

Fall 2014 **J332J Sports for Reporting Texas**
Unique **07980**

Class hours 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. M-W-F
Office hours 12 p.m. to 1 p.m., 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. M-W, or by appointment

Room BMC 5.214

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Course description

Sports for Reporting Texas is a multimedia course designed to serve reportingtexas.com, the School of Journalism's open-content news website. Reporting Texas is dedicated to producing original and high-quality journalism for and about Central Texas, which is what we'll do for the 15 weeks of the semester, exclusively about sports. The class will function in partnership (and occasionally meet) with J361F: Reporting Texas: Working in a Newsroom of Our Own.

Student reporters in Sports for Reporting Texas will learn to think more deeply and critically about sports coverage in their communities. Through partnerships with The Dallas Morning News, the Austin American-Statesman and other Texas media, you'll have the opportunity to see your work in published form, improving your portfolios as you begin the crucial transition from college to career. Reporting Texas will let you practice your craft in real time for a real audience -- and have the best kind of fun in all of journalism: connecting with your local community in ways that matter. This semester will focus on the charter of Reporting Texas: telling the stories of "Hidden Texas," ones that shed new light on the people and places of Central Texas.

Objectives

Sports for Reporting Texas students will be expected to generate stories for our website, our partners and other professional news outlets.

In doing so, we'll define what constitutes good stories for our audience -- ones that you want to tell and that people want to hear, see and read. We'll think smartly about sports issues and topics, and the way you approach them. We'll operate in an authentic newsroom atmosphere, as individuals and parts of a group. We'll learn standard newsroom practices and procedures for filing and processing content. We'll identify the best tools for telling the

story you want to tell. We'll hone thinking, writing, editing and production skills. We'll study and adopt new techniques for adding professional-grade quality to your stories. We'll use social media. We'll consider the role of ethics in web-based storytelling as it relates to fairness, accuracy and truth in the digital age.

Course mechanics

Reporting Texas reporters will function as independent actors, each responsible for proposing and executing stories. This is a serious obligation. Accountability is critical to your personal success and the success of Reporting Texas. A news organization at any level is only as good as the parts that make up its whole. The quality of sports coverage on Reporting Texas depends on the quality of work you do for this course.

From this point forward, consider our time together as a journalist's professional workshop. We will think hard about why we do what we do and how we can do it best. You will be expected to pitch stories you want to tell, on the assumption that if you're interested in something, you can, by employing sound techniques, make other people interested, too. You'll also be assigned stories that need to be done – covering timely issues related to the University of Texas athletic department, for example.

Undergraduates will produce four spot, news feature or feature stories (print and/or multimedia). Graduate students will produce five.

First deadline: Week of September 15

Second story deadline: Week of October 13

Third story deadline: Week of November 3

Fourth story deadline: Monday, Dec. 1

Stories can be done as individuals or as teams. Team stories require us to determine what constitutes a fair and equitable division of labor among individuals. We will devote a portion of our class time to editorial meetings in which we decide how to proceed on both individual and team projects. Trust and transparency are important elements of any healthy community, especially a highly functional newsroom. We are, as they say, all in this together. Embrace it.

Story types

A spot news story concerns an event that just happened and might develop through several iterations until the story is complete. A spot story can run 200 to 500 words after editing. A news feature develops a fresh angle on a topic that has been prominent in the news, often applying a local angle to an event of national, or even international, scope. These stories

typically run 500 to 1,000 words. A feature is anything of human interest. Feature stories also run 500 to 1,000 words.

Class and lab

We'll open every Monday morning with a spirited and wide-ranging discussion of the previous weekend in sports news, from local happenings to international developments. Please arrive with talking points. Be aware of what happened in sports and how it was covered.

We'll spend Wednesday's class meetings on story pitches and a frank editorial discussion about stories in progress. Be warned. As Reporting Texas reporters, you'll be held to a high standard. Great stories begin with great ideas. Bad stories often arise from bad, poorly formed or clichéd ideas. You inevitably will have some bad ideas; that's OK, failure is an integral part of this collaboration, and indeed an important part of your training here. It is our job – our obligation as a newsroom community -- to identify bad ideas before they become bad stories.

Most of the work required for this class will take place outside of the classroom. That's where the stories are.

We sometimes will meet on Fridays in the Belo Center for New Media, where J361F students will be in lab for Reporting Texas. This will give our two courses a sense of identity and unity. More than that, we'll have the opportunity to talk and learn with other instructors, teaching assistants and editors-in-residence Fred Zipp and Kathy Warbelow, two former top editors at the Austin American-Statesman. You'll be notified no later than each Wednesday if we plan to meet with the other class or on our own.

Filing instructions

We will work exclusively in Microsoft Word. All editing will be done in Track Changes, which you'll find in the Tools dropdown.

Once a story is approved, you'll be required to write a brief and snappy budget line and email it to kevin.robbins@austin.utexas.edu. The instructor and the reporter will agree on a deadline for the story. We'll establish a flow of work. We'll complete the first edit (also called the "backfield" edit). The next step is the line edit. The final step is the top edit, which will be conducted by another editor.

You'll be responsible for working headlines. (Don't sigh. You might be surprised how well that helps your story focus.)

All story-related email communication should include the slug and the word "file" in the subject line. All other email correspondence should the word "memo" in the subject line. Add a space, then your last name, another space, and finally the assignment number (or, for memos only, a brief description of the subject).

If your last name is Smith, for example, and you're filing your first assignment, the slug should read:

File smith assign1

A routine memo would look like this:

Memo smith missed deadline

You are required to reply to your editor within 24 hours. When an editor sends you an email regarding fixes or questions, the wheels are in motion, and it's beyond important that you respond quickly. News goes stale if it sits on a shelf, awaiting an answer from a writer or producer. Tardiness is not a good habit in journalism.

We'll consider multimedia pieces for every story we do. For instance, Reporting Texas is fortunate to have a photo editor. A photo request is an essential element for this class and the profession beyond. You are responsible for ensuring your art is assigned in time to meet your deadline. Failure to provide such a request and follow up with the photo editors will make us look bad, and have a negative consequence on your story grade.

We'll also use Twitter, Facebook and other platforms to circulate our work.

Deadlines

Deadlines are sacrosanct in journalism. **Missed deadlines will result in a reduction of 33 points at each of the following benchmarks: 30 minutes, 12 hours and 24 hours.**

Grades

Final grades in this course will be calculated using the plus/minus system. All numbers are absolute, and will not be rounded up or down at any stage. Thus, a B- will be inclusive of all scores from 80.000 percent to 83.999 percent. The University does not recognize the grade of A+.

Our scale:

A	100 percent to 94 percent of 500 possible points
A-	93 percent to 90 percent
B+	89 percent to 87 percent
B	86 percent to 84 percent
B-	83 percent to 80 percent
C+	79 percent to 77 percent
C	76 percent to 74 percent
C-	73 percent to 70 percent

D+	69 percent to 67 percent
D	66 percent to 64 percent
D-	63 percent to 60 percent
F	59 percent and below

Assignments (100 points each, 400 points total) will constitute 80 percent of your final grade. Class, lab and newsroom participation (100 points) will make up the other 20 percent.

Grades for assignments will be calculated in three stages:

Backfield edit	60 points/percent
Line edit	20 points/percent
Top edit	20 points/percent

Assignments will be evaluated according to the assessment standards set forth in **Appendix I**.

Editing procedure

Stories go first to the backfield editor. The backfield editor will assess your story and provide comments usually within 48 hours. You must respond within 24 hours and file fixes as promptly as possible. Failure to communicate with your backfield editor in a timely manner will result in a 20-percent reduction in your backfield edit grade. Failure to respond within 48 hours will result in an additional 20-percent reduction, and so on each 24-hour cycle thereafter.

From the backfield your story proceeds to the line editor. The same rules above apply. The final edit is the top edit, after which your story is cleared for publication. The reporter needs to ensure all art (photos, graphics, etc.) for the story is prepared and ready.

Story pitches

Everyone will pitch three sharply focused story ideas on Friday, Sept. 5. A pitch is one or two sentences: What is the story about? Why is it important? Why now?

We'll keep a running Pitch List. You'll be expected to keep at least live pitches on the Pitch List at all times. Each week you will discard at least one old pitch and add at least one new pitch. When a pitch is approved, you'll write a smart budget line and file it to the backfield within 48 hours. That's when we'll talk about deadlines, art and other matters specific to the story. That officially initiates the story process. Start reporting!

Course schedule

Sports for Reporting Texas operates as a newsroom, meaning there is no firm schedule for discussing a particular academic topic on a particular day. Instead, we'll discuss certain topics

and developments as they fit the timing and rhythm of our work. That's why it's important to stay current on sports news, especially local sports news.

Project topics include:

Why practice journalism? Why practice it in a newsroom? What's the point of Reporting Texas?

How will stories be edited and what do your editors expect? What are the mechanics of our formal editing system?

What role does self-editing play?

How do you produce a pitch?

How do you write great ledes? Great nut graphs? Great endings?

How do we take publishable photos? What makes a good picture? How do we edit pictures?

What are the secrets of sharply focusing a story?

What is story architecture and why is it important? What's the difference between a story, an article, an essay and a column?

Why are multiple sources important? What is viewpoint switching and why is it necessary? How do we amplify internal debate in our stories? How do we find good sources?

How do we write headlines and photo captions?

What is the best way to incorporate social media into our work?

What do stories in print, video and podcasting share in common? How are they different?

How do we organize long-form stories?

What role should data-mining play in our work?

In thinking about ethics, is being "fair and balanced" enough? What are some key ethical challenges in our digital age?

What do you want out of your career? What's the best way to achieve those goals?

Why do people seem to like zebras so much? And listicles? And ice-bucket challenges?

#zebras

Appendix I: Assessment grid for production work

Backfield evaluation:

Work is focused, disciplined and easy to understand (10 points)

Work demonstrates appropriate level of research and reporting depth (10 points)

Work is written with clarity, economy, grace and simplicity (10 points)

Work is supported by range of appropriate sources (10 points)

Work includes proper grammar, spelling and punctuation (10 points)

Work demonstrates critical thinking about issues relevant to a full treatment of topic (10 points)

Line evaluation:

Reporter completed requested suggestions and fixes in timely manner (10 points)

Reporter has requested and/or completed art (10 points)

Top evaluation:

Reporter completed requested suggestions and fixes in timely manner (10 points)

Reporter has provided publication-quality art (10 points)

Appendix II: Flag and required University notices and policies

This course carries the **Writing Flag**. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Accommodations for religious holidays: By UT Austin policy, you must notify the instructor of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

A word about safety: Please refer to the recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security (<http://www.utexas.edu/safety>).

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.

Statement on Equal Educational Opportunity: The University of Texas at Austin is committed to an educational and working environment that provides equal opportunity to all members of the University community. In accordance with federal and state law, the University prohibits unlawful discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, including sexual harassment, age, disability, citizenship, and veteran status. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is also prohibited pursuant to University policy.