"Weekly Scrapbook"
Geology in the News

FIRST Weekly DUE DATE: Wednesday, Jan. 18th @ 12pm (noon)
LAST BLOG DUE DATE: Wednesday, Apr. 5th @ 12pm (noon)
ESSAY DUE: Thursday, Apr. 20th @ 12pm (noon)

VALUE: 25% of Course Grade [15% for points earned by weekly posts and 10% for essay]

Objective: Gain a greater appreciation of the impact that geological and environmental events have on human activities (and vice versa). To gain experience recognizing reporting of geological and environmental events in mainstream news sources commonly used by average citizens.

What you have to do: Collect articles from on-line news sources that relate to geology and the environment. This is an Internet scrapbook, accessed via Blackboard (look for Scrapbook in the left-hand menu for GEOL110). You may only use sources from the provided list. You may need to pay a nominal fee for access during the semester to certain sources, but managing web browser cookies works well.

From these sources, you need to find and read articles related to geology and the environment each week and post the article and the summary to your blog EVERY WEEK. The scrapbook entry should contain: 1) A URL for the article; 2) A short paragraph summarizing the main points of the article. The article must have been written within two weeks of the due date of the assignment; the exact oldest publication date is in the attached deadlines table.

Is that all there is to it? Nope. Then, what you have to do at some point is to identify a THEME that strikes you as interesting in the articles (or a subset of the articles) that you collect. Then, at the end of the semester, you will write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) essay/analysis/commentary that focuses on your theme and uses the articles to support your thoughts/ideas/conclusions. We will not answer questions like “Do you think XX would be a good theme for my essay?” until after Spring Break. Once you have a good number of articles, it will be easier to develop a theme based on what you take away from the articles.

What’s a good strategy for this? At the beginning, you should just start collecting articles on a regular basis. This is a weekly assignment and your grade will be severely harmed if you do not submit regularly. Also … READ YOUR ARTICLES! During the course of the semester, most students who approach the assignment in this way have no trouble coming up with their own unique theme. Then, when the time comes, writing a few pages summarizing your thoughts is really easy.

What’s a bad strategy for this? First, you could convince yourself that this is a “term project” and that the “due date”, April 20th, is a really long way away and, therefore, this assignment doesn’t need your attention right away. Using this approach, you will lose points every week and will dig yourself a big hole as time goes on. This is not a “term project”, it is a series of weekly assignments. If you do not participate every week, you are making the project unnecessarily difficult or impossible to get a high score. Another bad strategy is to not read thoroughly, or simply ignore, the instructions and use unacceptable sources, or articles published outside the acceptable time frame, and/or chose unacceptable topics, then not read the comments we make about your assignment and keeping making the same mistakes over and over. Using any of these strategies, at the end of the semester, you will not have sufficient articles to write an essay.
Grading of Weekly Posts:

Each Scrapbook article can earn up to 3 points, broken down as follows:

- 0 points — No URL and no summary or a totally inadequate summary
- 1 point - Valid URL for an appropriate article from one of the approved sources
- 2 points - Summary present but lacking in length or detail
- 3 points - Fully acceptable post

We expect you to find, review, and upload 3 articles per week (all in one document). There are 11 weeks of posting in this project. So, your percentage on this portion of the project will be based on a maximum of 99 points. Since the weekly posts are 15% of your grade, this means that each week’s submission is worth just under 1.5% of your overall course grade. Failure to participate adds up to problems. See below for easy ways to get extra points on posting.

To help you get off to a good start, we have a grace period at the beginning of the semester where deductions for common mistakes are overlooked or minimized. In particular:

WEEK ONE ONLY: An article with an invalid date that is otherwise acceptable can receive 2 points (If the summary is flaky, only 1 point). You will be warned in the comments that this is a one-time thing. After week 1, invalid dates get zero points.

WEEKS 1-3 ONLY: Articles with valid sources and valid dates, but inappropriate topic can get 2 points (only 1 point if the summary is flaky). Students will be warned so they know to avoid this topic in the future.

Note there is NO GRACE PERIOD for using sources not on the approved list.

What topics are appropriate/inappropriate?

*Safe Topics:* those discussed in class including Energy, Meteor Impacts, Climate Change. Most topics related to geological sciences will be acceptable. Do not try to only look for articles on a particular topic with a view to writing your Essay; you will find this unnecessarily limiting.

*Topics to avoid:* purely biologically related articles, human biology, anthropology, planetary sciences, municipal water supplies, weather. Avoid videos, pure photo essays, and strictly informational shorts about the occurrence of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

The hardest issue for students to deal with in selecting articles is climate change. Many articles list climate change as a possible cause of some observation. Our criteria is that the correlation of climate change to a phenomena must be the primary emphasis of the article, rather than something stated in passing. For example, articles that say “... The Thing could be caused by X, or Y, or Z ...”, where climate change is X, Y, or Z and its role is not discussed in any detail, are not what we want you to read. Articles that primarily discuss the role of climate change on The Thing are acceptable.

To help you in the selection of articles, we provide types of articles to avoid on Blackboard. Please read over this section when in doubt.
What if I post more articles each week?

**Good News:** If you post 4 URLs/summaries you can get 10 out of 9 scrapbook points for that week.

**Bad News:** You cannot add a bunch of posts one week to catch up for not posting for several weeks. Weekly participation is expected. How serious are we about this? If you post more than 4 articles in any given week, we will not grade the excess articles and will **DEDUCT** one scrapbook point per excess article. Furthermore, any articles flagged as “excess” in the comments field cannot be referenced in your final essay. In other words: Weekly Scrapbooking is rewarded, Procrastination is penalized.

**How do I find out if my articles and summaries are OK?**

We will add comments to each post to let you know how you did and if we have suggestions. However, you cannot revise posts for re-grading. The grade assigned to the version we read is what counts. You are responsible for reading our comments on your posts and asking any questions before the dates posted in the deadlines table that is included with these instructions.

**How is the essay graded?** We will assign points using the guidelines below. We will also subtract points for late essays. Here are the guidelines:

**10 Points for the 3 -4 page essay, benchmark point values are:**

0 pts – No essay or an essay so inadequate that it does not deserve credit
3 pts – Essay lacking in many ways, no clear theme, poorly written, no relation to articles, etc
7 pts – Good effort, but the essay does not have added value. In other words, we cannot learn anything from the essay that we could not have learned from the articles directly.
10 pts – Well-written, good citations, etc. But, most of all, they show thought and analysis. It adds value to the articles, integrates observations across articles, and expresses this well.

**Logistics of uploading to Blackboard:**

- On the GEOL110 main page in Blackboard, click on “Scrapbook Assignments” on the left hand side
- Click on the assignment title, not the icon
- Go to Assignment Submission → Browse My Computer → upload your Word or PDF document → SUBMIT
- **Caution:** Apple “Pages” documents or assignments cut and pasted into the comments will receive a zero. Articles must be uploaded as **Word or PDF documents**.
- **Caution:** Avoid “Save Draft.” Your assignment will not be submitted
- You will see a preview of your assignment, confirming a successful upload
- Blank documents automatically receive a zero.
- If you make a mistake simply upload new version. We will grade the final uploaded assignment.
Important Notes:

- **A few words about Time.** All assignments in this class are due at noon. Noon is not a range of time, it's a specific moment. If the clock says 11:59:59.xx, it is “before noon”. If it says 12:00:00.xx, it is “after noon”. The clock on Blackboard is, by definition, perfect with respect to our stated deadlines. At noon in Blackboard’s eye, the link to the assignment goes away and you cannot submit and you will get a zero.

- **Late assignments are given 0 credit; in fact, you won’t be able to even submit them.** Yes, even if it is by a second. Yes, even if you had a tough time uploading to Blackboard. Yes, even if the WiFi at the local coffee shop shut down. Yes, even if you finished it 2am, planned to upload it before noon, but your alarm didn’t go off and so you didn’t wake up in time. “Playing Chicken” with deadlines makes no sense: Blackboard never blinks! Upload your assignments well in advance to avoid any issues.

- **Read the comments on your posts.** We will give feedbacks regularly. In early posts in particular we will tend towards warning you off inappropriate topics rather than taking off points. Read the Blackboard comments regularly to know if you are on track, even if you got full credit for an assignment.

- **You cannot submit the same article twice.** If you do, you will receive a zero on your entire assignment for both weeks. That amounts to about 3% of your grade. Don’t do it!

- **You cannot submit the same article summary as another student.** We use SafeAssign on all assignments. Its frighteningly good at finding things like this. Don’t test it. First Offense: BOTH students involved get zero for the whole assignment that week. Second offense is referred to the USC Academic Conduct system.
Acceptable News Sources for Geology in the News Scrapbook

The list below contains all of the acceptable sources for this project. It was assembled by monitoring the sources students used in previous semesters and choosing a balance of print, broadcast media, and on-line only sources and, to some extent, a balance of “political slants” of the sources. There are literally thousands of news outlets that do not appear on this list, including some major outlets. This is not a commentary on the quality or significance of those missing sources. We simply limit you to the list below for this project. Any source not on this list cannot be used.

BBC
Bloomberg
CNN
Charlotte Observer
Fox News
The Guardian
Huffington Post
Los Angeles Time
NPR
New York Times
Slate
The State Newspaper
USA Today
The Wall Street Journal
Washington Post

Often, online news sources have “pay wall” systems in place. In other words, after a certain number of articles a month, they expect you to buy a subscription. We have been successful addressing this by “cookie management” on our web browsers.

Sample Scrapbook Entries

Sample scrapbook entries are posted on Blackboard. We encourage you to use a standard format. Each week, you would upload one Word or PDF file with at least 3 entries in that format. Do not upload a separate file for each article. Save your submissions on your computer as well, it will be easier to access them at the end of the semester.

We also encourage you to put titles on your submission. A short title in your own words will help you remember the article at the end of the semester. We don’t grade the title, it’s just for you.

Be very aware of the date of publication of the article. Some sources are easier than others to find the date of publication. In the list above, Huffington Post is probably the hardest to find a clear publication date.
Geology In the News Weekly Scrapbook Dates and Deadlines

Submissions are due at noon on each due date!
You may submit as early as 5pm one week before the deadline.

**NO LATE SUBMISSIONS ARE ACCEPTED!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment Available (after 5pm)</th>
<th>Due Date (by noon)</th>
<th>Use only articles published On or After:</th>
<th>Ask Grading Questions On or Before:</th>
<th>Record your Points here!</th>
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**FINAL SCRAPBOOK ESSAY due at NOON on Thursday, April 20th**

All submissions of the Weekly summaries and Final Essay are through Blackboard.