

MEJO 753 Reporting & Writing News – Fall 2019

T 6-8:45 p.m. | Carroll 340A

Instructor: Kate Sheppard

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Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday 11 a.m.-1 p.m., or by appointment

Introduction

The goal of this class is to teach you not just how to report and write, but to think critically about how we do it, why we do it, and who we do it for. This will include discussion of ethics, platforms, funding models, and our role in the broader public discourse.

It's an exciting, horrifying, exhilarating and rapidly changing time to be a journalist. My goal is to get you to think for yourself, to think on your feet, and to prepare you to work in a variety of environments. We will also have a segment on audio journalism with Adam Hochberg to help you learn how to adapt your reporting and writing to other formats.

Each of you will pick a beat that is of interest to you personally and to the broader public. You will learn how to develop sources on your beat, uncover new information, advance public knowledge, and provide context and clarification for the news. We will spend time on the basics -- inverted pyramid, AP Style, interview techniques. We will spend a lot of time talking about the current events happening around us, and how journalists are doing when it comes to covering them. We will also spend time talking about thematic concerns like freedom of the press, libel, and the role of journalism in the broader society.

One point to highlight early in this syllabus: This is a living document, and I will be updating and making additions/changes throughout the term. I will always inform you of any adjustments, but please bookmark this page and come back to it regularly.

The four core tenants we will focus on:

- *Writing* — Grammar and spelling; ability to tell a story well, using of quotes, anecdotes and descriptive detail; use of active voice and strong verbs; ability to write ledes that are compelling and get to the point; ability to write tightly and organize information in logical, compelling sequence; recognizing how long a story needs to be.
- *Reporting* — Enterprise and diligence; ability and eagerness to find promising angles; ability to identify the people, details, and documents that build your story; cultivating strong sources; understanding the need to include multiple viewpoints and stakeholders.
- *Speed, efficiency, and accuracy*— Knowing how to work on deadline; ability and willingness to manage more than one assignment at a time; skill with basic factual information such as names, addresses, dates and figures.

- *Judgment* — Commitment to fairness and understanding multiple points of view; ability to discern between facts and beliefs; respect for diversity in all its forms; knowing not just how to report the news, but why and for whom.

Potential beats

Environment, Health care, Immigration, Education, Economic inequality, Race/racism, Housing, Elections, LGBTQ+ rights

You are grad students, so I expect you to get beyond campus and the city of Chapel Hill. You can look further out into Orange County, Durham, Raleigh, and at the state level. I encourage you to find local stories that speak to larger state and national trends and will be of interest beyond our region. If transportation is an issue, we can work out a beat that will still meet the requirements but provide you some flexibility. I want you to get some published clips for your portfolios by the end of the semester, so aim high!

Required Reading

Elements of Journalism, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel

The Journalist and The Murderer, by Janet Malcom

Young People and the Future of News, by Lynn Schofield Clark and Regina Marchi

The Oxygen of Amplification, by Whitney Phillips ([available free online](#))

AP Stylebook (you can buy a copy or [subscribe to use the online version](#))

Optional To Purchase (I will provide specific chapters)

On Writing Well, by William Zinsser

Merchants of Truth: The Business of News and the Fight for Facts, by Jill Abramson

In addition to the assigned readings, I expect you to be engaged consumers of news in many forms. You should subscribe to at least one national newspaper (i.e. New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal) and one high-quality periodical (The New Yorker, The Economist, The Atlantic, Time) in addition to what you watch on TV/read online/listen to on the radio or podcasts.

Assignments

News discussion leadership -- Each of you will be responsible for leading two news discussions this semester. You will need to select three articles on a subject currently in the news (ideally, the same or adjacent topics; you can dig into past coverage of the topic too) and share them with the class by 6 p.m. on the Friday before your assigned week. In class, you should give a short (<5 minutes) description of why you picked the topic/stories. You can highlight both good and bad examples of news coverage and any ethical or style concerns you might have. You should also have at least three questions ready to prompt discussion with your peers for ~20 mins.

Short breakdown the types of story assignments you will have:

- Covering speeches, public meetings, and press conferences
- Covering public opinion, through “(wo)man on the street” reporting and/or survey data
- A news story built around a published report
- An “explainer” on a topic of relevance to current news
- A profile of a candidate or public figure
- Coverage of a cultural trend relevant to public life
- An audio story of ~2 minutes
- Developing and executing an enterprise story on your beat, with multimedia component
- Developing a social and distribution plan for your enterprise story

Weight of assignments in final grade:

- News discussion leadership -- 10%
- Beat doc and pitches -- 10%
- Attendance and in-class participation -- 10%
- Stories -- 50%
- Final project - 20%

Attendance

You should approach this class as you would a job. Only a death in your immediate family or an illness that requires seeing a doctor will be accepted as an excused absence. Since this class meets once a week, only one unexcused absence is permitted. For each unexcused absence after that, you will lose points from your final grade. If you need to be late for any reason, please let me know in advance -- otherwise I will treat that as an unexcused absence as well.

Late Assignments

This is the news -- we live and die by deadline. Your grade will be significantly docked for missing a deadline. If you think you are going to miss a deadline for reasons outside of your control, please let me know as soon as possible so we can discuss how to address it.

Assignment Grade Scale

- A (90 and above) - Could be published with little to no major editing
- B (80-89) - Could be published with moderate editing
- C (70-79) - Requires significant editing to be punishable
- D (60-69) - Not publishable -- poorly conceived, written, or sourced.
- F (below 60): Did not complete, or completed with major factual or ethical problem.

Graduate Student Final Grade Scale

- H - High Pass - Clear Excellence
- P - Pass - Entirely Satisfactory Graduate Work
- L - Low Pass - Inadequate Graduate Work
- F - Fail

Honor Code

I expect students to conduct themselves 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.

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with me. 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.

Diversity

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 20152016 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 Accommodations

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

ACEJMC Core Values and Competencies

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.](#)

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. Specifically, this course is designed to help you:

- Understand and apply the principles of freedom of speech and press, including the right to monitor and criticize power.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.

- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the professions, audiences and purposes we serve.
- Critically evaluate your own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

Week-by-week schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Deliverables
August 20	Introduction to course	Syllabus	In-class writing activity
August 27	Writing basics - Style, ledes, and formats	<i>On Writing Well</i>	Beat docs due
Sept. 3	Reporting basics - Interviews, quotes, organization	<i>Elements of Journalism</i>	First planned event story due
Sept. 10	Research basics - database, library and online	<i>Elements of Journalism</i>	Second planned event story due
Sept. 17	Libel and other legal concerns		Public opinion story due
Sept. 24	Press freedom and FOIA		Research story due
Oct. 1	Source development and relations	<i>The Journalist And The Murderer</i>	Explainer story due
Oct. 8	Audiences and emerging technologies in news	<i>Merchants of Truth, Chapter, Young People and the Future of News</i>	
Oct. 15	What do we cover, and how?	<i>The Oxygen of Amplification</i>	Profile due
Oct. 22	Audio fundamentals and writing for the ear w/ Adam Hochberg		Pitches for enterprise story due
Oct. 29	Audio tech review, podcasting, and interviewing for radio w/ Hochberg		Trend story due
Nov. 5	Pitch feedback and selection		Pitches for audio due
Nov. 12	Social, promotion, and the reporter as brand	<i>Young People and the Future of News</i>	
Nov. 19	Review audio (2 mins) - Enterprise pitches		Audio story due
Nov. 26	Enterprise work/ trouble-shooting		First draft of enterprise story due

Dec. 3	So you're becoming a journalist ...		Second draft of enterprise story due
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Final exam

Tuesday, Dec. 10, 7 p.m.

20% of final grade

Your final enterprise story will be due in class. You will present your article and multimedia element(s), and discuss your plan for social promotion and audience development.