

MEJO 541 – Economics Reporting, Fall 2022

128 Carroll Hall

Fall 2022, 3 credits

Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.

Instructor: Dan Barkin

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Office hours: 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday. (Adjuncts are able to use Room 46. If you want to meet during office hours, email me in advance in the event we have to meet somewhere else in the journalism building if the adjunct office is being used by another instructor at that time.)

Objectives: Teach students how to cover Wall Street and the economy, focusing on how stocks, bonds and economic indicators interact, and how this information is reported in the media. Emphasis on reporting on the Federal Reserve, labor, consumers, manufacturing and inflation, as well as certain industries. Students will research and write articles in these areas.

Course requirements: Students are expected to attend class and participate in discussions. Classes will include lectures on specific topics. Students should regularly read economics-related stories in the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The News & Observer business section.

Grading:

90-100: Story could be published in a metropolitan newspaper's business section or a business magazine.

80-89: Minor editing needed, but it is publishable. Conclusions may be weak.

70-79: Needs extensive editing and rethinking. Structure or conclusions may be flawed. May contain spelling errors.

60-69: Story needs to be re-reported and rewritten all the way through. May contain more than one spelling error.

Below 60: Story has a factual error or misstates facts from documents. Seriously flawed in writing and conclusions.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

50%: Writing assignments outside of class;

15%: Midterm;

15%: Stock-picking papers (in lieu of final exam);

10%: Book report;

10%: Class participation.

More on class participation:

This course will be on Zoom, and will be recorded. If circumstances keep you from attending in person, I want you to be able to hear the lecture and also review material later in the semester, as needed. But to receive the **full participation credit for a class**, you need to attend class in person. And you also need to participate in discussions with others in the class and me. One of the great benefits of attending classes in person is that it allows you greater interaction with instructors and fellow students. It is easier to ask questions and it is much easier for the instructor to gauge whether there is understanding of the material we are covering, which is complex.

More on the stock-picking project:

(This is a summarized version of the instructions for this project, which will be handed out in class Aug. 23 and discussed in detail that class.)

Instead of a final exam, each student in Economics Reporting will write a 2,000-word paper analyzing their stock picks at the end of the semester and why those stocks rose or fell during the semester. You are to write this paper based on many of the economic factors and measures discussed during the semester. **The paper is due at noon, Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2018, and must be e-mailed to me at dbarkin@unc.edu.**

The best way to understand economic factors on a company's financial performance is to simulate investing in that company. As such, you will each have a hypothetical \$10,000 to invest in five stocks for the semester.

Each student will select five stocks by **Thursday, Sept. 8**. On this date, you will turn in a 1,000-word paper explaining your selections, and how you would allocate your \$10,000 among the five stocks. You can divide the \$10,000 in any way as long as shares of five individual and separate companies are purchased. I will calculate how many shares you have purchased in each of your five companies based on your allocation and the closing stock prices of those companies on Sept. 8.

Students may review any information or consult with anyone, including a stockbroker, to make their five stock picks. However, the stocks must be widely held and traded on either the New York Stock Exchange or NASDAQ. No penny stocks or thinly traded stocks will be allowed.

How I grade writing assignments

Writing assignments will be graded strictly. Economics writing involves numbers and names, so each fact error in a story will result in an automatic F. Each misspelled word with lower a grade by one letter. AP style errors will count a half-letter grade, or 5 points. There is a business news section in the AP stylebook. I recommend you review it.

Papers and story assignments can be turned in as an email attachment to dbarkin@unc.edu. Late work submitted after a deadline will receive a 25-point deduction for every day it is late. If something

prevents you from attending class or turning in an assignment on time, I need to be notified by email before class or before the deadline. I understand that things come up, and I will work with you. But I need to know what is happening.

Textbooks:

1. The Future of Business Journalism: Why it Matters for Wall Street and Main Street. Georgetown University Press. 2022.
2. Show me the Money: Writing Business and Economics Stories for Mass Communications. By Chris Roush. Taylor and Francis. 2016 (Third Edition).
3. The Fortune Tellers: Inside Wall Street's Game of Money, Media and Manipulation. By Howard Kurtz. Touchstone Books. 2001. Book report due Sept. 29.
4. The SABEW Stylebook. By Chris Roush and Bill Cloud. Marion Street Press. 2012.

Note: "The Bloomberg Way" is a manual/textbook that was first developed 25 years ago by the editors at Bloomberg News. It is [available online](#) at Park Library. Chapter 13 is a good survey of some of the terminal functions we will use in class. But the book is also a good reference for financial, economic and business terminology and concepts. I recommend accessing it early in the semester and will list readings in the class schedule.

For each of the readings listed below on the course calendar, please make sure you have read these chapters by the time you come to class on that day. I will be clear in class what is required for the next class, in case you are unclear from this syllabus. In addition, many class discussion topics will be supplemented by articles from newspapers, wire services and magazines about the economy. The instructor will provide those during class or links will be provided on this syllabus.

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 are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility 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 General Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help:

If you need individual assistance, it is your responsibility to meet with the instructor. The time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with the course material, a disability or an illness.

Diversity:

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined at <https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm>. 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:

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including academic adjustments, 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 for students are determined through Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws.

Please refer to the [ARS Website](#) for contact information or email ars@unc.edu.

Accreditation:

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication'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.

Course calendar:

Aug. 16: **Introduction to economics reporting.** What we will cover in this course. Assignment: Reporting on the economy from the perspective of a Franklin Street business. The first challenge: Can you get a busy store owner to talk to you? I will describe the assignment in class. **A short presentation will be due Aug. 18 in class.** Read Chapter 3 on business beats in Show me the Money by the next class. *(Even though this is an economics reporting course you will be writing about the economy in the context of business coverage, so this is a useful chapter.)*

Aug. 18: **The basics of economics reporting.** What is an economy? Economic indicators, well-known and obscure. Read Chapter 4 in Show me the Money for this class, pp. 68-70, 78-89. **Story Assignment will be discussed in class. Due Aug. 23.**

Aug. 23: **The Federal Reserve/Monetary policy.** The bank people really don't understand but should. Read Chapter 4 in Show me the Money for this class, pp. 71-76. Discuss stock market project. What are

the stock markets and how are they affected by the economy? [Instructions for project will be discussed in detail in this class.](#)

Aug. 25: **More on the Federal Reserve Board.** Why you should mine the Beige Book for story ideas. What is the Beige Book and is it really beige? Readings: Richmond Fed Region (Page E-1) section of the [July 2022 Beige Book](#). 2) Barkin, Business North Carolina [story](#) on the Beige Book. **Story Assignment will be discussed in class.** Due Aug. 30. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/beige-book-default.htm>

Aug. 30: **Finding economic and company information on the Bloomberg terminal.** Meet in the Park Library near the terminal, which is in the back. Read The Bloomberg Way, [available online](#) at Park Library, Chapter 13.

Sept. 1: **Gross domestic product.** A big, important number. What does it mean and how is it used? How can we cover it? Readings: [GDP: Does it Measure Up?](#) By the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank. **Story Assignment will be discussed in class. Due Sept. 8.** Bloomberg functions: GPD <Go>

Sept. 6: No class [Well-being day]

Sept. 8: **Initial stock picks due at beginning of class.** Give a 3-5 minute presentation of your selection in class. Be prepared to discuss what these companies do, how their stock prices have fared the past five years compared with the S&P 500, and why you think they will do well the rest of the semester. What industries are they part of and who are their competitors. If you were an analyst for a big hedge fund, this would be a presentation of your best ideas to the board. Give me a one-page analysis of these questions.

Sept. 13: **The unemployment rate, what it reveals and what it hides.** Using state databases to tell stories about the labor market in a changing economy. Barkin, Business North Carolina, "Tale of the tape: How manufacturing's decline shaped North Carolina." And the WARN Act, Barkin, Business North Carolina, Also: Chapter 4, Show me the Money, pp 77-70. Bloomberg functions: EMPR <GO> Story Assignment.

Sept. 15: **Consumer Price Index/Producer Price Index.** Beyond the spin. Going beneath the inflation headline numbers. Explaining what is really happening with prices. Bloomberg functions: CPI <GO> Story assignment.

Sept. 20: **Commodity Prices.** Metals, energy, agricultural products, livestock. How are they traded, and how can we explain their significance? Why Western North Carolina trees are shipped to Asia and Eastern North Carolina wood pellets ship to Europe. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Prices pop amid strong lumber demand and limited sawmills](#); The Bloomberg Way, pp. 162-165; Comdex: [Commodity Trading: Backbone of the global economy](#) Story Assignment

Sept. 22: **Covering consumers,** the biggest driver of the economy. How do we cover swings in consumer confidence, consumer borrowing. How well do these predict economic trends? Show Me the Money, pp.80-83. Bloomberg functions CNFC <GO> and PINC <GO> [Consumer confidence surveys: Do they boost forecasters' confidence?](#) St. Louis Fed. Story assignment.

Sept. 27: **Wall Street and the economy.** Read The Fortune Tellers by this class. Book report due. Future of Business Journalism, pp. 78-79. Chapter 8 in Show me the Money before you start picking your stocks,

pp 177-203. Chapter 8 in Future of Business Journalism is a hard-nosed look at how we should cover the stock market. Bloomberg function: WEI <GO>

Sept. 29: **Update paper on stock selections due.**

Oct. 4: **Nonprofits and foundations.** Show Me the Money, pp. 269-294. Story assignment.

Oct. 6: **Trade deficit/surpluses.** How trade and globalization impacted North Carolina's economy, how the pandemic may be changing that, and how to cover the change. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [How manufacturing's decline shaped North Carolina; How small businesses get serious about exporting](#) Bloomberg function TRBL <GO> Story assignment.

Oct. 11: Midterm

Oct. 13: **The residential real estate industry.** New and existing home sales/mortgage rates. Housing starts/permits. Show Me the Money, pp. 332-353 Bloomberg function HSST <GO>

Oct. 18: **Covering income inequality and the wealth gap.** Future of Business Journalism, pp 117-120. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Fed panel views increasing Black wealth as key economic driver; Federal Reserve panel on wealth gap.](#)

Oct. 20: No Class (Fall break)

Oct. 25: Stock picking updates. Winners and losers so far. Update papers due.

Oct. 27: **New car sales/durable goods orders/factory orders.** Show Me the Money, pp. 83-86. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Transportation shifts hit high gear.](#) Bloomberg functions ATSI <GO> FODG <GO> Story assignment.

Nov. 1: **Covering agribusiness.** The largest economic sector in North Carolina is barely covered. How to explain modern agribusiness and why it matters to urban counties. Soybeans and the ports. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [What a new agricultural transload facility means for Port of Wilmington; North Carolina's sweet success in the 'tater trade](#)

Nov. 3: **The military economy:** 140,000 DOD employees in NC, the world's largest Army base, but hardly any news coverage. Finding stories in the emerging defense innovation ecosystem. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Revitalized mill creates military-tech opportunity in Robeson County](#)

Nov. 8: **Stock picking updates.** Winners and losers so far. Update papers due.

Nov. 10: **Health care reporting,** Chapter 19, Future of Business Journalism, pp. 124-135.

Nov. 15: **Covering economic development.** The battle between states, regions and cities for jobs and wealth. The urban and rural economic divide. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Tale of the spreadsheet: Looking for NC trends in economic development](#)

Nov. 17: **Retail reporting and retail sales/same store sales.** Show Me the Money, pp. 55-57 Bloomberg function RTSL <GO> Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Closing time for big malls](#) Story assignment

Nov. 22: **Commercial real estate,** the sector whose rents, sale prices and vacancy rates reveal almost everything about where the national and regional economy is headed. Offices, shopping centers,

warehouse cities. Why pension funds and insurance companies own office parks and shopping malls. Chapter 13, Show Me the Money. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Gary Chesson's path to success in N.C. real estate](#). Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Disruptors and databases: How today's commercial real-estate sales happen](#) Story assignment

Nov. 24: No class (Thanksgiving)

Nov. 29: **Recessions, events that impact the economy**. Barkin, Business North Carolina, [Innovation can trump drive for efficiency](#)

Friday, Dec. 2: **Final exam scheduled period, Noon**. [The stock-picking project is in lieu of this exam and is due by email to me by Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2022.]