



Understanding Violent Weather

*All Expenses-Paid Four Day Seminar for Journalists at the
University of Oklahoma in Norman*

October 23 - 26, 2005

*Underwritten by a grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism
Foundation.*

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Purpose:

Covering blizzards, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and all the other manifestations of violent weather is a major responsibility of journalism. This four-day seminar offered journalists a chance to learn from world-class experts on violent weather at the NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory and the University of Oklahoma and to take their coverage to a new level.

Like all NPF programs, this one was on-the-record with plenty of time for discussion. Fifteen expenses-paid fellowships were available to qualified journalists. Fellowships included airfare, hotel and most meals.

Agenda:

Over four days of presentations, the program addressed the many aspects of meteorology and reporting on the weather. Fellows went on field trips to Weather News Inc. and the NOAA Weather Partners, including the National Severe Storms Laboratory, Storm Prediction Center, Radar Operations Center, National Weather Service, Norman Forecast Office, and the inside of a phased-array radar. Speakers included top experts in research, journalism and academia, who covered the following topics:

- **Basic Meteorology:** Anderson White, Ph.D., Assistant Director, Oklahoma University School of Meteorology.
- **Severe Weather: Tornadoes:** Harold Brooks, Ph.D., Research Meteorologist, National Severe Storms Laboratory.
- **Perspectives on Storm Chasing: Yesterday and Today:** Lou Wicker, Ph.D., Research Scientist, National Severe Storms Laboratory.
- **Global Warming: Is it Real? Can it Affect Violent Weather?:** David Karoly, Ph.D., Williams Chair Professor of Meteorology, University of Oklahoma.
- **Floods: the Awesome Power:** Suzanne Van Cooten, Ph.D., Research Hydrometeorologist, National Severe Storms Laboratory.
- **Reporting the Weather:** Dana Rosengard, Ph.D., McMahan Centennial Professor of Journalism, Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Oklahoma.
- **Winter Weather and Hurricanes:** Gerry Bell, Ph.D., Meteorologist, NOAA/National Weather Service.

- **Severe Thunderstorms and Tornadoes: Predicting the Unpredictable:** Kelvin Droegemeier, Ph.D., Regents and Presidential Professor; Weathernews Chair Director, Center for Analysis and Prediction of Storms.

Participants:

Fifteen journalists from 10 different states attended the program. These fellows represented broadcast and print news organizations with a combined audience of more than 5 million people.



Weather 2005 Fellows at NOAA Weather Partners facility

Eric Berger, *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX)
 Christopher Chmura, TBO.com (Dunedin, FL)
 Jeff Cox, WGXA Fox-24 (Macon, GA)
 Craig Eliot, KOAA-TV (Colorado Springs, CO)
 Jessica Ettinger Gottesman, 1010 WINS (New York, NY)
 Chris Grogan, KOLR/KSFX – CBS/FOX (Springfield, MO)
 Katy Human, *The Denver Post*
 Chris Kridler, *Florida Today* (Melbourne, FL)
 Robert Krier, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*
 Ken Mostek, KUSA-TV (Denver, CO)
 Scot Mundt, KELO-TV (Sioux Falls, SD)
 Frank Roylance, *The Baltimore Sun*
 Jillian Simmons, WHNS Fox Carolina (Greenville, SC)
 Sonya Van Oordt Stevens, KTAB-TV (Abilene, TX)
 Dinah Voyles Pulver, *The Daytona Beach News-Journal*

Twenty-one people applied for this program. This was a solid number of applicants, especially in a time of intense economic pressure on news organizations and staff cutbacks. Of these applicants, 12 represented broadcast organizations. NPF programs usually have a majority of print journalists, because broadcast journalists have a harder time breaking away to attend seminars. Expectations that the power of this topic would reverse that pattern proved true.

Reaction:

Thirteen of 15 attending journalists gave the seminar an “Excellent” rating, and two gave it a “Good” rating. Translating those ratings into a numerical scale (Excellent=4, Good=3, etc.), the overall seminar scored 3.87. “Understanding Violent Weather” was a highly successful seminar and ranked among the best in NPF history.

The journalists who attended were lavish in their praise, with comments such as:

- “This was an incredible experience, as I am sure all NPF programs are” -- Chris Chmura, WFLA-TV, *The Tampa Tribune*, and Tampa Bay Online.
- “The sessions were excellent and I came away with a number of story ideas and a deeper understanding of issues facing forecasters and weather researchers. I also enjoyed the mix of TV and print journalists. I believe we all learned from one another - a valuable thing in this era of convergence” -- Chris Kridler, *Florida Today*, Melbourne, Florida.
- “[T]his was a thoroughly enjoyable, uplifting, inspiring and, most importantly, useful session for me. I think the foundation assembled a great group of experts and journalists. I left invigorated” -- Robert Krier, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.
- “I’m surprised at how much I learned from the various speakers. I believe our readers will really benefit from the seminar. I went with the hope of learning more about the basic science so I could ask better questions and that’s exactly what happened” -- Dinah Voyles Pulver, *The Daytona Beach News-Journal*.
- “I thought this program was extremely well-run, and very informative” -- Frank Roylance, *The Baltimore Sun*.

Articles published as a result of the program:

“Weather Journalists In Norman To Learn From Best,” by Carol Cole. *The Norman Transcript*, October 25, 2005, **and** “Global Warming — Political Football,” by Carol Cole. *The Norman Transcript*, November 1, 2005.

“State Tornado Numbers Take An Upward Turn,” by Robert Krier. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 2, 2005, Pg. F-3.

“As 2005, With Its 13 Hurricanes, Is Eagerly Ushered Out, It Is Likely 2006 Will Challenge Communities Along The Gulf Anew; The Coast Is Clear (For Now); A Record-Setting Season's Last Storm Is Fierce, But It Isn't Expected To Cause Havoc On Land,” by Eric Berger. *Houston Chronicle*, November 30, 2005, A; Pg. 1, **and** “Galveston Sinking While Sea Levels Rise; Scientists Say Climate Change Could Deal Island a Major Blow by the Century's End,” by Eric Berger. *Houston Chronicle*, December 25, 2005, **and**

“Dark And Stormy Forecast For 2006; Team Expects 17 Named Storms Next Season - The Most It Has Ever Predicted,” by Eric Berger. *Houston Chronicle*, December 7, 2005.

“26 Storms Offer Plenty of Data,” by Chris Kridler. *Florida Today*, November 30, 2005.

“Land-Use Impact Discovered in Global Warming’ Agricultural Changes Can Profoundly Affect Climate, Though Greenhouse Gases Remain A Stronger Factor,” by Katy Human. *The Denver Post*, December 11, 2005.