

Journalism 380W (07855): Writing & Reporting

Fall 2013

Classes: M/W 1:30-3

Location: BMC 3.208

Lab: F 12-3

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Description

Required basic skills class for professional track graduate students. You will explore:

- Thinking critically about what news is.
- Grasping the mechanics of gathering news.
- Developing basic forms of news writing; adapting them to various formats for spot news, hard news, news analysis, profiles, features, multimedia, narratives.
- Developing areas of reportorial interest and expertise.
- Ethics, fairness, diversity and accuracy.
- “Neglected” or “under reported” social groups and stories.

Expected Objectives/Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate a basic competence in identifying newsworthy stories.
2. Demonstrate a basic ability to gather news.
3. Demonstrate a basic ability to report and write news in an accurate manner.
4. Demonstrate a basic ability to report and write news in a fair, ethical manner.
5. Demonstrate a basic ability to report and write news in a clear manner.
6. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the difference between hard news and feature news.

Written Assignments:

Written assignments consist primarily of two products:

- **Story Proposals:** These are one-page story ideas you pitch to your editors, focusing on what the story is and why we should run it. Suggest *human sources* to interview. Suggest *non-human sources* you would use, such as reputable reports, data, other published stories, as appropriate. Suggest *first-hand observations* you would make (e.g., attending an event). Suggest at least one *multimedia element* to accompany your story. Example: “I think we can get good photos that can accompany this story. I plan to get clear audio/video that we can make available to Reporting Texas.” We will have regular **editorial budget meetings** in class where you pitch these story proposals. We will discuss the merits of your proposal and suggest reporting and writing tactics to help strengthen the story.
- **Six (6) out-of-class and off-campus news and feature stories.** Requirements for each of these six stories differ from each other and are specified in the course schedule below. Each of these stories must have a multimedia element. This could be a chart, illustration, photograph, info-graphic, audio clip, video clip, Sound Slide, data visualization or other multimedia content that complements and enhances your story.

All assignments should be written with this *audience* in mind: People living in or near Austin, Texas.

For each story you must interview a minimum of two human sources; more are encouraged and welcomed. (Some stories will clearly require more sources; see specific requirements for each story in the course schedule below.)

You must include, at the end of your story, the *contact information* (phone numbers, email addresses) of anyone you have interviewed. These people will be called to verify that interviews took place and were conducted in a professional manner.

Written assignments are to be submitted via email to the instructor and Teaching Assistant before class on the date the story is due. In the email *subject line*, identify the assignment. Examples: **Proposal 1 or Story 1**.

Written assignments must be *properly formatted*. Double-space all copy. Use 12-point type and one-inch margins. Put your name, the date the story has been submitted, the Number of the Story (which of the six stories it is), and a two word description of the story.

So, here is an example/outline:

Mike Smith
Sept. 30, 2013
Story 3

ACL Music Festival

Austin, Texas -- Begin your story with a clear and riveting lead -- one that grabs the reader's attention. It can be a "hard news" lead – just hard facts. It can be a "feature news lead" – one that is more descriptive, subtle, or literary.

In your subsequent paragraphs, make sure that whatever is in your lead is borne out in the rest of the story. If necessary, because you used a "feature news lead," make sure you have one clear "summary paragraph" that really sums up what the story is all about.

Make sure your story builds to your last paragraph. That there is a good, clear ending.

LIST MULTIMEDIA ELEMENTS: Attach photographs or provide links to any audio/video you have gathered.

LIST CONTACT INFORMATION: A\$ap Rocky, 521-111-1111, please-tell-me-the-old-professor-is-not-listening-to-my-music@gmail.com; Regina Spektor, 622-222-2222, sad-when-old-people-try-to-be-cool@gmail.com

Grades:

Will be determined by several things:

1. Class participation/attendance: Journalism is predicated on interaction with sources, colleagues, and editors. You will be asked to describe your work, to defend it and to comment, constructively, on the work of your colleagues. **Participation includes, of course, attendance. Miss 4 classes without alerting the instructor or Teaching Assistant and you can be dropped down a grade.**
2. Evaluation, by professor and Teacher Assistant, of the stories you work on:
 - A story that needs minor editing and minor additional material (facts, quotes, sources, etc.) gets an A.
 - One that needs major editing or major additional reporting (**but not both**) is a B.
 - A story that needs both major revision **and** major additional reporting gets a C.
 - Some effort at writing or reporting gets a D.
 - No serious effort at writing or reporting gets an F.
 - Please note that the university grading policy allows for uses of pluses and minuses.
3. Deadlines. Miss your deadline and your highest potential grade can drop one grade level at each of these benchmarks: 15 minutes late, 12 hours, 24 hours. Many of the assignments can be completed well before the deadlines. You can turn your stories in early if you want.

The Grade Grid:

Grades will be tallied according to the following percentage guidelines:

- **Stories 1-5** are each worth **10 percent** of the final grade, for a total of **50 percent**.
- **Story 6**, our “capstone” story, is worth **20 percent** of the final grade.
- **Class exercises and participation** are worth a total of **15 percent** of the final grade.
- **Lab exercises and participation** are worth a total of **15 percent** of the final grade.

Office Hours and Editorial/Class/Career Consultation:

Each student is encourage to meet with the instructor at least twice during the semester to discuss work, career ambitions, reporting-writing concerns, etc. Students are urged to arrange more meetings.

Required Texts:

The Associated Press Stylebook – latest edition

The Elements of Journalism – latest edition, by Kovach

Religious Holy Days Observance Policy:

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance>

Students with Disabilities:

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities.

Students may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259.

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:

Do not plagiarize, make up quotes or make up facts.

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor.

By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

THE UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE:

“The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.”

Course Schedule (subject to changes)

Classes will sometimes begin with a “news meeting.” We will go around the room and ask you to identify the important news items of the day, how they should be prioritized in terms of “play” or “placement” in a publication. Journalists in the class can be asked to speak as the foreign editor, national editor, state editor, city editor, features editor, sports editor, business editor, multimedia editor, projects editor. Be aware of the daily news because you will be asked about it.

Aug. 28:

- Introductions
- Syllabus
- The Reporter’s Road Map/Reporter’s Checklist/Assessment Grid
- **ASSIGNED:** Story 1. Attend an event *on campus* that would be of interest to Austin-area residents and write a 500-word straight news story. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 1 is due Sept. 9. Story 1 is due Sept. 18.

Aug. 30 – Lab: Introduction to Teaching Assistant. Work on first story.

Sept. 2 – Holiday - No class.

Sept. 4:

- Discussion: Basic news elements. Fairness, accuracy, what is your responsibility to the reader, society? The Social Contract with the people you interview, write about.
- Nuts-and-bolts review: Headlines, leads, nut graphs, captions. Hard news, soft news, spot news, beats, narratives, commentary, features
- **ASSIGNED:** Kovach, 1-75

Sept. 6: Lab

Sept. 9:

- Leads.
- **DUE:** Story Proposal 1.
- Discussion of Story Proposals, your plan of attack

Sept. 11:

- Reporting basics: Interviewing, observing, sources, quotes, attribution.
- In-class interview sessions; “quick, online, lead writing.”

Sept. 13: Lab

Sept. 16:

- Story structures.
- Editorial budget meeting: Updates on your stories.

Sept. 18:

- **DUE:** Story 1
- Critiques
- **ASSIGNED:** Story 2. Attend an event *off campus* that would be of interest to Austin-area residents and write a 500-word straight news story. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 2 is due Sept. 23; Story 2 is due Oct. 2.

Sept. 20 – Lab

Sept. 23:

- **DUE:** Story Proposal 2
- Discussion of Story Proposals
- **ASSIGNED:** Kovach, 207-224.

Sept. 25:

- **Tentative:** Presentation by Brittany Deputy, journalism liaison, University of Texas Library System. A guide through the journalism resources available to you as you research your stories.

Sept. 27: Lab. Reporting/writing exercises.

Sept. 30:

- Multimedia journalism.

Oct. 2:

- **DUE:** Story 2
- Critiques
- Covering speeches & meetings; healthy skepticism
- **ASSIGNED:** Story 3. Attend an on-campus or off-campus speech, presentation, lecture, press conference or official announcement that would be of interest to Austin-area residents and write a 500-word story about it. Quote at least two people, including the person giving the speech, lecture, etc. Proposal 3 is due Oct. 7. Story 3 is due Oct. 16.
- **ASSIGNED:** Kovach, 132-137

Oct. 4: Lab

Oct. 7:

- **DUE:** Story Proposal 3
- Diversity in News Coverage
- Discuss Assigned Reading from Kovach, 132-137

Oct. 9:

- Crime & courts.
- **ASSIGNED:** Story 4. Write a 500-word story based on matters concerning police, fire, emergency workers, rescue workers or other first responders. The story does not have to be “breaking news” but must be of interest to Austin-area residents. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 4 is due Oct. 21. Story 4 is due Oct. 30.

Oct. 11: Lab

Oct. 14:

- Features, Profiles. Gathering basic profile information.
- Writing about people in power or “above the cloud line.” Doing “write arounds” and “backgrounders.”

Oct. 16:

- **DUE:** Story 3
- Critiques

Oct. 18: Lab

Oct. 21:

- **DUE:** Story Proposal 4
- **Guest, Tentative, Robert Quigley:** Social Media

Oct. 23:

- Magazine style journalism; subjective-vs.-objective journalism.
- John Hersey, Jimmy Breslin, Molly Ivins, Matt Taibbi

Oct. 25: Lab. Reporting/writing exercises.

Oct. 28:

- Local News. Local politics. Community News.
- Discussion: What are the Under Reported stories in your immediate backyard?
- Work in Class: Break into teams of two and identify, online, a burning issue in small cities or communities outside Austin city limits. Present budget line to class and a reporting blueprint.

Oct. 30:

- **DUE:** Story 4
- **Critiques**
- **ASSIGNED:** Story 5. Attend an official public meeting, hearing, civil trial proceeding, criminal trial proceeding or other official proceeding. It could be at any level, including community, city, county, state, regional, federal or international, but it must be open to the public. Examples: Local school board meeting, committee hearing at the state capitol, Travis County Commissioners Court meeting, city agencies, Travis County court proceedings, state agency public hearing. Write a 750-word story. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 5 is due Nov. 4. Story 5 is due Nov. 13.

Nov. 1: Lab

Nov. 4:

- **DUE:** Story Proposal 5
- Discussion: That day's New York Times and Austin American-Statesman political coverage. How media shifts political pendulum.

Nov. 6:

- Under reported stories, communities, people
- **ASSIGNED:** Kovach, 226-243

Nov. 8: Lab

Nov. 11:

- Investigative Stories
- Handouts: Dallas Morning News "Resegregation Package"

Nov. 13:

- **DUE:** Story 5
- **ASSIGNED:** Story 6. This is our final "capstone" story, worth more than all other stories. Write a 1,000-word feature profile of an individual doing social justice work or social service work in Central Texas. This will be someone trying to address a significant problem in our society: a volunteer at a nonprofit organization (e.g., a food bank), a community activist (e.g., leader of a group trying to help homeless people get off the streets), a pro bono lawyer (e.g., someone fighting for local environmental protections). Find someone who is doing work to provide social services to specific people or is trying to address specific social justice issues. We need color and action in the story, which means we need to see the person in action, doing things to address a social problem. To do this well, you will need to spend considerable time with

this person and others who know the person well. Interview and quote at least three people, including your profile subject. Proposal 6 is due Nov. 20. Story 6 is due Dec. 4.

Nov. 15: Lab

Nov. 18:

- Writing editorials, reviews.

Nov. 20:

- “Making the global local.”
- In-class: Scan New York Times international pages and determine how to localize international stories for the Austin reader. How would you make readers relate, care?

Nov. 22: No lab -- use the time to report Story 6

Nov. 25:

- Query letters; freelancing.
- Handouts: Query letter checklist, examples.

Nov. 27:

- Off-campus work on Story 6. Do not report to classroom. Work outside classroom to finish reporting/research on final stories.

Nov. 29: No Lab – holiday.

Dec. 2:

- Course review, remedial work
- Editorial Budget Meeting: Tell us how your final story, the capstone story, Story 6, is coming

Dec. 4:

- **DUE:** Story 6
- Course Instructor Survey
- Goodbyes

Dec. 6: No lab

THE REPORTER'S ROAD MAP

- 1. First: Find someone or something with inherent “news value” – different, important, singular, worth knowing, relevant to society, under reported, new, etc.**
- 2. Second: Learn about your topic by these methods: Observe. Interview. Read/research.**
- 3. Third: Weigh your observations, interviews and research and decide what the Central Thesis of your story is. What is the “main” information to convey? What is the point of your story?**
- 4. Fourth: Ask yourself if you need to do more observing, interviewing, reading/research. Often a “one source” story is useless. Do you need to interview more people? Use Critical Thinking to make sure you are not being led astray – by sources that are not accurate, that have an agenda, that are covering up, etc.**
- 5. Fifth: After you are satisfied you have done enough reporting, write down the Central Thesis in one sentence. Would your best friend from high school understand it? Would most people understand it? Think of it as “the headline” of your story.**
- 6. Sixth: Begin composing your story. THINK OF YOUR INTENDED AUDIENCE. Does each sentence add information? Does each sentence hold a reader's interest?**
- 7. Seventh: When you are done, see if your Central Thesis has been clearly presented. Prune all extraneous material. Cut any repetition. Cut quotes if they do not convey information or emotion. Is the writing always clear, compelling?**

THE REPORTER'S CHECKLIST

Are Multimedia Elements/Possibilities noted in your story proposals? [Example: "I have some good photos that can accompany this story. I also have clear audio that we can make available on the web site."]

Are you taking careful notes and using a digital recorder and/or camera as often as necessary?

In the first paragraph for a hard news story: If you are doing a basic hard news story, does the first paragraph convey the most important Who, What, When, Where and Why information of a story?

In the first paragraph of a news feature story: Does it grab the reader's attention? Does it set the tone and mood for the story? Does it intrigue the reader, create some sort of tension, develop a plot, etc.?

Nut Graph: If you are doing a story where you do not want to put the Who, What, When, Where & Why in your first paragraph then will you write a so-called "nut graph" and introduce it later in your story? This is a summary paragraph explaining why you are writing this story at this time, why this story is important. Nut paragraphs, or nut graphs as they are more commonly called, are often the second, third or fourth paragraph in a typical news feature story.

Accuracy & Context: Are all the names spelled correctly? Are the numbers, dates, ages accurate? Is the story fair? Is it complete (no holes)? Do you have adequate historical context and supporting information? Is it clear and understandable, especially to readers unfamiliar with the subject?

Organization: Is there a maintained focus throughout the story? Does it flow logically, leading the reader from one thought to the next?

Quotes: Is quote style followed? Do the quotes add new information? Do they convey emotion? Are you pulling quotes out of context? Are you using partial quotes? Are you quotes adding to the story – or are they just repeating facts?

Sources: Are there reliable sources? Are the sources appropriate for the story? Are the sources properly identified and attributed? Have you obtained the contact information for anyone you interview? Any of our your sources? And have you put it at the bottom of your story?

Writing: Consider these things: Word choice, clarity, conciseness; sentence construction; transition, flow; active voice; clear storytelling technique. Think about remaining in on tense – either the present tense or past tense.

Your voice: Should it be in the story?

Mechanics: Grammar/spelling, AP style

APPENDIX I

Assessment Grid for J380 Reporting & Writing

The instructor will use the following framework in evaluating your work:

1. The story has inherent news value; it is newsworthy; it fits the assignment.

0 1 2 3 4

2. Basic news elements– “Who, What, When Where, Why” – are included, as appropriate.

0 1 2 3 4

3. The story is accurate.

0 1 2 3 4

4. The work is fair, ethical.

0 1 2 3 4

5. The story contains or identifies at least one multimedia element.

0 1 2 3 4

6. The work provides required contact information for sources.

0 1 2 3 4

7. The work is clearly composed, structured, written; easy to follow and has a satisfying and effective ending.

0 1 2 3 4

8. Grammar, spelling, punctuation and style are correct.

0 1 2 3 4

9. The story was submitted properly and on time.

0 1 2 3 4

10. The lead is effective: Either as a hard news lead, or a feature lead.

0 1 2 3 4