling carbon credits to help reduce global warming is an interesting environmental story about a new frontier in the worldwide effort to slow down climate change.

The Mexican journalists were participating in a three-day conference held March 8-10, 2007, co-sponsored by the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism. They learned about land use, water pollution, eco-tourism, aquaculture, climate change, investigative reporting techniques and other topics.

The workshop was organized by the International Center for Journalists and supported by grants from the David and Lucile Packard and the John S. and James L. Knight foundations.

This workshop was the third in a series of training workshops aimed at developing environmental journalism in Mexico. Other workshops were held in Mexico City in January 2004 and in Loreto, Mexico, in May 2006.

With support from the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, the Mexican journalists organized a



Two reporters walk across a tarpaulin, which is holding in methane from a hog farm in Mexico.

Photo by Jim Detjen

Mexican society of environmental journalists and have worked for the past three years to build the organization. The Knight Center created a Spanish Web site that lists resources for Mexican environmental reporters and sponsors a listserv — known as Pal-NET — to help the journalists communicate.

One of the people who convinced the Knight Center to undertake this Mexican initiative is Susana Guzman, a Mexican journalist who received her master's degree in journalism from MSU in 2004. Susana did her master's thesis on Mexican environmental journalism and conducted the largest survey ever done on the state of environmental reporting in Mexico.

This project is a prime example of the kinds of research the Knight Center undertakes. We conduct practical research to learn about important issues and then work to find solutions to correct problems identified by our research.

Last summer, the Knight Center organized a meeting at Columbia University in New York on the state of environmental journalism on television. We brought together top journalists from CNN, CBS, ABC and other news organizations and presented new research by Andrew Tyndall of Tyndall Reports about environmental journalism on TV.

That meeting identified problems

in environmental journalism on TV and spurred debate about how to correct them. One idea that was discussed was the creation of a student-produced television program.

As a result of this discussion, the Knight Center produced an environmental TV program that will premier on WKAR-TV, the Public Broadcasting Service station in East Lansing, Mich., on Sunday, May 27, 2007 — the 100th birthday of the late Rachel Carson.

The pilot program will feature a segment called “Dying to be heard,” which is based on an editorial I wrote in *EJ*'s Fall 2005 issue. The piece focuses on how the research conducted by former MSU ornithologist George Wallace provided important evidence for Carson's landmark environmental book, “Silent Spring.”

Lou D'Aria, a veteran TV journalist who previously worked for KRON-TV in San Francisco, worked with MSU student journalists to create the pilot episode. A second show will include two segments based on articles printed originally in *EJ*.

Lou and I hope this program will serve as a prototype for a student-produced television show broadcasted on PBS stations at least once a semester. We believe this production — along with our Mexican initiative — will lead to better-informed citizens on critical environmental issues.