

Pop Culture for Environmental Awareness

Context

Pop Culture for Environmental Awareness is a joint project between Oorvani Foundation and St Joseph's University (SJU) to enable young Bengalureans to learn about the city's environment and sustainability issues.

This programme on “environmental storytelling” is to be offered as an optional paper for journalism: Students of Journalism and Optional English, Journalism and International Relations/Public Policy and MA English courses will be the primary participants but the programme will be open to Communicative English and Journalism and International Relations students as well. It will also be offered as an elective for other departments like environmental science.

Young people are familiar with story-telling formats that are popular on Social Media, particularly Instagram and YouTube, both as content creators as well as consumers. Our approach centres on using this interest and familiarity to communicate Bengaluru's environmental issues, amongst their peer group.

Oorvani's team, St Josephs' faculty and external experts will facilitate the understanding of pressing environmental issues in Bengaluru. The students will creatively reinterpret and communicate this information in fresh formats such as memes, songs, cartoons, short skits presented as reels, threads, and engaging vox pops in English, Kannada and other local languages with editorial guidance. By transforming complex reports into relatable, entertaining content these young 'influencers' can effectively disseminate crucial information to a broader audience.

Design of SJU course

The programme “environmental storytelling” will be offered as an annual lab-based course, adding up to approximately 30 hours of contact sessions and about 60 hours of field work/internships/production. Students are eligible to get one credit during the semesters and two additional credits over the summer depending on the work done.

The programme will be offered to 25 students.

The elements of the project involve:

1. Student lab (hosted at the St Josephs’ campus)

Students and facilitators come together to explore a specific theme related to sustainability in Bengaluru. Introductory sessions will present topics to students, we will share reading material/films/videos around the topic and discuss concerns/responses. Facilitators will bring in nuance and complexity of issues during these conversations. For nuanced topics such as climate change, lab faculty will provide extended readings/source materials, after which a small quiz will be held to test students’ understanding of the topic.

2. Narrative building and content creation

There will be individual exercises as well as team work. After the initial presentation and discussion, each student will share their learning, by developing short posts / material and potentially posting it publicly on social media.

In addition, students are divided into teams, with each team coming up with ideas for projects/videos/podcasts etc. Each team must decide within themselves what specific aspect of the theme/topic they will discuss, and which member will handle what portion of the production: Research/Scripting, Primary source gathering, secondary source, shooting, sound design/recording, editing, final production/presentation, etc.)

They can pitch a new story based on emerging developments or retell existing reported stories using new formats or pop culture elements – memes, graffiti and cartoons or videos as SM posts/reels/YT shorts, Google Web Stories or podcasts/audio-videos material recordings including spoken word poetry, rap, skits and sketches, among others.

Students will be mentored through this process by the Citizen Matters editorial team and St Josephs' faculty. Participants will share their work by the end of the fortnight for review by peers and project facilitators: Once the team is ready, they will "pitch" to lab facilitators their idea and get feedback. Other teams may also provide inputs and this discussion will be curated and guided properly by SJU/CM faculty. When the first cut is ready, lab faculty will ensure that themes are adhered to, overall direction follows what was pitched and that specific inputs/feedback are incorporated.

3. Final submission/project presentation/portfolio

Students prepare a portfolio with their stories by end of the semester for evaluation as per college requirements. The material will be vetted for facts and ethical language by facilitators.

4. Publishing

The content elements will be used to curate multimedia posts on Citizen Matters with students as authors and will be shared on our social media platforms as well as that of the creators, along with context and reference links. This takes the information to the larger public as well.

Each Student Lab will centre around a theme related to Bengaluru's environment and sustainability. The initial themes will be introductory in nature, like air quality, water, solid waste, mobility etc. Then students explore the intersections with larger urban and social issues: for example, climate x buildings, biodiversity x economy, lakes x city planning, air pollution x marginalisation, heat stress x gender etc. We will encourage global references in the storytelling, but ensure a local relevance.

Course structure

The lab will cover multiple topics/themes. A lab theme is addressed over a fortnight each. Students shall produce two materials per lab topic, one individual and one as part of a group. Students incorporate these into a portfolio to be presented by the end of the semester.

Semester Plan

Topics / Themes (draft plan)	Activities	Timeline / Milestone
Solid waste	Presentation: Journey of waste Lab exercise & Individual submission Team discussion, pitching & field work (offline - weekend)	Week 1
	Draft submissions/review/feedback	Week 2
Water	Presentation: Urban Water Balance Lab exercise & Individual submission Team discussion, pitching & field work (offline - weekend)	Week 3
	Draft submissions/review/feedback	Week 4
Air Quality	Presentation: AQ sources Lab exercise & Individual submission Team discussion, pitching & field work (offline - weekend)	Week 5
	Draft submissions/review/feedback	Week 6
Intersectional Topic	Presentation & Exercise Field work, Team discussion	Week 7
	Posting and Feedback	Week 8
Work review	Group submission and review Portfolio Assembly	Week 9
Final Portfolio	Draft submission and review	Week 10
	Portfolio Assembly & submission	Week 11

Summer Credits

The students will be offered a summer programme, guided by facilitators that will enable them to gain two additional credits. They will take up additional topics and produce material and submit an updated portfolio.

Post-project options

Options for participants

- Students who complete the programme will be given an opportunity to apply to Oorvani Foundation for a paid internship.

Building a replicable model

- The learning materials, session plans and course instructions will be packaged into a Programme Playbook. The programme can then be replicated in other colleges across Bengaluru and potentially other cities.
- At SJU, this module could be offered as an elective for 3rd and 4th semester journalism courses. SJU has had electives such as development journalism, and environment and science reporting in the past, and this component could be built into such electives.
- In the longer term, St Joseph's University could look to offer it as a Certificate Course for the general public - which will comprise of contact classes/theory hours, and practical/field work sessions adding up to about 60 hours. SJU also envisions this to be extended to students of environmental science, data science students, students of the physical and life sciences school and to some of the PG students, as an optional credit course within the academic year.

Timeline and Output

Time period	Activity	Output	Outcome	Impact
Dec 2024- Mar 2025	Learning sessions & exercises	Themed presentations by OF team, SJU faculty and experts	Students gain a better understanding of environmental challenges and solutions. Establish collaborative networks between educators, experts, journalists and future workforce (i.e. students)	Awareness and understanding of environmental issues among the student community
Jan-Mar 2025	Narrative Building / Brainstorming (storytelling methods & formats)	Discussions	Students understand what is feasible and begin planning with supervision and mentorship. Accuracy, editorial integrity and quality information ensured	Students will have better capacity to communicate and show impact, better equipped for jobs of the future.
Jan-July 2025	Fieldwork & content creation (even semester + summer project)	Material - memes, videos or audio/podcasts, social media posts	Students gain first hand experience of issues and ability to interrogate and sense-make Opportunity to harness their creativity and passion to talk about larger issues.	Students are deeply invested in communicating solutions to the city's environmental problems.
Mar-July 2025	Review of student work	Student Portfolio	New forms of storytelling and reportage from the youth for a peer network. Better understanding of forms of communication engaging and effective with the youth.	Young Bengalureans more engaged in environment issues and solutions Newer forms of storytelling incorporated in our plans
Mar-July 2025	Publishing	Video/multimedia stories on Citizen Matters and Social media posts	Reach audiences on various platforms, widen influence across groups. Opportunities for students to get published on a professional platform	Improved public understanding of Bengaluru's environmental issues Engaging Communication Material