

MEJO 541: Business Reporting, Fall 2021

Meeting time: 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. T/Th

Meeting places: Carroll Hall, Room 142

Mask use: All enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community — your classmates and me — as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask or wear it improperly, I'll ask you to leave immediately, and I'll submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](#). At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students with an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For more information, see <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/university-guidelines-for-facemasks/>.

Instructor: Margaret Moffett (I prefer to be called Margaret)

Email: mmoffett@ad.unc.edu

Cell: 336-707-1982

Office hours: Virtual, phone or face-to-face by appointment

About Margaret: I was a full-time newspaper reporter and editor for 28 years, 23 of them at the Greensboro News & Record (jobs included general assignment reporter, an investigative reporter, City Hall reporter, assistant sports editor and assistant city editor). In 2018, I became managing editor of Triad Business Journal, also in Greensboro. In late 2019, I left to become a full-time freelancer (and teacher here at UNC) doing a mix of journalism and PR. Here's my [LinkedIn page](#). I believe journalism can save the world.

Course overview: Think of this class as a survey course in business journalism — more philosophical than a “how-to” course in writing business stories. We'll discuss how the media affects the public's perception of specific business sectors. We'll do this from the point of view of the individual journalist and how their articles and words affect business and of the media as an industry and its role in shaping corporate America. We'll also look at current issues in business journalism.

Required texts:

- *Muckrakers: How Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, and Lincoln Steffens Helped Expose Scandal, Inspire Reform, and Invent Investigative Journalism.* By Ann Bausum. World History Biographies: 2007. **THE BOOKSTORE SAID THIS IS OUT OF PRINT, SO DON'T WORRY IF YOU CAN'T FIND IT.**

Attendance

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](#)
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](#)

Class policy:

- You get 1 unexcused absence with no penalty. After that, I'll take off a half-letter grade from your final class grade for each absence.
- Please communicate with me early about excused absences. You're bound by the [Honor Code](#) when making a request for a university-approved absence. (source: <http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>). You may make up work you missed if an absence is pre-approved. It'll be easier to obtain permission than forgiveness.
- I CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH: Do NOT come to face-to-face class if you feel bad or have been exposed to someone who has tested positive; we can arrange for you to watch it remotely

Late assignments (or, Don't make me dock you a letter grade.)

In the newspaper business, we call this "missing a deadline." It's a sure-fire way to make your editor mad. It's important that you hit your deadlines. Late papers, if I decide to accept them, will receive a reduced grade unless we agree BEFORE the assignment is due that a delay is justified. On some assignments, the grade will be an F for failure to meet the deadline. Even if an assignment is excused as late, I won't accept any assignments that are later than two weeks after deadline. Obviously, I'll make exceptions for emergencies.

Grading

The class will operate a point system. The more complex the assignment, the more points it's worth. I'll use a combination of objective and subjective metrics to grade you. At the end of the semester, I will divide the number of points you've earned by the total possible points (1,000) and use the following scale to calculate your grade:

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89

B = 83-86

B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79

C = 73-76

C- = 70-82

D+ = 67-69

D = 60-66

F = 0-59

Course grades will be based on which of the following categories best describes you and your efforts:

- **A:** Your work is “wow!” Your thinking is clear and original. Your assertions are logically supported with plenty of relevant evidence. Your writing is strong and grammatically correct. **THERE WON'T BE MANY OF THESE.**
- **B:** Topics are carefully and thoughtfully covered. Superficial flaws in logic, evidence, or organization exist, but your case is clear and on-target. Writing is strong with very few errors. Your work is quite good. **THIS IS A GOOD GRADE!**
- **C:** One or two minor elements of the assignment or evidence are weak or missing. Organization is adequate. Writing contains several misspellings or grammatical errors. Your work is average (which, BTW, is not a bad thing!!).
- **D:** Several elements of the assignment or evidence are missing. Organization is haphazard. Writing contains numerous mistakes and detracts from the message. Your work is below average.
- **F:** You miss the point of the assignment, or you don't complete the assignment. Most or all of the required elements are missing. Writing is poor and it's difficult to discern the message. Your work is failing.

Daily assignments (3): 300 points (30% of grade)

Midterm: 250 points (25%)

Final exam: 300 points (30%)

Team presentations: 150 points (15%)

Mistakes that bring out Margaret's red pen:

- Misspelled name: **-50**
- Missing first reference: **-15**
- Other fact error: **-50**
- Misspelled word: **-10**
- AP/SABEW style error: **-5**
- Wordiness, redundancy: **-5**
- Grammar error: **-5**
- Punctuation error: **-3 to -5**
- Other errors: **-3 to -25**

Team Assignments

Team 1: Alem, Crumpton, Kloster, Reynolds, Summers

Team 2: Arendas, Flores, Makes, Rhoden, Summey

Team 3: Askey, Hardison, McClatchey, Roberts, Tate

Team 4: Bansal, Heller, Melgard, Spach, Tunley

Team 5: Barbour, Imlay, Miller, Springer, Wheless

Team 6: Chewning, Jin, Molero, Stiehl, Works

Honor Code:

I 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're 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 me or Senior Associate Dean C. A. Tuggle, or speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Syllabus Changes

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

ARS

The university facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.
(source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Title IX

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence

Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on non-discrimination

The university is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Diversity statement

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there's anything I can do to improve; I appreciate your suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the university policy on [prohibiting harassment and discrimination](#). In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and doesn't 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. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the university's nondiscrimination policies.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Thursday, Aug. 19: Introductions

We'll go over the syllabus, talk about the course and get to know each other.

Week 1: The Muckrakers

Tuesday, Aug. 24: A look at the rise of aggressive business coverage, by every business journalist's heroes and heroine — Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair or Lincoln Steffens. Muckraker? That's a compliment, by the way.

What you should read for class: Muckrakers (it's not that long)

Thursday, Aug. 26: Team activity: Some would argue that Amazon and Google are monopolies in desperate need of a trust-buster. Your team will spend about 45 minutes talking about ways the media can approach this topic. Have these companies gotten too big? If so, what are the best ways to demonstrate this to the public? We'll spend the next 30 minutes discussing (15 on Amazon and 15 on Google). (25 points toward team presentation grade).

What you should read/watch for class:

- The Atlantic: [“America’s Monopoly Problem Goes Way Beyond the Tech Giants”](#)
- Video: [Inside Amazon: A New Kind of Monopoly](#)
- NYT: [“It’s Google’s World. We Just Live in It.”](#)
- Elle: [“Google Love Me, Until I Pointed Out Everything That Sucks About It”](#)

Week 2: A Quick Look at Business/Media Relations

Tuesday, Aug. 31: The Rise of the Business Magazine: We talk about Fortune, Forbes and BusinessWeek, and how they spawned a new genre of business reporting. We will also take a look at recent print and online biz magazines.

What you should read for class: *Profits and Losses*, Ch. 6 (will provide handout)

Thursday, Sept. 2: Covering business vs. covering products/services. There's a difference.

What you should read for class: N/A

Week 3: The Media and the Entertainment Industry (part 1)

Tuesday, Sept. 7: Music — the media’s relationship with the industry and how it promotes/reports on artists.

What you should read for class:

- Rolling Stone: “[Want to get on the radio? Have \\$50,000?](#)”
- Vice: “[Sexism, Deceit, and Power: The Corrupt Mechanics Behind Modern Pop Music](#)”

Thursday, Sept. 9: No in-person class. Asynchronous: Listen to [this interview](#) with Ronan Farrow, author of “Catch and Kill.”

Week 4: The Media and the Entertainment Industry (part 2)

Tuesday, Sept. 14: TV/movies — How has the media covered the shift in the way the public consumes TV and movies.

What you should read for class:

- Tom’s Guide: “[I’m testing Hulu with Live TV to cut the cord — here’s the pros and cons](#)”
- NYT: “[The Streaming Era Has Finally Arrived. Everything is About to Change.](#)”
- Variety: “[Netflix’s Film Chief Scott Stuber Is Shaking Up Hollywood: ‘The Movie Business Is in a Revolution’](#)”
- L.A. Times: “[Scarlett Johansson vs. Disney: How should talent be paid for streaming?](#)”

Thursday, Sept. 16: Team activity: Your team is starting a digital news outlet that will cover the entertainment industry. You have no budget constraints. Come up with pitches for the first three stories you assign to reporters. We’ll spend the last 20 minutes of class discussing. (25 points toward team presentation grade).

Week 5: The Cannabis Industry

Tuesday, Sept. 21: This is an emerging sector with a whole lot of issues to consider. As more and more states look at legalizing marijuana, how is the media covering the business of weed?

What you should listen to for class:

- Reynolds Center podcast: [How to Cover Money Episode 24: Covering the Business of Pot](#)
- Reynolds Center podcast: [How to Cover Money Episode 26: Covering the Marijuana Industry](#)

Thursday, Sept. 23: What ethical issues arise in the coverage of the marijuana industry?

What you should read for class:

- Rolling Stone: [“How PR Professionals Can Change the Conversation Around Cannabis”](#)
- Rolling Stone: [“My Guidance on Changing the Conversation Around Cannabis Through Transparency”](#)
- Poynter: [“Burgeoning cannabis industry means opportunities for journalists”](#)
- NBC News: [“‘Ridiculous’ price of medical marijuana leaves patients scrambling”](#)
- U.S. News & World Report: [“Could Heavy Marijuana Use Be Driving Rise in Schizophrenia Cases?”](#)
- [NYT articles](#) (click on a couple that interest you to get a sense of how the Times covers the industry.)

Week 6: The Food/Fashion Industry

Tuesday, Sept. 28: Food. We all need it, amirite? A quick look at how the media covers Big Food and its relationship to obesity, celebrity chefs and our fascination with all things delicious.

What you should read for class:

- The New Republic: [“How Food Media Created Monsters in the Kitchen”](#)
- Axios: [“The media industry has a growing appetite for food content”](#)
- Newsweek: [“Big Food is the New Big Tobacco. We Must Take Them On.”](#)
- Politico: [“The End of Big Food”](#)
- NYT: [“Can Home Cooking Reverse the Obesity Epidemic?”](#)

Thursday, Sept. 30: Fashion: How does the media cover fashion? And how does the fashion industry court coverage from the media?

What you should read for class:

- Fashion Unfiltered: [“Fashion Business Journalism: A Golden Age”](#)

- [Business of Fashion](#): Look around the site to get a feel for the coverage. Definitely read [About Us](#)
- Glossy: [“Confessions of a Fashion Reporter”](#)
- The Atlantic: [“Women’s Magazines Objectify Women Just as Much as Men’s Magazines Do.”](#)
- Vox: [“Facetune and the internet’s endless pursuit of physical perfection”](#)

Week 7: The Auto Industry

Tuesday, Oct. 5:

What you should read for class:

Thursday, Oct. 7:

What you should read for class:

Week 8: Midterm

Tuesday, Oct. 12: No class (University Day)

Thursday, Oct. 14: Midterm exam

Week 9: Fall Break

Tuesday, Oct. 19: Asynchronous: TBD

Thursday, Oct. 21: No class (Fall Break)

Week 10: The Healthcare Industry

Tuesday, Oct. 26: Lecture

What you should read for class: TBD

Thursday, Oct. 28: Team activity

What you should read for class: TBD

Week 11: The Manufacturing Industry

Tuesday, Nov. 2: Lecture

What you should read for class: TBD

Thursday, Nov. 4: Lecture

What you should read for class: TBD

Week 12: The Tech Industry (part 1)

Tuesday, Nov. 9: Silicon Valley

What you should read for class: TBD

Thursday, Nov. 11: Apple

What you should read for class: TBD

Week 13: The Tech Industry (part 2)

Tuesday, Nov. 16: The future of tech

What you should read for class: TBD

Thursday, Nov. 18: In-class group work

Tuesday, Nov. 23: Presentations

Thursday, Nov. 25: No class (Happy Thanksgiving!!)

Tuesday, Nov. 30: Review for exam

Final exam: Thursday, Dec. 9 at noon

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES AT A GLANCE

(Note: All assignments due by 5 p.m. on due dates)

#1: Due Tuesday, Sept. 14

For 150 points — Write 400 words (in first person) as either Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, Ida B. Wells or Lincoln Steffens. A scientist has brought you back to life and uploaded your brain with everything a business reporter needs to know about Wal-Mart — from profitability and market share to the lack of benefits for workers and the way products are sourced. You decide to go to your local Wal-Mart and take a look at this for yourself. Describe what you see, as informed by the knowledge you have of Wal-Mart. What do you think (as Tarbell, Sinclair or Steffens) as you walk around? This may require a little bit of Internet research on Wal-Mart's business practices. Have as much fun with this as you like.

#2: Due Tuesday, Oct. 26

For 100 points — You work in a newsroom (lucky you!). Your editor has given you the grocery store beat. Ask five friends what stories they'd like to read about grocery stores. Analyze these ideas for their merit with roughly 150 words for each idea. Identify the type of business stories each idea is (features, investigative, explanatory, consumer, profiles, etc). Who's the audience? What larger questions do their ideas point to: fears about food safety? Curiosity about where produce comes from? Interest in competition among chains? Or something else?

#3: Due Tuesday, Nov. 16

For 250 points — Watch one of the documentaries listed below. Write 750 words on the documentary's approach to the business/industry it covers. In addition to a brief summary of the film, you might consider some of these questions: Does the documentary identify a problem? Does it offer a solution to the problem? What does it want the viewer to think about the business/sector? Do the filmmakers offer the business/industry the opportunity to respond? If so, describe the nature of the relationship. If not, why?

- "American Factory"
- "Becoming Warren Buffett"
- "Food, Inc."
- "Frye"
- "Generation Startup"
- "She Did That"
- "Supersize Me"
- "The Social Dilemma"