

Guiding Grads

Knight Center alumni offer advice and warnings on how a new generation of environmental journalists should navigate the field



DEBBIE MUNSON BADINI

BIO: Knight Center graduate assistant 2004-2005. Michigan Department of Natural Resources communications representative.

RECOMMENDED READ: *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss. An underdog story, and a childhood favorite, its environmental implications and influence on my ideals escaped me until I read it again as an adult.

Journalists and journalism students lately act like they're one step away from being added to the endangered species list.

Never before has there been a greater demand for "green" news, and our audience is looking to a growing variety of non-traditional media outlets — such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube — to satisfy their appetites.

Though these new media outlets will not replace television news, magazines and newspapers, an increasing number of outlets for environmental news is a good thing for current students who have learned how to use these tools as a journalist.

Adapt or die: This platitude no longer applies only to the endangered species we cover. No longer can environmental journalism students leave school thinking they are going to simply be a newspaper reporter, television producer, photographer or Web content manager.

Roll all of these jobs into one, add a proficiency with social media networking, and that's closer to what will be expected of future environmental journalists.



IVONA LERMAN

BIO: Knight Center graduate student 1999-2001. Deputy editor-in-chief at the Croatian edition of *National Geographic Magazine*, won a prestigious Croatian Journalists' Association award for her story on overfishing in the Adriatic Sea.

Layoffs and cuts make it harder to be a responsible journalist everywhere in the world. The financial crisis is just starting to hit Croatia and we are already seeing increased pressure to find ways to be more profitable. We are facing a great challenge: how to stay afloat while not compromising the integrity and quality of journalism. This is, I believe, the biggest challenge of modern journalism, and environmental journalism as well.

But for environmental journalism, not all news is bad. *National Geographic Magazine*, for example, recently decided to strengthen and deepen its environmental coverage by forming a new team within the magazine dedicated solely to energy and the environment.

Global warming is one of our major priorities. Climate change is a continuously growing and evolving story: Now it's not only about weather patterns and melting of the ice caps — it's also about energy efficiency and green building. As countries struggle to survive the financial crisis, green technology and building will become increasingly important, and environmental journalists will have a crucial role in covering that story.



KATIE COLEMAN

BIO: *E!*'s editor 2006-2007. Grant writer for the Environmental Law & Policy Center, a nonprofit environmental law firm based in Chicago.

RECOMMENDED READ: *Earth Odyssey*, by Mark Hertsgaard, who investigates like a reporter and writes like a storyteller, breaking down without dumbing down some of the most complex global environmental issues.

The most significant environmental change since I studied at the Knight Center has been the increased excitement surrounding high-speed rail development. In a country where cars rule, creating the same kind of clean, modern, convenient, affordable, comfortable and fast trains found in Western Europe and parts of Asia simply was not realistic — politically or financially.

But as the old adage goes: There is opportunity in crisis.

The economic stimulus package contains \$9.3 billion for high-speed rail development and other passenger-rail improvements. This is significant for our economy and for our environment. It not only will help create real-time construction and engineering jobs but will also pull new jobs, businesses and people into our urban centers over the long haul — this, in turn, will help reverse sprawl and thereby reduce pollution.



Laura Sams

BIO: Studied in the Knight Center in 2002. Co-owns Sisbro Studios, which creates wildlife films, books and educational media.

RECOMMENDED READ: *Beyond Ecophobia*, by David Sobel, highlights the importance of giving children time to love the natural world before burdening them with saving it.

Over the last 10 years, I have become increasingly more sensitive to the effects that "doom and gloom" stories can have on young people, as well as adults. While filming a recent project, I asked a third-grade student what he liked about the ocean.

"The dolphins are being killed and the coral are dying," he said. "We need to save them."

I paused and said, "That is what is wrong with the ocean. Now what do you like?"

He looked at me with a slightly furrowed brow before his face lit up with a smile. "I think octopus are really cool because they can fit their bodies into a tiny soda bottle," he said.

We should teach kids what is right about the world before we teach them what is wrong. I encourage environmental journalists to give adults and children more reasons to celebrate the world.

1998

The Safe Drinking Water Act sets standards for drinking water quality and bans the use of untreated irrigation canal water for drinking.

2000

The European Union bans leaded gasoline to reduce pollutants emitted from cars and lead levels in the blood stream. The EPA approves new emission standards to cut truck and bus pollution by 95 percent by 2010.

2001

Bush withdraws the U.S. from Kyoto Treaty, which established a global commitment to reduce greenhouse gases, especially CO2 emissions. On June 14, European leaders scold Bush for this move.

2002

Monsanto Chemical Company, Roundup herbicide producer, found guilty of polluting Anniston, Ala., with toxic PCBs.

2002

President Bush denies EPA report linking human activity to global warming.

2003

In June, an Energy Bill is introduced to Congress to include ethanol mandates, nuclear power plant constructions, and electrical reliability measures.

SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

1999

2000

2001

2002

2003

2004

MILESTONES AT THE KNIGHT CENTER

1999

The Knight Center for Environmental Journalism is established with a \$500,000 endowment grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

2000

The Knight Center hosts the Society of Environmental Journalists' national conference. The Knight Center moves to larger offices in rooms 381 and 382 of the Communication Arts Building.

2001

The Knight Center hosts its fifth Great Lakes Environmental Journalism Training Institute. Andy Revkin, *New York Times* national environmental writer, is the keynote speaker.

2002

Jim Detjen teaches environmental journalism at Nankai University in China as a Fulbright Scholar.

2002

E! Magazine is created by Kristen Tuinstra and Randy Yeip, two master's students. Knight Foundation gives the Knight Center \$250,000 to expand its programs.

2003

Dave Poulson is hired as the Knight Center's assistant director (now associate director). He teaches first class in investigative environmental reporting.

