

# Journalism 380W: Writing & Reporting

## Fall 2015

**Classes: Tu/Thu 11-12:30**

**Location: CMA 4.152**

**Lab: F 12-3**

**Location: BMC 3.208**

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## Description

Writing and reporting class for professional-track graduate students. You will explore:

- Thinking critically about what news is.
- Grasping the mechanics of gathering news and interviews.
- News writing
- Spot news, hard news, news analysis, profiles, features, multimedia, narrative storytelling.
- Areas of reportorial interest and expertise, including “beats.”
- Ethics, fairness, diversity and accuracy.
- A special emphasis on “neglected” or “under-reported” stories.

## Expected Objectives/Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate a basic competence in identifying newsworthy stories.
2. Demonstrate a basic ability to gather news, interviews.
3. Demonstrate a basic ability to report and write news in a clear, accurate, ethical manner.
4. Demonstrates attention to diversity in sources, subjects and topics.
5. Create stories suitable for publication.

## **Assignments:**

**Editorial Budget Meeting:** We will have regular editorial budget meetings at which your story ideas are presented in class. You must come to class with a new story idea. Tell us the focus of your story, why it is newsworthy, and in what news venue the story could possibly appear. We will discuss the merits of your ideas. We will go around the room and you will tell us your story idea: Who you might interview, what data you might get, what multimedia might be available, where you could envision the story appearing.

## **Six (6) News Feature Stories:**

- Requirements for each of these six stories differ and are specified in the course schedule below.
- **Each** of these stories must have a multimedia element. This could be a data-driven chart, photograph, info-graphic, audio clip, video clip, Sound Slide or other multimedia content that complements and enhances your story.
- **Each of these** stories MUST BE accompanied by a 250-300 word “query letter” sent to an editor at a publication or news site appropriate for your story. Examples: **The Austin Chronicle, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Texas Observer, Texas Monthly, Austin American-Statesman, The Houston Chronicle, Dallas Morning News, Williamson County Sun**, etc.
- For each story you must interview a **minimum** of three sources; more are encouraged and welcomed. (Some stories will clearly require more sources; see specific requirements for each story in the Course Schedule).
- For each story, pay strict attention to **diversity** in terms of your sources. Interview people from different races, ethnicities, genders, etc.
- You must include, at the end of your story, the **contact information** (phone numbers and/or email addresses) of **anyone** you have interviewed. These people will be contacted by the Teaching Assistant to verify that interviews took place and were conducted in a professional manner.
- You must take a photo of **anyone** you interview in person. (If that is impossible, include an explanatory note with your story).
- Written assignments are to be submitted via email to the instructors and Teaching Assistant at least One Hour before the start of class on the date the story is due.
- In the email **subject line**, identify the assignment. Example: **Story 1**.
- Double-space all stories. Use 12-point type.
- At the top of your story please put your name, the date, the number of the story (which of the six stories it is), and a two-to-three word description of the story. Here is an example of what to put at the top of the story:

**Mike Smith**  
**Sept. 30, 2014**  
**Story 3**

**ACL Music Festival**

TIPS FOR DOING STORIES:

- LIST YOUR MULTIMEDIA ELEMENTS: Attach photographs or provide links to any audio/video you have gathered.
- At the end of your story, LIST THE CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE FOLKS YOU INTERVIEWED. Examples: A\$ap Rocky, 521-111-1111, ownthemusic@gmail.com; Regina Spektor, 622-222-2222, reginaspek@gmail.com

## **Grades:**

Are determined by:

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. Miss 4 classes without alerting the instructors or Teaching Assistant and you can be dropped down a full grade.

2. Evaluation, by professors 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.
- The university grading policy allows for uses of plusses and minuses.
- A misspelled name – of a person, institution, agency – can lead to a full drop in a grade level on your story

3. Deadlines. Miss your deadline and your highest potential grade on a story can drop one grade level.

## **Grade Grid:**

Grades will be tallied according to the following percentage guidelines:

- **Stories 1-5** are each worth **10 percent** of the final grade.
- **Story 6** is worth **30 percent** of the final grade.
- **Class exercises and participation** are worth **10 percent** of the final grade.
- **Lab exercises and participation** are worth **10 percent** of the final grade.

## **Office Hours and Editorial/Class/Career Consultation:**

Each student is encouraged to meet frequently with the instructors to discuss work, career ambitions, etc.

## **Texts:**

*The Associated Press Stylebook – latest edition (often available in used bookstores in Austin)*

**Religious 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.

**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](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.”*

## **Schedule** (\*subject to change)

Every class will begin with an “Editorial Budget Meeting:” Each of you will be asked to present WHAT YOU THINK is the “most interesting OR important news story” of the day.

If the story has already appeared in news outlets, then you will have to tell us HOW you will do a better, newer, different, extended, advanced version. Tell us how you will “advance” the story or perhaps “localize” it.

Tell us where you can envision submitting the story: What publication, news site, you would send the story to if you ever worked on it. It can be anywhere reasonable.

\*Be prepared to debate, critique and defend. We want to hear you speak up in this portion of the class – and hear your thoughts on any ethical issues, diversity issues, reporting tactics, writing tactics. You must show Critical Thinking in this process.

\*\*Be prepared to have several ideas: You will not be allowed to present **The Same Idea** as one of your colleagues.

\*\*\*Please come to class up to speed on the latest news because you will be asked about it. You must spend time, before every class, familiarizing yourself with the news. And you must be thinking of ways to “advance” the news – to do better, fresher, stories than ones already done.

*Aug. 27:*

- *Introductions*
- *Syllabus*
- *Professor Mary Bock visits at noon to talk about visual elements in your work*
- *The Reporter’s Road Map/Reporter’s Checklist/Assessment Grid*
- **ASSIGNED:** *Story 1, due Sept. 17. A minimum 750-word news feature story suitable for submission to a targeted publication. Interview at least three people. THE TOPIC MUST TOUCH ON A SOCIAL JUSTICE, SOCIAL SERVICE OR PUBLIC AFFAIRS ISSUE SUCH AS POVERTY, INJUSTICE, UNEMPLOYMENT, HOMELESSNESS, RACISM, ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS, CORRUPTION, UNFAIR TREATMENT, INEQUITABLE TREATMENT, SEXISM, ETC.*

*Aug. 28: Lab: Please meet at 12 p.m. at the Perry-Castaneda Library, Room 4.102 for a presentation by Brittany Deputy, the journalism coordinator/liaison for the University of Texas at Austin library system. She will guide you through the extensive research/database holdings available to J School students.*

Sept. 1:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Tell us what story you are working on for Story 1*
- *Critical Thinking Discussion: Basic news elements. Fairness, accuracy, what do you think is your responsibility to the reader, society? What is your Social Contract with the people you interview, write about, investigate, etc.?*

Sept. 3:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 1*
- *In-class: interview sessions*

Sept. 4: Lab

Sept. 8:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 1*
- *Basic Story structures: Inverted pyramid, news features, etc.*

Sept. 10:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 1*
- *Query letters*

Sept. 11: Lab

Sept. 15:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 1*
- *Basic Story structures: Inverted pyramid, news features, etc.*

Sept. 17:

- ***DUE:*** *Story 1, with your “query letter” to a targeted publication*
- *Critiques of Story 1*
- ***ASSIGNED:*** *Story 2, due Oct. 1. A minimum 750-word news feature story. Interview at least three people. THE TOPIC MUST TOUCH ON A SOCIAL JUSTICE, SOCIAL SERVICE OR PUBLIC AFFAIRS ISSUE SUCH AS POVERTY, INJUSTICE, UNEMPLOYMENT, HOMELESSNESS, RACISM, ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS, CORRUPTION, UNFAIR TREATMENT, INEQUITABLE TREATMENT, SEXISM, ETC.*

Sept. 18 – Lab

Sept. 22:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Tell us what you are doing for Story 2*
- *Diversity in news sources, stories*
- *In-class exercises in developing diversity source lists*

Sept. 24:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 2*

Sept. 25: *Lab*

Sept. 29:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 2*

Oct. 1:

- ***DUE:*** *Story 2, with your “query letter” to a targeted publication*
- *Critiques of Story 2*
- ***ASSIGNED:*** *Story 3, due Oct. 15. A minimum 750-word story touching on police or law enforcement matters. You must speak to police officers, sheriffs, FBI or Texas Department of Public Safety officers. Interview at least 3 people.*

Oct. 2: *Lab.*

Oct. 6:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Tell us what story you are doing for Story 3*
- *Instant Backgrounding on Breaking News stories, stories that need to go online ASAP*

Oct. 8:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 3*

Oct. 9: *Lab*

Oct. 13:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 3*

Oct. 15:

- ***DUE:*** *Story 3, with your “query letter” to targeted publication*
- *Critiques*
- ***Assigned:*** *Story 4. Due Oct. 29. 750-word minimum news feature of your choosing*

Oct. 16: Lab

Oct. 20:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Tell us what story you are doing for Story 4*
- *Subjective-vs-objective journalism*

Oct. 22:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 4*
- *Molly Ivins, Matt Taibbi, Hunter Thompson, et al.*

Oct. 23: Lab

Oct. 27:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 4*
- *Discussion: What are the Under-Reported stories in your backyard?*
- *Work in Class: Break into teams of two and identify, online, a burning issue in small cities or communities in Texas. Present budget line to class and a reporting blueprint.*

Oct. 29:

- ***DUE:*** *Story 4, with your “query letter” to a targeted publication*
- *Critiques*
- ***ASSIGNED:*** *Story 5. Due Nov. 12. Minimum 750-word story touching on a state agency in Texas. With a focus on finding an angle that will appeal to readers in the city, in the state and nationally. Interview at least 3 people.*

Oct. 30: Lab

Nov. 3:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Tell us what you are doing for Story 5*
- *New York Times and Austin American-Statesman political coverage & discuss how national/local media cover politics and even shift political pendulum*

Nov. 5:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 5*

Nov. 6: Lab

Nov. 10:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 5*
- *Investigative Journalism & Investigative Projects*
- *Handouts: Dallas Morning News “Re-Segregation In Texas”*

Nov. 12:

- **DUE:** *Story 5, with “query letter” to targeted publication*
- *Critiques*
- **ASSIGNED:** *Story 6. Due Dec. 3. The “Capstone” story for the semester. Write a 1,500-word news feature profile of an individual doing social justice work or social service work in Texas. Someone trying to address a significant problem in our society: a nonprofit organization (e.g., a food bank), a community activist (e.g., leader of a group trying to help homeless people), a pro bono lawyer (e.g., someone fighting for local environmental protections). Find someone who is doing work to provide 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 people 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 at least five people, including your profile subject.*

Nov. 13: Lab

Nov. 17:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Tell us who are you profiling for Story 6*

Nov. 19:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 6*
- *“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. 20: Lab -- use the time to report Story 6

Nov. 24:

- *Editorial Budget Meeting*
- *Update on Story 6*

Nov. 26: *No class -- holiday*

Nov. 27: *No lab – holiday*

Dec. 1:

- *Course review, remedial work*
- *No editorial budget meeting*
- *Update on Story 6*

Dec. 3:

- ***DUE:*** *Story 6, with “query letter” to targeted publication*
- *Course Instructor Survey*
- *Goodbyes*

Dec. 4: *No lab*

## **THE REPORTER’S ROAD MAP**

- 1. First: Find someone or something with inherent “news value” – a story that is 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 (including the gathering of DATA).**
- 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 thinking about DATA? How to get it and present it?**

**Are you taking careful notes and using a digital recorder and/or camera?**

**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, fair and ethical

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

4. The work exhibits diversity in sources and/or topics

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