

Spring 2017 Unique	J332J Sports for Reporting Texas 08110
Class hours	9 a.m. to noon Fridays
Office hours	3 p.m. to 4 p.m. MWF, or by appointment
Room	CMA 4.144
Instructors	Kevin Robbins
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Course description

Sports for Reporting Texas isn't so much a college course as it is an actual professional journalism experience, resplendent in its soaring triumphs and nagging frustrations peculiar to our one-of-a-kind industry. You might look at our semester together in other ways: as practice, rehearsal, repetition, training, on-the-job training or simply a job. Jobs are neither always fun nor ever easy. But a job must be done – well and on time, if you want to keep one and have a chance at getting a better one. So that's what we'll do.

This is a course about real journalism. Our real journalism will go and live on ReportingTexas.com, the School of Journalism's open-content news website. Reporting Texas is dedicated to producing original, independent 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.

As reporters for Sports for Reporting Texas, you will learn to think more deeply and critically about sports coverage in your communities. You will learn to report thoroughly and smartly. You will learn and embrace the importance of meeting deadlines and staying on schedule. You will become better journalists – that is my promise. And 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.

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 an all-for-one, one-for-all team. We'll learn standard newsroom practices and procedures for filing and revising work. We'll identify the best methods for telling the story you want to tell. We'll hone thinking, writing, editing and rewriting skills. We'll study and adopt new techniques for adding a professional-grade finish to your stories. 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 undertaking. Personal accountability is critical to your 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 better – even 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 three news or feature stories (print and/or multimedia). Graduate students will produce four. All stories will include at least three voices.

First deadline: Week of Feb. 20

Second story deadline: Week of March 20

Third story deadline: Week of April 17

All deadlines in this course are 11:59 p.m. of the day assigned. 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.robbs@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 coordinate a photo request. We'll complete the first edit (also called the "backfield" edit). The next step is the line edit, done by a different editor at Reporting Texas. The final step is the top edit, which will be conducted by yet another editor. You'll marvel at the evolution of your work as it passes from level to level.

You'll be responsible for working headlines. 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 include 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 – about a story problem or, say, an expected absence -- would look like this:

Memo smith missed deadline

Important note about email etiquette: You are required to reply to your editor's email within 24 hours – at bare minimum, a simple acknowledgement that you have received the email and are preparing to get to work. 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 component is requested 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 with adversely affect your final story evaluation.**

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 400 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, 300 points total) will constitute 75 percent of your final grade. Class attendance and newsroom participation (100 points) will make up the other 25 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 – typically me. 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 (you and your backfield editor will determine the revision deadline based on the amount of work involved). 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 Monday, Sept. 5. A pitch is one or two sentences: What is the story about? Why is it important? Why now?

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.

Projected topics might 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 openings? Great nut graphs? Great endings?

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 audio 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?

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

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.