

MEJO 553 Advanced Reporting Spring 2020

Instructor: Eric Ferkenhoff
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Rm. Carroll 368; M/W – 3:30 p.m.-4:45 p.m.
Office Hours: By appointment.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Course Description: In-depth examination of various issues, from education to government, the environment, gender equality, justice and business, using a variety of media to tell compelling investigative or explanatory stories.

Required Textbooks:

The Associated Press Stylebook
Strunk & White's Elements of Style
Finding the Story: James B. Stewart

Recommended Reading:

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 online)
Daily news consumption, including top national and local news outlets, as well as social media that fits your topic.

Course Structure: Class discussion and labs.

Discussions will focus on advanced reporting, FOIA and interviewing techniques and skills, and source-building.

Aside from lecturers, this class will run very much like a newsroom, with editorial meetings where we dive into angles of ongoing stories and discuss memos (described later), work the phones, research and discuss reporting techniques that could/should yield volumes of information from sources.

Students also are required to complete:

1. A beat report on the 6-10 important issues facing your topic or issue, 10 influential people in the area, including government or organization officials, as well as important lobbying groups.
2. Four timely stories of roughly 2,000 words, or the equivalent in other media (we'll discuss because each case can vary).

3. In-class updates on legislative developments and public-awareness efforts dealing with the topic.
4. A final, multimedia project that acts as a capstone to your reporting. (We'll discuss details, depending on primary media being used.)

REPORTING ASSIGNMENTS

Requirements: All stories will center on a central theme, so pick yours wisely – usually a topic you're passionate about but may fall outside your comfort zone.

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 SIX HUMAN SOURCES, who must be listed at the end of each story including FULL NAME, TITLE. 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.

In attribution of sources, 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. UNC-CH students may not be sources for these stories except in cases where their use has been cleared with the instructor ahead of deadline. Be sure to read the school's policy on sources, off-the-record and attribution in your UNC Stylebook.

Week-by-Week Schedule:

The following will be discussed the first day of class:

Reporting memos – short, to-the-point memos detailing where you're at in your stories – are due by midnight every Friday.

Due date for your beat report is Jan. 18 (midnight)

First full story is due on January Feb 1; Second story due March 1; Third story due April 5; Final Project due April 26. (Due dates could be subject to change depending on growth in the class on reporting, writing or production techniques, etc.)

Jan 8: Introductions, cover syllabus, talk about demands and expectations of the class.

Jan. 13/15: Stephanie Brown on the 16th. On the 14th, cover explanatory news writing and production; first editorial meeting and start researching for beat report and first story.

Jan. 20 (MLK Day; no class) Jan. 22: Guest Lecture from John Robinson on narrative writing. READ: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2016/07/23/numb/>

Jan. 27/29: My story and work in the field; editorial meeting and lab

Feb. 3/5: Investigative reporting, writing and production; editorial meeting and lab work on first story.

Feb. 10/12: FOIA lecture; lab work on FOIAs for stories.

Feb. 17/19: Uncovering sources; editorial meeting, lab work

Feb. 24/26: Source building, keep them, never emptying your notebook, lab work

March 3/5: Understanding institutions of power; lab work, research.

March 10/12: Spring Break

March 17/19: Weaving data into stories; lab work

March 24/26: Using stats in stories; editorial meeting

March 31/April 2: Building out the human element, narrative; lab work

April 7/9: Understanding nonprofit organizations, groups, Forms 990; lab work on final.

April 14/16: Understanding demographics, guest lecture; editorial meeting.

April 21/23: Using Social Media to track issues, subjects, sources; lab work on final; last day of class.

Final project due May 6 following the exam period.

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 7 at 8 a.m. in Carroll Rm. 268.

Deadline: The School puts considerable emphasis on deadlines. Therefore, MEJO 553 has very strict deadline standards. All stories must be submitted by the deadline unless other arrangements are made. All stories must be emailed by deadline – in a Word document – to eferk@icloud.com.

Stories are considered late when not submitted at the assigned time, and the grade will be reduced by 10 points.

Stories will suffer a second 10-point penalty if not turned in at the BEGINNING of the following class session. That's a total of 20 points deducted. Stories submitted more than a week late will be docked 50 points.

Final stories will be docked 20 points if not submitted by midnight on the last day of class. 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.

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 or nationally. The instructor is willing to work with any students who are seeking to get their work published. The instructor has some ideas and will discuss them with individual students once beats are assigned.

GRADING

Students in this class are expected to produce top-quality reporting. When initial drafts do not indicate such a result, students will be told to do more reporting and to rewrite.

I provide a numerical grade that is a translation from the more typical letter grade with pluses or minuses. He takes a number of things into consideration.

The first is the challenge the student faced in reporting the story. A student who takes the obvious, worn-out angle to a story 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 before doesn't work.

News is important. That's what we're writing. Students must find the news angle to their stories. Remember the news values and see how they apply. Stories should be timely, but it is best if they can survive several news cycles, that is, it is best if they have a shelf life of several days or more, so we have time to publish outside.

Strong sources also warrant higher grades than weak ones, and sources should come from various sides of the story. The number of sources also matters. The more the merrier. Six sources is the minimum. And students should be looking around for new sources all the time. For some stories, students will want to get out of the political environment to find the N.C residents who are affected by the policies before the lawmakers, for example, the mother being affected by a change in Medicaid coverage, the land owner near a coal ash repository, the small business owner who will pay a new tax.

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

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.

Grading for this class is as follows: A = 95 or above, A- 90-94; B+ 88-90; B 85-87; B- 80-84; C+ = 78-79; C 73-77; C- 70-72; D+ 68-69; D 60-67

Final Grade: Each story/component is equal to 20 percent of your grade, with the final making up 30 percent and participation equaling 10 percent. Attendance is mandatory, and points will be docked for participation if you fail to show (unless excused for reporting purposes).

I adhere 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.** He deviates from that policy if a student has been repeatedly late with his or her stories, reducing the final grade by as much as a full grade. He also raises the final grade for the student who is consistently very good and who excels on several stories.

During class and office hours, students can work individually with me. I will read their stories (drafts) to point out 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, preferably every week.

Students must avoid conflicts of interest. Students should also understand that they are producing objective news in this course, not their opinions.

Student attendance is essential. Don't miss class. You will be docked every time you do.

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>.

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.

ABSENCES (according to University policy):

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

- 1. Authorized University activities*
- 2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office \(EOC\)](#)*
- 3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office \(EOC\)](#).*

ACCREDITATION

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media'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.

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 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 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.