

Reporting Latin America

Fall 2015

J347F (07985) – J395 38 (08220) – LAS 322 (39420) – LAS 381 (39650)
M - W 9:00AM –10:30AM | CMA 4.150

Instructor:
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Syllabus

Course Description

This course focuses on the work of foreign correspondents in Latin America as well as on a wide range of aspects of international reporting in general. It is both a conceptual and skills course, as it includes the critical analysis of how the region is covered by the United States media combined with practical exercises. On the one hand, reading materials, analysis of foreign correspondents' work, lectures, class discussions and guest speakers will help students to understand international reporting in general and, in particular, the coverage of the Western Hemisphere. On the other hand, there will be practical exercises and actual coverage of a specific beat: the media in Latin America, with an emphasis on journalism and Freedom of Expression issues in the region. That coverage will be published on the blog of the Moody College of Communication's Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and promoted in its social media networks.

Objectives

Through reading, lectures, class discussions, research papers and practical exercises the course aims to reach **four** main objectives:

- 1) To prepare students to work with international news coverage in traditional media jobs (such as foreign correspondents, foreign news desk editors) and non-traditional jobs, especially those created on digital platforms and dedicated to Latin American issues;
- 2) To give students knowledge about the work of foreign correspondents and the international news flow, including the role of news agencies and the impact of the Internet and digital communication on the coverage of global issues;
- 3) To develop specific knowledge about Latin America and the way it has been covered by American traditional news organizations and by newly created digital media outlets, including citizen media and social media;

4) To develop critical thinking skills in the analysis of international news coverage.

Structure

To reach those goals, the course is structured in three sections — monitoring, researching and practicing.

In the **monitoring section**, each student will follow the work of an American correspondent based in Latin America. The purpose of this section is to create an opportunity for each student to learn from these correspondents, to analyze their work, to compare dispatches with other American or Latin American media outlets, and to identify styles and patterns of news stories.

In the **research section**, the class will work with theoretical models of international reporting, international communication and global news flow while keeping the emphasis on Latin America. Topics in this section include globalization, global news agencies, the impact of digital technologies on the work of foreign correspondents, safety issues, and the history of American foreign correspondence.

In the **practicing section**, students will work as foreign correspondents in lab simulations, but will also have an opportunity to cover a real international news beat: the situation of the media and Freedom of Expression in Latin America. The class will produce stories about Latin American media that will be published on the [Knight Center for Journalism in the America's news blog](#). The practicing section is an intensive writing component.

Reading Material

The only book required for this class is *The Associated Press Stylebook*. During the lectures and discussions, however, books, such as the ones in the recommended on list below, will be referenced. Additional reading material will also be available on online and in handouts.

It is also required that all students keep abreast of current events in Latin America. This will be especially important for the simulated press conferences (SPCs), an essential part of the practicing section of this course. It will also be essential that students follow the news on Latin American media, especially the struggle of journalists for freedom of the press. It is indispensable to follow the news blog of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas.

Students are required to read at least one book, which may be the basis for the research paper. That book may come from the list below or be negotiated with the professor along with the topic of the paper.

Required book:

- *The Associated Press Stylebook*, current edition.

Recommended books:

- Alves, Rosental Calmon. *International Communication in People to People: an Introduction to Communications*, Eds. Kathleen Fearn-Banks and Anthony B. Chan, New York: American Heritage Custom Publishing, 1997.
- Hamilton, John Maxwell. [Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting](#), Louisiana State University Press, 2009.
- Hannerz, Ulf. [Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents](#), University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Gross, Peter and Kopper G., Gerd (editors). [Understanding Foreign Correspondence: a Euro-American perspectives of concepts, methodologies, and theories](#), Peter Lang Publishing, New York, NY, 2011.
- Knightley, Philip. [The First Casualty: The War Correspondent As Hero and Myth-Maker From the Crimea to Iraq](#), The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004
- Kovach, Bill and Rosentiel, Tom. [The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople should know and the public should expect](#), New York, 2001
- Pedelty, Mark. [War stories: The culture of foreign correspondents](#), Rutledge, 1995.

Global Cultures Flag:

This course carries the Global Cultures Flag. Global Cultures courses are designed to increase your familiarity with cultural groups outside the United States. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one non-U.S. cultural group, past or present. Learn more about the flags at the Center for Core Curriculum website at <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/ccf/flags>.

Assignments

This is an intensive writing class with the following assignments for each of its three sections:

Monitoring Paper

The monitoring section consists of a systematic observation and analysis of the work of selected U.S. foreign correspondents based in Latin America or who travel there regularly. Each student will be assigned to follow the work of a correspondent and will present oral and written reports on their journalistic performance. Students must research the correspondent's work on the Web and/or electronic databases such as Lexis-Nexis and Factiva.

The monitoring paper should be four- to six-pages long, typed in Times New Roman 12 (or an equivalent font), black ink and double-spaced. The paper hardcopy is due on the

day of the oral presentation in class. The student should select 20 to 25 examples of the correspondent's stories, preferably over the past several months, and carefully analyze them. An annotated copy (in paper or electronic) of the 20-25 stories must be turned in along with the paper. "Annotated copy" means that each story should have parts of it marked, highlighted and comments should be added. The reports must be well organized and follow academic standards. A good way to do this is to divide the paper into key topics like these four, which are just examples.

- **Content analysis:** Show what kind of subjects received most of the correspondent's attention. Gauge how often the stories are in-depth, superficial, hard news, features, or human-interest, political or economic events. Students must determine, to the best of their ability and based on their own research, if the story is contextualized in an appropriate way, and if there is any reason to suspect bias or prejudice.
- **Text analysis:** Try to break down the correspondent's writing structure. Identify the most frequent kinds of leads and if the correspondent follows patterns or models. Check if a certain hierarchy is given to the pieces and whether narrative or hard news style is more common. The ultimate goal of the text analysis is to help you understand the correspondent's writing techniques so that you can learn from them and share your findings with the class.
- **Comparative analysis:** Compare the correspondent's work with that of other reporters in the region. This is useful especially with hard news stories, when students can compare different dispatches about the same event. Which coverage was better? Why? What characteristics did you find in each report? Which one gives the American reader a better context to understand what happened? It will be a plus if you compare the American coverage with local Latin American media using the Internet.
- **Assignment analysis:** What kinds of stories are more frequent? How many countries are covered by this particular correspondent on a regular basis? Which subjects have dominated the correspondent's agenda? Are there issues in which the correspondent's performance is clearly better or worse?
- **Social media and multimedia:** Is the correspondent using Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites to reach out to the audience or finding sources or information? Does the correspondent create multimedia projects, experimenting with new narratives and interactive news packages?

The monitoring papers will be presented in class and the hardcopy should be turned in immediately after the oral presentation.

Research Paper

This assignment will serve as the final paper, an opportunity to summarize the semester, reflecting each student's class notes from lectures, discussions and readings, or to go more in-depth on a particular topic of the class. It is mandatory that each student read at least one book that may be the basis for the central issue of the research paper. Other sources must also be cited (it is not a "book report"). In addition to the course's overview, each paper will need to have a clear and specific focus that will be previously approved by the professor.

Students registered for J347F and LAS 322 should turn in a paper of around 1,500 words and the J395 38 and LAS 381 should turn in a paper of around 2,500 words.

Note that this is an academic paper, not a news story. You must follow an academic style to organize and write your paper, following general guidelines that will be discussed in class. The papers are individual assignments, must be written following academic style (i.e. APA, Chicago, MLA) and must contain bibliographic references.

The research papers will be presented in class during the last week of class, and hardcopies should be turned in immediately after the oral presentation.

Practicing exercises

There are two kinds of assignments in this section: Simulated Press Conferences (SPCs) and blog posts. The SPCs are stories based on a simulation of a U.S. foreign correspondent working in Latin America, so they are lab exercises, not real, not for publication. The blog posts are real reporting of Latin American issues related to the media and freedom of expression, which will be submitted for publication in the blog of the [Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas](#). There will be four SPCs and three blog posts.

In SPCs, students play the role of an American foreign correspondent in a Latin American country while the professor plays the role of a newsmaker in that country. Occasionally, a guest speaker may be interviewed by the class in lieu of the regular SPC. In preparation, the professor will provide background information about the interviewee, but students are also expected to be informed about current events in Latin America that have been covered by the international media.

Students will also be assigned to write at least three blog posts for the Knight Center's blog, and will be encouraged to participate in the center's social media efforts and other activities. The blog posts can be an aggregation/*curation* of a topic, with abundant links and credit to the sources, but it should also include original content, which could be an analysis or interpretation. It would be even better if the posts result entirely from original reporting. Students could, for example, use Internet communication features, such as Skype or email, to conduct interviews with sources in Latin America, including the correspondents they are studying for the monitoring section.

Each student is expected to provide a hardcopy of all stories. Hardcopies will be turned in to either the professor or the teaching assistant, with a suggested headline and written in Times News Roman 12 or equivalent font, double-spaced. Each SPC story and blog post should be around 500 words.

Each story or post will be edited and graded, but students will have an opportunity to revise it once. The revision is mainly for the learning process, but it can also result in a grade improvement.

The students are also encouraged to submit videos or audio files in lieu of a written blog post. However, this must be done after approval by the professor.

Deadlines are sacred! Late stories will not be accepted. **No story by the deadline means a zero** for that particular assignment (SPC or blog post). Exceptions may be considered, but must be based on documented excruciating circumstances.

Attendance and full participation in the class activities are mandatory. Any unexcused absence can affect the student's final grade. In respect to the professor and other students, all cell phones should be in silence mode and students should not text or be distracted by other activities or electronic devices during class.

Grades

There will be no exams in this class. The final grade will be a combination of the result of the work in the three sections of the course. All the work will be graded from 0 to 100 and the final grade will be calculated based on the following proportions:

Monitoring paper: 20%
SPCs: 30%
Blog posts: 30%
Research paper: 20%

The **final letter** grade will be calculated based on the following scale:

A 94-100
A- 90-93.9
B+ 86-89.9
B 83-85.9
B- 80-82.9
C 70-79.9
F 0-69.9

University Honor Code

All students are expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code, which reads: "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."

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

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

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.

For the University's official definition of scholastic dishonesty, see Section 11-802, Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities.

<http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi08-09/app/gi08.appc03.html#sec-11-802-scholastic-dishonesty19>