

MeJo 253 “Reporting: Spring 2018 Syllabus

Paul O’Connor, lecturer
MeJo 253.002 Tu-TH 8 a.m.-9:15 a.m., CA 268
Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:30 - 2 p.m. in CA 392, and by appointment.
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School Requirement: All 253 students must attend a local government information session on Friday, January 12, at 3 p.m. in Carroll 33. Session is not likely to last more than 90 minutes. This is a School mandate! If you will have a schedule conflict with another class, you must demonstrate that to the instructor before the session. Otherwise, there are no excused absences. An unexcused absence will lead to a 10 pt. markdown on your first paper.

The schedule of assignments is attached to the end of this document.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Public affairs reporting can include almost anything that deals with appropriation, distribution, handling or expenditure of public funds. It includes reports on public and quasi-public agencies, organizations and institutions. It also includes reports on the community organizations affected by public institutions. Under the umbrella of public affairs reporting are city, county and state governments; local authority districts (e.g. OWASA, Triangle Transit Authority, Airport Authority, etc.); politics; elections; the courts; schools; urban affairs; the environment; and social areas such as minority and women’s affairs, consumer affairs, business, public affairs, etc.

Prerequisite: MeJo 153.

Course Description: Exercise in news gathering and interviewing and in writing news for print and new media.

Required Textbooks:

The Associated Press Stylebook
JOMC School Stylebook, online

Recommended Textbooks:

Yopp, Jan J. and Haller, Beth, *An Introduction to Reporting: A Beginning Journalist’s Guide*.
Kraft, Nicole, *Always Get The Name Of The Dog*. (available on iTunes/iBooks.)

Course Structure: Class discussion and labs.

Discussions will focus on (1) Reporting and interviewing techniques and skills, and (2) institutional structures of government, private organizations, businesses, community organizations and reporting topics.

Lab will focus on completing reporting assignments on deadline, editing, and discussion of beat reporting, student work and any issues that come up on beats. Frequent discussion of the news, too.

Students also are required to complete:

1. A beat report that outlines and evaluates his/her beat.
2. 10 news assignments/stories.
3. A larger, in-depth project/story.

II. REPORTING ASSIGNMENTS (80 Percent of the Final Grade)

Requirements: Students are required to cover a beat that will generate their weekly written assignments. That is, points 1 and 2 above.

All stories will make use of a combination of sources, including public documents, interviews, library and Internet research, background info and objective reportorial observation.

All stories must use and quote at least **THREE HUMAN SOURCES**, who must be listed at the end of each story including **FULL NAME, TITLE and CONTACT INFORMATION**. Failure to list sources will drop your grade by 10 **POINTS**. Repeated failure to provide contacts will make instructor very suspicious. You are also expected to use additional sources, such as documents and public records.

Speakers and/or participants at events may **NOT** be counted as a required individual source unless the source is interviewed separately before or after an event. In their attribution of the source, students should designate that the quote came from an interview. When students conduct an email interview, they should note that the source commented in an email interview.

Students should strive to add different sources in follow-up stories or subsequent stories on their beats. Repeated sources should only be used when relevant or necessary. Student sources also don't count towards the required three **UNLESS** the student is quoted because he or she is also part of the community. Also, student sources are allowed on beats where the professor has OK'd them. Be sure to read the school's policy on sources, off-the-record and attribution in your UNC Stylebook.

The instructor has prepared a separate document on the various acceptable beats. "MeJo 253 Beats" can be found under Course Resources on Sakai.

Beat Assignments: The weekly assignments and project piece will be written from the student's beat.

Beat Report: The Beat Report is due **Thursday, Jan. 25**, at the beginning of class (see Schedule of Assignments). Students will provide complete information on the questions asked in the "Beat Report Template" available under Course Resources in Sakai. The report outlines your beat, its chief officials and/or newsmakers, elected or appointed bodies. It lists news stories likely to break during the semester.

Students can download information found on the Internet, but they must speak to sources and write what they learn about the beat and provide **BACKGROUND** on their sources. Students should provide information on when and where important meetings/events will be held.

Weekly Story Assignments: Each story will be 500-700 words in length with no fewer than **THREE SEPARATE HUMAN SOURCES**, as stated above. The upper word limit can be waived with instructor's permission. The more sources a writer uses, the better the story usually is. **And that improves grades.** A source quoted from a public meeting counts only if also interviewed.

Weekly assignments are due on Thursdays at the time designated by the instructor.

Students can bank stories. That is, they can write two stories in one week if they want to get ahead on assignments. Banked stories must be fairly fresh and not out of date. Students must check with instructor on these.

Mechanical Requirements: Reporting assignments must be 500-700 words long, prepared on 8 1/2- by 11-inch paper on a 60-space line with one-inch margins. They must be typed, **doubled-spaced**, copyedited with traditional copy marks and symbols, and submitted on or before the deadline. Students should indent new paragraphs and should **NOT** enter an additional space between paragraphs.

Deadline: The School puts considerable emphasis on deadlines. Therefore, MeJo 253 has very strict deadline standards. All stories must be submitted by the Thursday deadline unless other arrangements are made. They may be printed during class.

Stories are considered late when not submitted at the assigned time and will be reduced by 10 points. You **MUST** come to class and submit your story. Sending a story by email on Thursday and not appearing in the lab is unacceptable, and your story will be considered **LATE** if you do this without permission. Stories are to be submitted on paper. Any story submitted by email runs the risk of being electronically lost. No matter how that happens, it is the student's responsibility. If the instructor allows a story to be submitted by email, the student takes all responsibility for

whatever goes wrong in cyberspace, including instructor error. If a student seeks permission to submit a story by email, that student acknowledges full responsibility for that story arriving on time.

Stories will suffer a second 10-point penalty if not turned in at the BEGINNING of the following Tuesday's session. That's a total of 20 points deducted if a story is submitted after Tuesday at the start of class and before the conclusion of that student's Thursday lab. Stories submitted more than a week late, that is after the conclusion of the Thursday lab one week after it was due, will be docked 50 points.

Final project (enterprise) stories will be docked 20 points if not submitted by the end of lab on the due date. If a student does not submit an enterprise story by the deadline, he or she must discuss plans with the instructor to submit one later. In the event that an enterprise piece is not submitted by the start of class on the final day of class, the instructor will assign it a zero. Even if a paper is assigned a zero, the student must submit an acceptable enterprise piece to gain academic credit for the course. The latter is unlikely to be necessary, however. The student will likely have failed the course at that point.

The instructor receives stories sequentially. A student cannot skip a due date because a story is late. For example, if a student fails to submit the fifth story but submits a story on the due date for number six, then that submission is considered story five and it is penalized accordingly. Story six is now late and the clock starts ticking on its penalty.

Prof. O'Connor will further reduce a student's semester grade by a partial grade when that student submits three or more late papers. For example: A student with an average in the C range for the semester but three late papers will get a C minus.

III. PUBLISHING

The School encourages its students to publish as many stories as possible during their collegiate careers. In this class, there is no publishing requirement, but the instructor strongly encourages you to find a market for your stories. He suggests that you explore possibilities with The DTH, other campus publications and even commercial publications in the region. The instructor is willing to work with any students who are seeking to get their work published. DTH students can coordinate their reporting for the paper with stories required for this class.

IV. FINAL PROJECT (20 PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE)

Students are required to write a 1,500-1,800-word, comprehensive story that is developed from the beat covered during the semester.

Each student will discuss the topic for this assignment with the instructor during a scheduled appointment after Spring Break.

The assignment requires the use of at least SIX HUMAN SOURCES, each of whom will be identified by name, title and contact information at the end of the story. All source rules for regular weekly stories apply. The instructor will not accept an enterprise story that does not have a source list.

The deadlines for the various MeJo 253 sections differ. Pay no attention to deadlines issued by other, kinder and gentler instructors.

Stories should not exceed the 1,800-word requirement without the instructor's approval.

V. GRADING

Published Articles: Students are encouraged to write stories that have the possibility of being published by a local news outlet, or elsewhere, but stories will not receive extra credit for being published.

Prof. O'Connor provides a numerical grade that is a translation from the more typical letter grade with plusses or minuses. He takes a number of things into consideration.

The first is the challenge the student faced in reporting the story. Meeting coverage will get a much lower grade than a story gleaned from public records. A student who takes the obvious, worn-out angle to a story – merchants lose money on Homegrown Halloween, for example – won't get as good a grade as a student who finds a fresh angle. Originality is key here. We're looking for enterprise on the student's part. Students who continually return to the same story will need to have strong, fresh angles to it. Rehashing what was reported last week doesn't work.

News is important. That's what we're writing. Students who find the news angle to their stories fare better. Remember the news values and see how they apply.

Strong sources also warrant higher grades than weak ones. A survivor of a cancer operation is a much stronger source than a random student asked to comment on the situation in Tyrgistan. (The professor went to journalism school himself, remember, tried to interview housemates and didn't get away with it, either.) And sources should come from various sides of the story. Student school beat stories, for example, have a tendency to quote a teacher, an administrator and a public relations person. They are all on the same side of that story. A good reporting student will find parents, community activists and students who may have a completely different view of the same issue. The number of sources also matters. The more the merrier. Three sources is a minimum, not a cause for celebration. And students should be looking around for new sources all the time.

Students are graded on their reporting and writing skills. Errors of style, punctuation and grammar cost a lot of points.

Stories are due at the end of the period. Students have until the following lecture session to turn in a late, missed assignment. It will, however, be docked as noted above in the deadline section of this syllabus.

Students who will be late with an assignment must notify the instructor in advance and explain why. Events do happen that interfere with completing a story, such as illness or a death in the family. Be aware, however, that being untruthful to the instructor as to the reason for your missing deadline is an HONOR CODE offense and could lead to your dismissal from the university. Your instructor finds lies about a death in the family particularly offensive.

Grading for this class is as follows: A = 93 or above, A- 90-92; B+ 88-89; B 83-87; B- 80-82; C+ = 78-79; C 73-77; C- 70-72; D+ 68-69; D 60-67.

Final Grade

As stated above, the weekly assignments constitute 80 percent of the final grade, the final project 20 percent. Prof. O'Connor adheres to a strict numerical accounting for the final grade. **Students cannot expect to be elevated even 1/100th of a point so they qualify for a higher semester grade.**

Prof. O'Connor makes three exceptions. He fails a student for the semester when that student has three failing grades on the regularly weekly assignments and/or enterprise story. As noted above, he also reduces semester grades from the semester average for students who submitted three or more late papers or who had unexcused absences. Students who have at least three full A's on the writing assignments may be elevated beyond their strict numerical average if they also do not have a writing grade below B-.

During class and office hours, students can work individually with Prof. O'Connor. He will read their stories (drafts) point out their errors, suggest re-writes and new approaches to reporting. Students should avail themselves of this opportunity to have their papers improved before they submit their final versions for grading. All students are expected to participate in these meetings at least several times during the semester, preferably every week.

Students must avoid conflicts of interest. If your mother is the director of social services, you can't cover that beat. Students should also understand that they are writing objective news in this course, not their opinions. Prof. O'Connor gets particularly sarcastic when he comes across opinionated reporting.

Student attendance is essential. A student who merely appears in class on Thursday to submit a paper will be docked 10 points. A student who misses a Tuesday class will be docked 10 points on the next paper. Absences may be excused, but students should generally understand that they are expected to be in class every single class period. Prof. O'Connor will not

abide unexcused absences. A student with more than two absences will be docked further on the final grade, as much as a full semester grade. Be warned that the instructor is very serious about this.

VI. HONOR CODE.

At UNC, we expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Students may be allowed to work together on some stories. The instructor will explain and clarify under which particular, limited circumstances such cooperation will be appropriate and acceptable in the course. On all other assignments, you are expected to do your own work and abide by the Honor Code of the University. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html>.

Plagiarism is an increasing problem on this and other college campuses. You are to cite your sources appropriately and according to the assignment. The Code of Student Conduct states that expulsion or suspension can result from "(a)cademic cheating, including (but not limited to) unauthorized copying, collaboration or use of notes or books on examinations, and plagiarism (defined as the intentional representation of another person's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own). If you have questions, ask your instructor.

Students are reminded that their failure to do all of their own interviews, research, note-taking, documentation, writing and reporting is a violation of the University Honor Code and could result in disciplinary action by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

If you are writing a story that you plan to submit for class in conjunction with another publication, the DTH for example, you must do all of the work that appears in the version you hand to your instructor. That means you cannot accept any help from your editor at that publication for the work you submit for class. You may take an assignment from that editor, but the editor's preparation of a story memo for you or the editor's handing of a press release to get you started constitutes unacceptable assistance.

For more information on plagiarism, go to The Writing Center's Plagiarism site at: <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.html>.

Keep in mind that your instructor is a veteran news reporter who spent his career finding cheats and liars in the political world, and that powerful search engines have been designed to help instructors catch plagiarism. Don't try your luck.

Seeking Help:

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness. Do not wait for the professor to contact you regarding poor performance, missing or late papers.

Diversity:

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Special needs: If you have any disability or other special situation that might make it difficult to meet the requirements described above, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If you have not done so already, you should also contact the Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (AR&S) at 919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu.

ACCREDITATION

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are

designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the last six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

The proficiencies noted below are those that apply particularly to this course.

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Schedule of Assignments

Spring 2018

Beat Report due: Thursday, January 25, 2018.

Weekly Stories due: Every Thursday beginning on February 1 and ending on April 12. No stories due Thursday, March 15.

Final Project/Enterprise Story due: Tuesday, April 24.

The final exam period is Tuesday, May 1, at 8 a.m. in our classroom. It will be used to review and assess the final projects.