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# Environment Reporters and U.S. Journalists: A Comparative Analysis

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This study provides baseline data regarding environment reporters in the twenty-first century, and then compares this baseline information about a specialized journalism beat to existing studies of U.S. journalists in general. This comparison between 652 environmental journalists working at daily newspapers and television stations and more than 1,000 U.S. journalists in general found that these reporters share many individual and work-related characteristics, perhaps due in part to their similar backgrounds and to the basic professional training received by most journalists. The authors propose a uniform theory of journalism education, arguing that journalists are journalists first because they are linked by their studies, training, and experience, and that differences among reporters may be related to variations in their education. The researchers also found that newspapers employ more specialized reporters than do television stations, and that the bigger the newspaper, the more specialists, suggesting that bigger is better for specialized reporting.

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## INTRODUCTION

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For more than two decades, research teams headed by David H. Weaver of Indiana University have conducted comprehensive national studies of U.S. journalists every 10 years (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; 1996; Weaver et al. 2007). The

statistical profiles, each drawn from a sample of more than 1,000 working journalists, offer rich data showing how journalists have changed in terms of demographics, attitudes, and work routines. Although the samples were large enough to allow the researchers to generalize about subgroups such as newspaper and television reporters, the samples could not offer insights into specialized subgroups such as beat reporters.

Since 2000, researchers in Tennessee, Connecticut, and Utah have sought to remedy the lack of baseline information about one subgroup of reporters, those covering environmental issues. These journalists provide a vital link

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between scientists and other experts studying environmental issues and the general public, who want to know about the natural world in which they live (Atwater et al., 1985; Rogers, 2002). Previously, there had been no major project that looked at the personal characteristics of environment reporters, their attitudes, and their work routines. This study seeks to fill that gap, both by reporting on those characteristics and then comparing them, whenever possible, to the national data generated by the Weaver group. This research provides the baseline data needed for the systematic study of American journalists and specialized reporters.

Our first hypothesis is that environmental journalists are similar to U.S. journalists in many individual and work-related characteristics, perhaps due in part to the similar backgrounds and basic professional training of most reporters. Likewise, we hypothesize that differences between environment reporters and U.S. journalists in general may relate to variations in their education. Finally, we propose that the larger the newspaper, the more likely it will be to employ one or more specialized environment reporters, suggesting that bigger is better for specialized reporting. As recently as 2006, the *Los Angeles Times* employed “more than two dozen” reporters and editors who specialized in “coverage of science, technology, medicine, or the environment” (Hotz, 2006, 57) and, like the *New York Times*, was a poster child for the concept of bigger is better. The question here is whether the same concept holds true for the more typical “large” newspaper, with a circulation of more than 60,000.

## The American Journalist and the Environment Reporter

The first major national survey of American journalists was done by John W. C. Johnstone and associates at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The 1971 survey was published in 1976 as *The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work* by the University of Illinois Press (Johnstone et al., 1976). Weaver

and G. Cleveland Wilhoit continued this landmark project in 1982–83 and 1992. Their work was published as *The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work* in 1986 and as *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era* in 1996. In 2002, Weaver, Randal A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes, and Wilhoit conducted the most recent survey, which was published as *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (copyright 2007 although it actually came out in 2006).

The 2002 survey, consisting of 97 questions, was completed by 1,149 American journalists working for daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television, news magazines, and wire services, “plus additional separate samples of 315 minority and on-line journalists” (255). “The maximum sampling error at the 95% level of confidence for this main probability sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points” (259). It provides extensive data, including the basic characteristics of U.S. journalists, their education, their media use, their politics, their job satisfaction, and their perceptions of the workplace. The results of the current survey showed some differences from previous findings, including the fact that the average journalist in 2002 was older than in the previous decade. But, overall, the authors concluded, “The picture of U.S. journalists in 2002” is “one marked more by stability than change” (239). According to the survey, the typical American journalist was Caucasian, male, married, and “just over forty” (1). He was a graduate of a public university who was satisfied with his current employment working for a daily newspaper owned by a large corporation. He either majored in journalism or communication (57.7 percent), English (14.9 percent), or a wide variety of other subjects (44). The physical and biological sciences (including agriculture) were near the bottom of the list with only 2.9 percent.

One might think that reporters assigned to covering a specialized beat like the environment would be more experienced and better educated in their subject areas than the average U.S. journalists described by Weaver. In the

1960s and 1970s, environment reporting often was a province of the science beat (Sachsman, 1973; Storad, 1984). Twenty years later, when the Society of Environmental Journalists was created, environment reporters came with a variety of different backgrounds and environmental stories often were also government stories, science stories, health stories, and even business stories (Ward, 2001). Today, environment reporting tends to be “the chronicling [of] the endless tug of war in politics, economics, and environmental advocacy,” says former *Atlanta Constitution* staff reporter and nature writer McKay Jenkins (Blum et al., 2006, 229). But science remains fundamental to the environment beat, and so one would hope that environment reporters would differ from other journalists, many of whom apparently spent their college years avoiding science and math (Sachsman, 1985). Morris (1999) questions whether a traditional journalism school education qualifies reporters to write about health and science, arguing that although “new graduates are prepared to cover simple stories that reflect their undergraduate training,” they may not be prepared for coverage of more complex issues (188). Morris believes that many journalists “take courses in the natural sciences and physical sciences,” pointing to “specialized journalism programs sponsored by various foundations at universities across the country” (189). But he concludes that “much more work needs to be done both within journalism and outside.”

Are environment reporters better educated in the sciences than other U.S. journalists? Do they go to journalism school or study the sciences? Or some combination of the two? These questions are answered by the current research.

Science writers had been analyzed as early as the 1930s (Krieghbaum, 1940). But although modern environment reporters had been described and discussed since the 1970s (Atwater et al., 1985; Cantrill, 1993; Cohn, 1990; Friedman, 1990; 2003; Greenberg et al., 1989; Hansen, 1993; Sachsman, 1976; 1996; Taylor et al., 2000; Valenti 1995; 1998), there was no thorough data-based statistical analysis of

these specialized professionals. More was known about the sources they used (Greenberg et al., 1989; Lacy & Coulson, 2000; Sachsman, 1973; Smith, 1993; Taylor et al., 2000; Valenti, 1998; 1999; 2000a; 2000b) than about their demographics or feelings. What was missing was precisely the kind of baseline data and description provided by Weaver and Wilhoit for U.S. journalists in general.

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## METHOD

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The lack of previous large-scale demographic studies of environment reporters may be due to a stumbling block in such research: there is no definitive list of these reporters. Many belong to the Society of Environmental Journalists; many do not. Some cover the environment as a beat, on a full-time basis. Other self-identified environment reporters spend most of their time covering a variety of issues and switch to the environment when there is breaking news on the topic.

This study used a variety of existing sources to identify environment reporters. The researchers contacted newspapers and television stations, asking to speak to the environment reporter, an editor, or to anyone else who identified themselves as currently working to “cover the environment on a regular basis as part of your reporting duties.” The interviewers telephoned every U.S. daily newspaper listed in *Editor & Publisher Yearbook* and every television station that had a news director listed in *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* (thus trying to exclude from the count all those stations that employed no reporters at all). The researchers also excluded those reporters who were assigned to a specific city, town, county, or region and covered all issues—including the environment—pertaining to that community. They excluded those full-time television weather reporters in small markets who also occasionally handled an environment story such as storm damage, and also reporters who were on leave for medical

and professional reasons at the time of the interviews.

The researchers asked environment reporters to identify others at their news organization or at other news outlets who might qualify to be interviewed. The interviewers cast a wide net, seeking to gather information both on specialized beat reporters and those who cover the environment as one of many tasks completed on a given day. The study focused on one region of the country at a time, dividing the nation into seven regions<sup>1</sup> rather than the four regions and nine divisions used by the U.S. Census.

The study began in 2000 in New England, where the researchers identified 55 environment reporters. Each of these reporters completed a 45-minute telephone survey interview, resulting in a 100 percent response rate. Interviewers worked their way through the other regions, interviewing 91 of 91 reporters (100 percent) in the Mountain West in 2001; 151 of 158 reporters (95.6 percent) in the South in 2002–03; 116 of 127 reporters (91.3 percent) in the Pacific West in 2002 and 2004–05; 53 of 53 reporters (100 percent) in the Mid Atlantic region in 2003–04; 101 of 117 reporters (86.3 percent) in the Mid Central region in 2004–05; and 85 of 85 reporters (100 percent) in the West Central region in 2004–05. In all, the researchers interviewed 577 of 603 newspaper reporters (95.7 percent) and 75 of 83 television reporters (90.4 percent). There was no evidence that responses varied based on when reporters were interviewed.

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<sup>1</sup>The states in New England were Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; those in the Mountain West were Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Those in the Pacific West were the Pacific Northwestern states of Alaska, Oregon, and Washington, and California and Hawaii; and those in the South were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The Mid Atlantic region included Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; the Mid Central consisted of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Wisconsin; while the West Central included Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas.

Overall, the researchers interviewed 652 of the 686 environment reporters identified, or 95.0 percent. Because the researchers successfully interviewed all but 5 percent of the subjects they found and because there was no evidence that responses differed due to the year interviewed, it is not unreasonable to treat this research as if it were a national census, rather than a series of regional studies. The results allow the project to report with unusual detail—and without a sampling error—which journalists are environment reporters, where these reporters work, their personal and job-related characteristics, and how they compare to and differ from U.S. journalists in general.

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## FINDINGS

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### Where Are the Environment Reporters?

Daily newspapers are far more likely than television stations to have an environment reporter. A total of 534 out of 1,462 newspapers (36.5 percent) had at least one environment reporter. This was a much higher percentage than that for television stations, where the study found 86 stations with environment reporters compared to the 859 TV stations with a news director listed in *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook*, or 10.0 percent.

The study also identified news organizations with multiple environment reporters and those that shared reporters. The 534 newspapers with environmental journalists actually employed a total of 603 environment reporters. This included 42 newspapers with 2 environment reporters, 9 newspapers with 3, 4 newspapers with 4, and 3 newspapers with 5 environment reporters, whereas 18 newspapers shared 8 reporters. Meanwhile, 86 television stations employed a total of 83 environment reporters, including 3 stations with a total of 8 environment reporters and 13 stations sharing 5 environmental journalists (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**News organizations with environment reporters\***

Region	Newspapers			Television stations		
	Total daily newspapers	Newspapers with environment reporters	% papers with env. reporters	TV stations with news directors	TV stations with environment reporters	% stations with env. reporters
		Papers/Reporters			Stations/Reporters	
New England	82	42** with 51	51.2%	33	4 with 4	12.1%
Mountain West	110	55 with 81	50.0%	81	10 with 10	12.3%
South	310	124 with 131	40.0%	194	23** with 27	11.9%
Pacific West	147	93** with 114	63.3%	96	15** with 13	15.6%
Mid Atlantic	169	48** with 53	28.4%	89	0 with 0	0.0%
Mid Central	310	101 with 103	32.6%	138	15** with 14	10.9%
West Central	334	71** with 70***	21.3%	228	19** with 15	8.3%
Total	1,462	534 with 603	36.5%	859	86 with 83	10.0%

Question: Do you cover the environment on a regular basis as part of your reporting duties?

\*The number of news organizations with environment reporters differs from the number of environment reporters because some news organizations have more than one environment reporter, whereas others share an environment reporter.

\*\*In New England, two newspapers shared one reporter; in the Pacific West, four papers shared one, three shared one, and three shared one. In the Mid Atlantic states, two papers shared one, whereas in the West Central region, four interrelated newspapers employed a total of three reporters (with one reporter's work being published in four papers, one reporter's work being published in two papers, and the third reporter's work being published in only one paper). In the South, two television stations each had two reporters and one station had four, whereas two stations shared one reporter; in the Pacific West, three stations shared one reporter; in the Mid Central, two stations shared one; and in the West Central four stations shared one and two stations shared one.

\*\*\*One newspaper had an environment reporter who was previously counted and interviewed when he worked in a different region. The reporter's interview was counted only once although both newspapers were given credit for the presence of an environment reporter.

The circulation size of the newspapers had a strong correlation with the number of reporters. Of the newspapers with fewer than 14,000 daily circulation, 20.3 percent employed an environment reporter. As circulation increased, so did the likelihood of a newspaper having an environment reporter. Looking at newspapers with more than 60,000 in circulation, 78.7 percent had at least 1 environment reporter; 17.5 percent had 2 or more (see Table 2). The bigger the newspaper, the more specialists, suggesting that bigger is better for specialized environmental reporting.

In television, the size of the market may have played a role in determining the presence of an environment reporter at ABC, NBC, and CBS VHF stations with news directors listed in *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook*. Forty-six of these network affiliated stations in the top 20 television markets had 6 environment reporters, or 13.0 percent, compared to 10.0 percent for all TV stations identified as having environment reporters.

Regional differences also appear to play a role in determining which newspapers feature

environment reporters, as well as how many such journalists are employed. The percentage of newspapers with environment reporters was much higher in the Pacific West (63.3 percent), New England (51.2 percent), and the Mountain West (50.0 percent) than the national average of 36.5 percent. Furthermore, in these three regions, the number of environment reporters was considerably higher than the number of newspapers with environment reporters, meaning many newspapers had more than one environment reporter. Regional differences were less pronounced for television stations than newspapers, with five of the seven regions fairly close to the national average of 10.0 percent. The Pacific West had the highest percentage of TV stations with environment reporters (15.6 percent), as well as the highest percentage of newspapers with such a reporter.

## Who Are the Environment Reporters?

The reporters who cover the environment on a regular basis are pulled from all corners of

**Table 2**  
**Newspapers with environment reporters by circulation**

Number of environment reporters	Less than 14,000	14,000–29,999	30,000–59,999	More than 60,000	Total newspapers	Total reporters	Interviewed reporters
0	613	210	66	39	928	—	—
1	149	119	96	112	476	466.25*†	445.25*
2	6	11	5	20	42	78.75*	77.75*
3	1	0	2	6	9	27	25
4	0	0	0	4	4	16	16
5	0	0	1	2	3	15	13
Total	769	340	170	183	1,462	603	577

Total of 534 out of 1,462 (36.5%) newspapers had 603 reporters.

\*The reason the number of reporters is given in fractions is because some newspapers shared environment reporters. If two newspapers shared one environment reporter, the reporter was split .50 and .50. The sharing of environment reporters also accounts for the fact that there were fewer total reporters than there were newspapers with one environment reporter and the fact that the number of environment reporters at newspapers with two environment reporters does not add up to double the number of those newspapers.

†One newspaper had an environment reporter who was previously counted and interviewed when he worked in a different region. The reporter was counted only once although both newspapers were given credit for the presence of an environment reporter.

the newsroom, as shown by their widely varying titles. When the reporters in the study were asked their official job title, fewer than a third (29.0 percent) of the titles included the word “environment” (see Table 3). In addition, a handful of science reporters (1.9 percent of the total), health reporters (0.8 percent), and a mixture of natural resource, agriculture, and outdoors reporters (5.6 percent) said they covered environment stories. In contrast, almost half (49.4 percent) held the title of reporter, general assignment reporter, or staff writer. Another 13.4 percent were beat reporters in other areas (e.g., business, politics, sports) or worked as both an editor and as a reporter. Many said they were assigned environment stories whenever a local story broke that needed coverage, then used any free time for enterprise stories involving the environment.

These job titles also varied across the country. In the South, 39.7 percent of reporters had the word “environment” in their job title, compared to a low of 18.2 percent in New England. Science reporters who covered the environment were most prevalent in New England; those reporters labeled natural resources, agricultural, or outdoors writers were more likely to be found in the Mountain West and the South.

While some of these environment reporters cover the issue full-time, most divide

their time, as can be inferred from their job titles. The reporters were asked to estimate how much of their work time they spent, in the previous 12 months, on environment stories. While 26.0 percent said they spent more than two-thirds of their time on environment stories, on average these reporters spent 43.0 percent (mean) of their work week in the previous year on environmental reporting. More than half of the reporters (52.2 percent) spent less than 34 percent of their time on these stories. Again, in the Pacific West and Mountain West, there was more of an emphasis on environment stories. These two regions were the only areas where the average reporter spent 50 percent or more of his or her time on the environment (see Table 4).

In summary, the first part of this study indicates that most newspapers and television stations do not have a reporter covering the environment on a regular basis. Newspapers with larger circulations and those in the Pacific West, New England, and the Mountain West were more likely to have an environment reporter than smaller newspapers or those in other regions. And newspapers were much more likely to have a specialist than television stations, even those TV stations in large markets. Reporters who cover the environment on a regular basis have a wide variety of job titles, reflecting the fact that some cover the beat full-time whereas

**Table 3**  
**Job titles of “environment reporters”**

Job titles	New England (2000)	Mountain West (2001)	South (2002–2003)	Pacific West (2002, 2004–2005)	Mid Atlantic (2003–2004)	Mid Central (2004–2005)	West Central (2004–2005)	National (2000–2005)
Environment reporter, writer; All environment combos	10 18.2%	28 30.8%	60 39.7%	29 25.4%	16 31.4%	24 23.8%	21 24.7%	188 29.0%
All natural resources, agricultural, Outdoor except environment	0 0%	8 8.8%	13 8.6%	9 7.9%	1 2.0%	2 2.0%	3 3.5%	36 5.6%
All science except environment	5 9.1%	1 1.1%	2 1.3%	2 1.8%	0 0.0%	1 1.0%	1 1.2%	12 1.9%
All health except environment	2 3.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.9%	1 2.0%	0 0.0%	1 1.2%	5 0.8%
Reporter, general assignment, staff writer	30 54.5%	45 49.5%	74 49.0%	55 48.2%	29 56.9%	51 50.5%	36 42.4%	320 49.4%
Specialized reporters—Business, politics, sports	6 10.9%	5 5.5%	0 0.0%	9 7.9%	3 5.9%	1 1.0%	0 0.0%	24 3.7%
Specialized editor, manager—City editor, assignment editor	2 3.6%	4 4.4%	2 1.3%	9 7.9%	1 2.0%	22 21.8%	23 27.1%	63 9.7%
Total	55 100.0%	91 100.0%	151 100.0%	114* 100.0%	51* 100.0%	101 100.0%	85 100.0%	648* 100.0%

Question: What is your exact job title at (Name of Organization)?

\*The total n may vary due to some participants not answering the question.

others juggle environmental issues with other issues of the day.

## Comparing Environment Reporters and U.S. Journalists in General

This study compared environment reporters with U.S. journalists across three dimensions.

The first, shown in Tables 5 and 6, includes personal characteristics such as age, ethnicity, gender, religion, and education. Tables 7 and 8 present job characteristics such as perceived level of autonomy and the amount of editing that reporters experience. The third dimension, detailed in Table 9, looks at media usage patterns such as which newspapers and

**Table 4**  
**Percentage of time spent covering “environment” stories**

Region	0–33%	34–66%	67–100%	Total	n	mean*
New England (2000)	58.2%	23.6%	18.2%	100%	55	37.9%
Mountain West (2001)	37.4%	31.9%	30.7%	100%	91	50.0%
South (2002–03)	51.7%	18.5%	29.8%	100%	151	44.2%
Pacific West (2002, 2004–05)	35.3%	23.3%	41.4%	100%	116	54.8%
Mid Atlantic (2003–04)	49.1%	17.0%	33.9%	100%	53	47.4%
Mid Central (2004–05)	69.3%	15.8%	14.9%	100%	101	30.2%
West Central (2004–05)	64.7%	22.4%	12.9%	100%	85	33.0%
Total	52.2%	21.8%	26.0%	100%	652	43.0%

Question: Looking back on the past year, about what percentage of your time has been spent on reporting environmental stories (however you want to define them). -----%

\*Mean computed against ungrouped “percentage of time” variable.



**Table 5**  
**Personal characteristics of environment reporters vs. U.S. journalists**

Personal characteristics	Environment reporters (2000–05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*	U.S. journalists (1992)**
Age			
18–24	4.5%	4.4%	4.1%
25–34	28.0%	29.3%	37.2%
35–44	28.9%	27.9%	36.7%
45–54	30.6%	28.2%	13.9%
55+	8.0%	10.1%	8.1%
Total	100.0%	99.9%***	100.0%
n	647 <sup>a</sup>		
Years in journalism (mean)			
Male	16.2 years	18.0 years	15.0 years
Female	11.8 years	13.0 years	12.0 years
All****	14.9 years	N/A	N/A
Religion			
Protestant	52.6%	46.2%	54.4%
Catholic	28.6%	32.7%	29.9%
Jewish	3.5%	6.2%	5.4%
Other/None	15.3%	14.8%	10.2%
Total	100.0%	99.9%***	99.9%***
n	633 <sup>b</sup>		
Importance of religion			
Very important	30.0%	36.0%	38.0%
Somewhat important	35.6%	36.0%	34.0%
Not very important	20.9%	N/A	N/A
Not at all important	13.6%	N/A	N/A
Total	100.1%***	N/A	N/A
n	627 <sup>c</sup>		
Ethnicity			
White/Other	96.6%	91.6%	92.5%
African American	0.9%	3.7%	3.7%
Hispanic	1.4%	3.3%	2.2%
Asian	0.8%	1.0%	1.0%
Native American	0.3%	0.4%	0.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n	640 <sup>d</sup>		
Gender			
Male	70.7%	67.0%	66.0%
Female	29.3%	33.0%	34.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n	648 <sup>e</sup>		
Political affiliation			
Democrat	32.6%	35.9%	44.1%
Republican	9.3%	18.0%	16.4%
Independent	51.8%	32.5%	34.4%
Other	6.3%	13.6%	5.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n	604 <sup>f</sup>		
Income			
Less than \$35,000	47.8%	N/A	N/A
\$35,000 to \$60,000	40.2%	N/A	N/A
More than \$60,000	12.0%	N/A	N/A
Total	100.0%	N/A	N/A
n	609 <sup>g</sup>		

(Results reported in percentage unless otherwise noted); U.S. journalists' median income in 2002, \$43,588; \*Weaver et al. (2007), pp. 6–22, and 97–99. "The maximum sampling error at the 95% level of confidence for this main probability sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points," p. 259;

\*\*Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), pp. 6–21 and 92–96. "The sampling error margin at the 95% level of confidence for this main probability sample of 1,156 was plus or minus three percentage points," p. 251; \*\*\*Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding; \*\*\*\*Mean computed against ungrouped "years in journalism" variable.

<sup>a</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded no answer (5);

<sup>b</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded no answer (6) or refused to answer (13);

<sup>c</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded don't know (2), no answer (6), or refused to answer (17);

<sup>d</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded no answer (5) or refused to answer (7);

<sup>e</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded no answer (3) or refused to answer (1);

<sup>f</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded don't know (3), no answer (12), or refused to answer (33);

<sup>g</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded don't know (4), no answer (20), or refused to answer (19).

**Table 6**  
**Educational characteristics of environment reporters vs. U.S. journalists**

Personal characteristics	Environment reporters (2000–05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*	U.S. journalists (1992)**
1. Level of school completed			
H.S. or less	0.6%	1.8%	4.3%
Some college	6.2%	8.9%	13.6%
College graduate	68.1%	68.0%	64.5%
Some graduate training	7.6%	4.7%	6.2%
Master's degree or more	17.6%	16.6%	11.4%
Total	100.1%***	100.0%	100.0%
n	648 <sup>a</sup>	1148	1147
2. Undergraduate majors (of college graduates)			
Journalism/Communication	44.9%	57.7%	56.3%
Journalism/Communication plus another field	5.1%		
Subtotal: Journalism + Comm.	50.0%	57.7%	56.3%
Science	23.3%	2.9%****	2.2%****
All other fields	25.7%	39.2%	41.4%
No major	1.0%	N/A	N/A
Total	100.0%	99.8%	99.9%
n	572 <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A
3. Undergraduate minors (of college graduates)			
Journalism/Communication	4.4%	N/A	N/A
Science	38.7%	N/A	N/A
Other	14.9%	N/A	N/A
No minor	41.9%	N/A	N/A
Total***	99.9%	N/A	N/A
n	542 <sup>c</sup>	N/A	N/A
4. Graduate subjects of study			
Journalism/Communication	50.6%	N/A	N/A
Science	18.4%	N/A	N/A
Ph.D./law/MD	3.4%	N/A	N/A
Other	27.6%	N/A	N/A
Total	100.0%	N/A	N/A
n	87 (of 114) <sup>d</sup>	N/A	N/A
5. Have you had short courses, sabbaticals, workshops since becoming a journalist? (% yes shown)	73.8%	64.0%	58.0%
6. Do you feel you need additional training in journalism or other subjects? (% yes shown)	76.5% <sup>†</sup>	77.0%	61.6%
What area:			
Natural science	13.3%(87)	N/A	N/A
Environment	9.7%(63)	N/A	N/A
Journalism/Communication	9.7%(63)	34.2%	11.4%
Computers/new technology/multimedia	3.8%(25)	12.4%	N/A
English, literature, writing	3.2%(21)	<1.5%	4.7%
Law	1.5%(10)	5.2%	2.2%
Political science/government	1.4%(9)	2.1%	4.9%
Business	1.1%(7)	2.1%	7.2%
Economics	1.1%(7)	<1.5%	2.9%
History	0.9%(6)	<1.5%	3.8%
Photography	0.3%(2)	4.1%	1.6%
Modern languages	0.3%(2)	6.2%	2.6%
News analysis, clinics, seminars	0.2%(1)	8.2%	9.8%
Shorthand	0.0%(0)	<1.5%	0.3%
General (e.g., "any course," "all subjects")	4.4%(29)	NA	NA
Specific answers not otherwise listed (e.g., philosophy)	4.0%(26)	NA	NA
No answer; non-responsive	21.8%(142)	NA	NA
Not seeking additional training	23.3%(152)	23.0%	38.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0% <sup>††</sup>	100.0%
n	652	1149	1148

Question: What is the highest grade of school, or level of education, you have completed? (Ask open ended; circle best category); 1) no school or kindergarten, 2) grades 1–11, 3) completed high school, 4) 1–3 years of college, 5) graduated from college, 6) some graduate work, no degree, 7) master's degree, 8) doctorate, law, or medical degree, 9) vocational or technical school beyond.

Question: What was your undergraduate major? 1) Journalism, 2) Journalism and other major (Specify Other \_\_\_\_\_), 3) Other major(s)—What was it? (Specify Other \_\_\_\_\_), 4) Did not have a major... Question: What was your undergraduate minor, if any? 1) Journalism, 2) Journalism and other minor (Specify Other \_\_\_\_\_), 3) Other minor(s)—What was it? (Specify Other \_\_\_\_\_), 4) Did not have a minor... Question: What field were you in graduate or professional school? Field \_\_\_\_\_ Question: Have you had any short courses, sabbaticals, workshops or fellowships since becoming a journalist? 1) Yes, 2) No

Question: Do you feel you need additional training in journalism or other subjects? 1) Yes, 2) No

\*Weaver et al. (2007), pp. 31–53; \*\*Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), pp. 29–47; \*\*\*Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding; \*\*\*\*The figures for Science majors among U.S. journalists in 2002 include 2.8% "physical and biological sciences" plus 0.1% "agriculture" and for 1992, 2.1% "physical and biological sciences" plus 0.1% "agriculture." † In cases of multiple responses and multiple-word responses (e.g., environmental journalism), first response or first word coded; †† In Weaver et al. (2007), subjects mentioned by fewer than 1.5% of the respondents are listed here as <1.5%. Weaver et al. (2007) lists the total percentage as 100%; <sup>a</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded no answer (3) or refused to answer (1); <sup>b</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded don't know (1), no answer (22), or refused to answer (13), and the 44 who either did not attend or did not graduate from college; <sup>c</sup>Total does not include reporters who responded don't know (13), no answer (52), or refused to answer (1), and the 44 who either did not attend or did not graduate from college; <sup>d</sup>Of the 114 reporters who said they held master's or other advanced degrees, the total reported does not include those who responded no answer (27).

**Table 7**  
**Job characteristics of environment reporters vs. U.S. journalists: autonomy in the newsroom**

Job characteristics	Environment reporters (2000–05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*	U.S. journalists (1992)**
They are almost always able to get a story covered that they think should be covered			
Almost complete	36.1%	52.0%	55.0%
Great deal	45.6%	N/A	N/A
Some	16.4%	N/A	N/A
Not much	1.8%	N/A	N/A
Not at all	0.0%	N/A	N/A
Total	99.9%***	N/A	N/A
They have almost complete freedom in selecting the stories they work on			
Almost complete	33.1%	40.0%	44.0%
Great deal	53.2%	N/A	N/A
Some	12.5%	N/A	N/A
Not much	1.1%	N/A	N/A
Not at all	0.2%	N/A	N/A
Total	100.1%***	N/A	N/A
They have almost complete freedom in deciding which aspects of a news story should be emphasized			
Almost complete	38.2%	42.0%	51.0%
Great deal	50.5%	N/A	N/A
Some	10.8%	N/A	N/A
Not much	0.6%	N/A	N/A
Not at all	0.0%	N/A	N/A
Total	100.1%***	N/A	N/A
The amount of editing your stories gets from others at your organization			
Great deal	3.1%	N/A	N/A
Considerable amount	11.7%	N/A	N/A
Some	44.8%	N/A	N/A
Little	36.9%	N/A	N/A
None at all	3.4%	16.0%	23.0%
Total	99.9%***	N/A	N/A

\*Weaver et al. (2007), pp. 73–75.

\*\*Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), pp. 62–65.

\*\*\*Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

magazines were read by reporters and how often reporters watched television news.

### **Personal Characteristics**

*Age and experience.* Weaver et al. (2007) described a graying of the journalism workforce “as the baby boomers move through

the decades” (6). The aging of the workforce can be seen in Table 5, where the percentage of U.S. journalists shifted from ages 25–34 and 35–44 in the 1992 study to a sharp increase of reporters aged 45–54 in 2002. There is a striking similarity in the age groupings of the environment reporters and the U.S. journalists

**Table 8**  
**Amount of freedom men and women had in being able to select stories**

	Environment reporters (2000–05)				U.S. journalists (2002)*			
	Print		Broadcast		Print		Broadcast	
Amount of freedom in selecting the stories they work on:	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Almost complete	n = 399	n = 173	n = 58	n = 16	n = 580	n = 291	n = 184	n = 84
Great deal	31.8%	35.3%	41.4%	12.5%	35.0%	39.9%	39.7%	31.0%
Some freedom	56.1%	50.9%	34.5%	68.8%	45.2%	38.8%	41.3%	35.7%
Not much	11.3%	12.7%	20.7%	12.5%	17.9%	16.2%	17.4%	31.0%
None at all	0.8%	1.2%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	1.9%	5.2%	1.6%	2.4%

Question: How much freedom do you usually have in selecting the stories you work on? Would you say...

\*Weaver et al. (2007), p. 187.

in 2002. Most reporters were spread fairly evenly across the three age groups ranging from age 25 to 54; there was a lower percentage of reporters in the 18–24 age group and in the age 55 and higher group.

The aging of the workforce also is reflected in the years of experience. Female environment reporters averaged 11.8 years experience, slightly less than female U.S. journalists (13.0 years). Male environment reporters averaged 16.2 years of experience, compared to 18 years for the U.S. journalists. The slightly lower experience level for both male and female environment reporters (compared to U.S. journalists in general in 2002) is surprising, given that beat assignments such as covering the environment are considered prestigious in some newsrooms and frequently go to more experienced journalists. However, there may really be no difference because the national sample survey's "maximum sampling error at the 95% level of confidence" was "plus or minus 3 percentage points" (259).

**Religion.** The environment reporters were more likely than U.S. journalists to be Protestant, whereas the U.S. journalists had higher percentages of Catholic and Jewish reporters. A slightly higher percentage of U.S. journalists (36.0 percent) than environment reporters (30.0 percent) said they considered religion to be very important to them, whereas the percentages saying religion was somewhat important were almost identical.

**Ethnicity and gender.** Although both groups were overwhelmingly white, the percentage of white environment reporters was higher (96.6 percent to 91.6 percent). The percentage of males was double that of females in both groups.

**Political affiliation.** Although environmental journalists are sometimes typecast as liberal and pro-Democratic party in their orientation, the study found the percentage of environment reporters identifying themselves as Democrats (32.6) was a bit lower than U.S. journalists in 2002 (35.9) and much lower than U.S. journalists in 1992 (44.1). The environment reporters had far more independents

(51.8 percent to 32.5 percent), whereas U.S. journalists in 2002 had almost twice as many Republicans as did the environment reporters (18.0 percent to 9.3 percent).

**Income.** Given the average 14.9 years experience of environment reporters, their reported salary level was very low. Some 47.8 percent said they earned less than \$35,000 a year; another 40.2 percent said they earned from \$35,000 to \$60,000, whereas the remaining 12 percent earned more than \$60,000 a year. The U.S. journalists earned a median \$43,588 in 2002; no breakdown by income group was published.

**Education.** The levels of education completed by environment reporters and U.S. journalists in the 2002 survey were very similar. However, there were meaningful differences in terms of undergraduate majors and minors, and probably graduate degrees as well. While the most popular major among both groups was journalism/communication, 23.3 percent of the environment reporters who graduated from college (and answered the question) majored in one or another of the sciences compared to only 2.9 percent of the journalists in general. Furthermore, 38.7 percent of the environment reporters who were college graduates (and answered the question) said they minored in one or another of the sciences. Of the 114 environment reporters who received master's or other advanced degrees, 16 received master's in the sciences. Because a bachelor's degree in the sciences generally is a prerequisite for a graduate degree, one can assume that there were very few science master's among the U.S. journalists in general (see Table 6).

### **Summary: Personal characteristics.**

The older workforce employed in journalism by 2002 may have reduced the greater age and experience level one might expect from beat reporters like those covering the environment. In their personal characteristics, similarities outweighed differences. Neither group had the overwhelmingly pro-Democratic party registration that exists in the popular mind. Many of the

environment reporters were better educated in the sciences than U.S. journalists in general. Fifty percent of the environment reporters majored in journalism/communication, but many of these minored in a science, and nearly a quarter majored in one of the sciences.

### **Job Characteristics: Autonomy in the Newsroom**

Specialized reporting slots like covering the environment may be thought to offer the reporter more autonomy in story selection and more independence in handling of stories. Nevertheless, the percentage of environment specialists who said they had “almost complete” autonomy in the newsroom was less than their colleagues among U.S. journalists. For example, when asked whether “they are almost always able to get a story covered that they think should be covered,” 52 percent of the U.S. journalists in 2002 responded they had “almost complete” ability to get a story covered, compared to 36.1 percent of the environment writers (see Table 7).

The trend continued across related questions. Forty percent of U.S. journalists said they had almost complete freedom in selecting the stories they work on, compared to 33.1 percent of the environment reporters. Forty-two percent of U.S. journalists said they had “almost complete freedom in deciding which aspects of a news story should be emphasized,” compared to 38.2 percent of environment reporters. When asked about “the amount of editing your stories get from others at your organization,” 16 percent of U.S. journalists reported receiving no editing, whereas only 3.4 percent of environment reporters said they received “none at all.”

However, when one measures autonomy by combining those who said they had “almost complete” freedom with those who said they had a “great deal” of freedom, the numbers are more complex. Regarding the amount of freedom men and women had in selecting stories, the percentage of newspaper environment reporters who said they had “almost complete” or a “great deal” of freedom was greater than their male and female counterparts. In television,

on the other hand, only female environment reporters said they had more freedom than their counterparts (see Table 8).

### **Media Usage Patterns**

The environment reporters and U.S. journalists in general shared preferences in the newspapers and magazines they read and the amount of time they spent watching television news. The top four magazines read on a regular basis by environment reporters and U.S. journalists in 2002 were almost the same: *Newsweek*, *Time*, *National Geographic*, and *The New Yorker* for environment reporters, versus *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, and *Sports Illustrated* for U.S. journalists. Not surprisingly, the environment reporters were more likely to read magazines devoted to the natural world, such as *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*, *E: The Environment Magazine*, and *Outside* (see Table 9).

The top four newspapers were the same for both groups and reflected the national orientation of all four papers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*. The prominence of *The New York Times* to both groups is worthy of note. *The Times* was read on a regular basis by almost twice as many U.S. journalists as the second most popular newspaper, *The Washington Post*. Among environment reporters, *The Times* was read more than three times as often as the runner-up, again *The Washington Post*.

The two groups also were similar in not watching conventional evening television network news broadcasts, perhaps in part because they are still working or returning home from work in the early evening. Instead, they were more likely to watch cable TV news, taking advantage of its 24/7 availability. For example, 50.9 percent of environment reporters and 40.4 percent of U.S. journalists (in 2002) said they did not watch any network news broadcasts in an average week. In contrast, 30.4 percent of environment reporters and 16.6 percent of U.S. journalists watched no cable TV news, whereas 22.7 percent of environment reporters and 23.2 percent of U.S. journalists watched cable news every day.

**Table 9**  
**Media usage patterns of environment reporters vs. U.S. journalists**

Media usage patterns	Environment reporters (2000-05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*	U.S. journalists (1992)**
<b>Magazines used</b>			
Newsweek	24.2%	31.2%	32.2%
Time	20.6%	27.9%	28.5%
National Geographic	15.5%	N/A	8.9%
The New Yorker	15.2%	16.1%	8.7%
Atlantic Monthly	8.0%	4.3%	5.2%
Sports Illustrated	6.3%	16.0%	16.5%
U.S. News	5.5%	5.0%	9.2%
Harper's	5.4%	3.0%	4.2%
Smithsonian	4.4%	2.4%	4.4%
Environment Magazine	4.4%	N/A	N/A
Outside	3.8%	N/A	N/A
Rolling Stone	3.4%	5.7%	6.9%
NY Times Sunday Magazine	2.6%	N/A	N/A
Columbia Journalism Review	2.5%	N/A	N/A
The Economist	2.5%	3.7%	N/A
Vanity Fair	2.3%	6.4%	N/A
<b>Newspapers Used</b>			
New York Times	46.5%	38.1%	26.1%
Washington Post	15.3%	20.0%	11.1%
Wall Street Journal	14.3%	22.9%	23.4%
USA Today	11.8%	19.2%	21.9%
Los Angeles Times	9.2%	7.4%	5.4%
Boston Globe	4.9%	3.5%	3.5%
Chicago Tribune	4.8%	7.3%	4.6%
San Francisco Chronicle	3.7%	2.2%	4.4%
Denver Post	3.5%	2.8%	3.0%
Oregonian	2.9%	1.9%	N/A
Atlanta Journal Constitution	2.6%	3.9%	2.7%
Dallas Morning News	2.3%	2.7%	2.2%
Rocky Mountain News	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Hartford Courant	1.5%	N/A	1.5%
Chicago Sun Times	1.2%	2.1%	1.4%
<b># of days watching network news</b>			
0	50.9%	40.4%	34.0%
1	13.1%	13.7%	15.5%
2	9.7%	12.4%	12.1%
3	7.4%	11.9%	11.6%
4	4.8%	4.6%	7.3%
5	6.3%	10.1%	10.3%
6	0.8%	2.6%	3.3%
7	6.9%	4.3%	5.8%
<b># of days watching cable news</b>			
0	30.4%	16.6%	N/A
1	12.0%	10.0%	N/A
2	9.7%	9.0%	N/A
3	6.0%	11.1%	N/A
4	6.0%	7.5%	N/A
5	10.0%	18.7%	N/A
6	3.1%	3.8%	N/A
7	22.7%	23.2%	N/A

\*Weaver et al. (2007), pp. 23–29.

\*\*Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), pp. 21–26.

## Job Satisfaction

Reporters who choose to cover specialized stories like the environment might be expected to report higher levels of job satisfaction than U.S. journalists in general. Although this study found high levels of job satisfaction among environment reporters, the levels were similar to those found for U.S. journalists in 2002. Some 85.2 percent of environment reporters said they were very satisfied or satisfied with their jobs, compared to 83.9 percent of U.S. journalists (see Table 10).

### Job Satisfaction by Characteristics of Environment Reporters

The study then broke down job satisfaction by the personal and job characteristics of environment reporters. In doing so, it appears that job satisfaction had a somewhat negative relationship with amount of education. Environment reporters with less than a college degree were more likely to be satisfied than those with more education. There also seemed

to be slight differences in job satisfaction related to religious affiliation. But importance of religion correlated with job satisfaction; the more important religion was to environment reporters, the more likely the reporters were to say they were satisfied in their jobs. Environment reporters and U.S. journalists (2002) who were white were very likely to be satisfied with their jobs. And these percentages were almost identical: 85.9 percent and 84.5 percent, respectively. However, African-American environment reporters were much more satisfied (100.0 percent) than their U.S. journalist counterparts (77.0 percent). Hispanic environment reporters were less satisfied (66.7 percent) than Hispanic U.S. journalists (78.0 percent). Asian-American reporters in both categories were equally satisfied (80.0 percent to 80.9 percent). Men were more satisfied than women both among environment reporters and U.S. journalists, with very similar numbers. Likewise, comparing job satisfaction by age among both categories of reporters showed similar results (see Table 11).

Job satisfaction also correlated highly with job-related characteristics. Television reporters covering the environment were more likely, on average, to report higher levels of job satisfaction than newspaper reporters. Those with an official title including the word “environment” were more likely to be satisfied. The percentage of time covering the environment correlated strongly with job satisfaction; reporters spending at least two thirds of their time on the environment were more likely to be satisfied than those spending less time.

The study found relationships between job satisfaction and various measures of autonomy. Environment reporters were more likely to be satisfied with their job if they felt their news organizations did a good job of enhancing the public’s understanding, if they had freedom in selecting stories and deciding what aspects to emphasize, and if they were free to follow up on a story. The tendency of some reporters to complain about too much editing—and too little editing—is reflected by the results of this study.

**Table 10**  
Job satisfaction of environment reporters and U.S. journalists in general

Job satisfaction	Environment reporters (2000–05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*	U.S. journalists (1992)**
Very satisfied	201 31.2%	33.3%	27.0%
Satisfied	348 54.0%	50.6%	50.0%
Fairly dissatisfied	81 12.6%	14.4%	20.0%
Very dissatisfied	14 2.2%	1.7%	3.0%
Total	644*** 100.0%	1149 100.0%	1156 100.0%

Question: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job? Would you say...

\*Weaver et al. (2006), p. 107.

\*\*Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), p. 100.

\*\*\*The total n may vary due to some participants not answering the question.

**Table 11**  
**Job satisfaction by individual characteristics of environment reporters**

	Environment reporters (2000-05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*
Overall	85.2%	83.9%
<b>1. Personal characteristics</b>		
Age		
18–24	89.7%	90.7%
25–34	83.4%	79.8%
35–44	87.7%	85.0%
45–54	83.7%	85.5%
55+	84.6%	87.1%
Education		
HS or less	100.0%	N/A
Some college	94.9%	N/A
College grad	84.7%	N/A
Some graduate school	80.9%	N/A
MA or more	84.8%	N/A
Religion		
Protestant	84.5%	N/A
Catholic	85.4%	N/A
Jewish	90.9%	N/A
Other	88.1%	N/A
None	83.0%	N/A
Importance of religion		
Very important	87.0%	N/A
Somewhat important	86.1%	N/A
Not very important	84.5%	N/A
Not at all important	80.7%	N/A
Ethnicity		
1. White	85.9%	84.5%
Non-white	70.3%	N/A
2. White	85.9%	84.5%
African American	100.0%	77.0%
Hispanic	66.7%	78.0%
Asian-American	80.0%	80.9%
Native American	50.0%	89.7%**
Gender		
Men	87.1%	86.6%
Women	80.4%	78.7%
Political affiliation		
Democrat	83.2%	N/A
Republican	91.1%	N/A
Independent	85.0%	N/A
Other	81.6%	N/A
Income		
Less than \$35,000	81.2%	N/A
\$35,000 to \$60,000	90.5%	N/A
More than \$60,000	82.2%	N/A
Marital status		
Married	87.5%	N/A
Unmarried	82.2%	N/A
<b>2. Job characteristics</b>		
Region		
New England (2000)	85.5%	N/A
Mountain West (2001)	85.6%	N/A
South (2002–03)	86.7%	N/A
Pacific West (2002, 2004–05)	85.3%	N/A
Mid Atlantic (2003–04)	82.7%	N/A
Mid Central (2004–05)	85.7%	N/A
West Central (2004–05)	83.1%	N/A

(Continued on next page)



**Table 11**  
**Job satisfaction by individual characteristics of environment reporters (Continued)**

	Environment reporters (2000-05)	U.S. journalists (2002)*
Job titles		
All environment titles	89.8%	N/A
Other titles	83.3%	
Medium		
Newspaper reporter	84.5%	N/A
TV reporter	90.7%	83.4%
Percent of time covering environment		
1-33%	82.4%	N/A
34-66%	85.0%	N/A
67%+	90.8%	N/A
Years in journalism		
1-10	84.7%	N/A
11-20	84.3%	N/A
21+	86.7%	N/A
Years covering environment		
1-10	87.0%	N/A
11-20	85.0%	N/A
21+	84.0%	N/A
How good a job does your own news organization do in enhancing the public's understanding of environmental issues?		
Outstanding	95.2%	95.9%
Very good	90.5%	89.8%
Good	86.6%	77.6%
Only fair	72.9%	N/A
Poor	40.0%	N/A
How much freedom do you usually have in selecting the stories you work on?		
Almost complete freedom	89.3%	N/A
A great deal of freedom	89.7%	N/A
Some freedom	61.7%	N/A
Not much freedom	42.9%	N/A
None at all	0.0%	N/A
How much freedom do you usually have in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized?		
Almost complete freedom	88.7%	N/A
A great deal of freedom	86.9%	N/A
Some freedom	71.4%	N/A
Not much freedom	0.0%	N/A
None at all	0.0%	N/A
If you have a good idea which you think important and should be followed up, how often are you able to get the subject covered?		
Almost complete freedom	91.4%	N/A
A great deal of freedom	87.3%	N/A
Some freedom	70.8%	N/A
Not much freedom	50.0%	N/A
None at all	0.0%	N/A
How much editing do your stories get from others at (your organization)?		
A great deal	80.0%	N/A
A considerable amount	89.5%	N/A
Some	87.4%	N/A
Little	82.6%	N/A
None at all	76.2%	N/A

Percentages represent those reporters saying they were "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with their jobs.

Q: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job? Would you say 1) very satisfied, 2) fairly satisfied, 3) somewhat dissatisfied, or 4) very dissatisfied.

\*Weaver et al. (2007), pp. 108-111 and 190.

\*\*Includes American Indians, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, or Others.

Reporters who said they received a considerable amount of editing, some editing or little editing were more likely to be satisfied with their job than those whose stories received no editing—or received a great deal of editing.

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## DISCUSSION

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Research in mass communication requires the systematic accumulation of baseline data. There is a critical need for baseline information from which to develop theoretical work in the future. This need for baseline data is particularly true for comparative journalism research, especially in terms of changes or trends within and between journalistic beats. This study provides such essential baseline data regarding environment reporters, and compares this information to existing studies of U.S. journalists in general. This research tells us where the environment reporters work, who they are, and how they compare to other American journalists.

Daily newspapers are far more likely than television stations to have an environment reporter and newspapers with larger circulations are most likely to have environment reporters and to have more than one environment reporter. Daily newspapers in the Pacific West, New England, and the Mountain West were more likely to have environment reporters than those in other regions.

Reporters who cover the environment on a regular basis have a wide variety of job titles, reflecting the fact that some cover the beat most of the time whereas others juggle environmental issues with other issues of the day. Reporters spent, on average, 43.0 percent of their time on environmental stories; the percentage of time rose to 50.0 percent and higher for those in the two most western regions. The environment reporters were journalists first; nearly half were simply called reporters, general assignment reporters, or staff writers.

The older workforce employed in journalism by 2002 may have reduced the greater age and experience level one might expect from beat reporters like those covering the environment. In their personal characteristics, the similarities between environment reporters and U.S. journalists were remarkable. The two groups were particularly similar in age, years in journalism, and gender. And there were more similarities than differences in religion, importance of religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, and education. But although the most popular major among both groups was journalism/communication, many of the students who would go on to become environment reporters did not fit the common stereotype of journalism majors as students who tended to avoid the sciences. The differences between journalists and scientists sometimes are attributed to the assumption that they studied different subjects in college. Although almost all scientists were science majors and half of the environment reporters were journalism or communication majors, many of the environment reporters studied the sciences extensively in college, minoring or even majoring in one or another of the sciences, and 16 of the 114 environment reporters with advanced degrees hold master's in the sciences.

Specialized reporting slots like covering the environment may be thought to offer the reporter more autonomy in story selection and more independence in handling of stories. However, if one defines autonomy as “almost complete” autonomy, then environment reporters said they had less autonomy than U.S. journalists in 2002. On the other hand, if one defines autonomy in terms of “almost complete” or a “great deal” of freedom, at least in terms of story selection, the numbers are more complex, and environment reporters generally seem to be saying they have more autonomy than U.S. journalists in general.

The environment reporters and U.S. journalists in general shared preferences in the newspapers and magazines they read and the amount of time they spent watching television

news. The top four newspapers were the same for both groups and reflected the national orientation of all four papers.

Reporters who choose to cover specialized stories like the environment might be expected to report higher levels of job satisfaction than U.S. journalists in general. Although this study found high levels of job satisfaction among environment reporters, the levels were similar to those found for U.S. journalists.

Overall, the dominant finding of this study is that environment reporters working at daily newspapers and television stations share many individual and work-related characteristics with U.S. journalists in general. Environment reporters are journalists first, perhaps due in part to their similar backgrounds and to the basic professional training received by most journalists. The differences that exist between some environment reporters and U.S. journalists in general may be related to differences that do exist in their college education.

Data from this national study may lay the foundation for basic theory building. The authors propose a uniform theory of journalism education that argues that journalists are journalists first because of the similarities in their studies, training, and experience and that differences among reporters may be related to variations in their education or factors that affect their choice of study. Such a theory of journalism education provides an explanation for the similarities that exist among American journalists regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender, or politics and for the differences that exist as well. A uniform theory of journalism education may also provide an explanation for the general conflicts that exist between reporters and their sources, whose education and training differ.

In addition, the findings in this study that newspapers employ more specialized reporters than do television stations, and that the bigger the newspaper, the more specialists, suggest that bigger is better for specialized reporting. This bigger is better theory of specialized reporting does not always appear to be true, given some reported regional differences, but the impact of size on specialty beats appears often enough to

be worth pursuing, especially at a time when the fate of some of the nation's larger newspapers is under threat by corporate readjustments. If bigger really is better, then perhaps big newspapers should be sustained, despite the cost of operation.

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