MEJO 426 – Audio Journalism for Radio and Podcasts
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MEJO 426 CLASS SCHEDULE –SPRING 2024

Wed, Jan 10, 11:00–12:15	Course introduction
Fri., Jan 12, 11:00 – 12:30	Tech talk
Wed., Jan. 17, 11:00 – 12:30	Discussion: writing for the ear, using sound
Fri., Jan. 19	No class
Wednesdays, starting Jan. 24, 11:00-12:15	Story meetings
Friday, Jan. 26, 11:00 – 12:30	Discussion: voicing, mixing
Fridays, beginning Feb. 2, 11:00 until your story is done	Production session

MEJO 426 is a collaborative class, so in-person attendance is expected. In cases of sickness or emergencies, you may join by Zoom. Please let me know in advance if you need to join remotely.

ZOOM INFO:
https://unc.zoom.us/j/99185376590?pwd=aC8zRUpGTWpiMDljd0Vqb3o5L2c2Zz09
Meeting ID: 991 8537 6590
Passcode: 979979
To join by phone: 16469313860,,99185376590#

"CAROLINA CONNECTION" BROADCAST SCHEDULE

- February 3, 10, 24 (No show Feb. 17 – Wellness days)
- March 2, 9, 23 (No show March 16 - Spring break. No show March 30 – holiday)
- April 6, 13, 20, 27

Course goal: Working as a team, we produce journalistic audio content that's accurate, well-written, well-produced, and innovative. As in a professional newsroom, you are expected to collaborate with your fellow students and your instructor to achieve the best possible final product. WCHL will broadcast your work, and we'll distribute it through Spotify and other podcast platforms. We'll also make it available to other professional media organizations. Each story should meet the standards of national broadcasters.

Course policies: MEJO 426 has no exams, quizzes, nor textbook. Your grade is based solely on the quality and quantity of work you do for "Carolina Connection" and our podcasts. You should make meaningful contributions each week – by producing a story, helping another reporter, contributing a Q&A, or performing other duties assigned by a producer.

Deadlines and workflow: As in a professional newsroom, meeting deadlines is essential. Our weekly script deadline is **Wednesday at 6:00 pm**. (The only exception would be if you're covering an event that takes place Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday.) Late scripts and missed deadlines will affect your course grade, and your story may not air.

I must give your script final approval before you can produce the story.

I make my best effort to edit all student scripts each week. However, if you submit your story after 6:00 pm Wednesday (and it's not covered by the exception above), there's no guarantee that your story will be edited.

We meet once a week to discuss story ideas for upcoming shows. You are expected to attend these meetings, bring well-thought-out story ideas, and discuss your own and your classmates' ideas. <u>You'll also be expected to volunteer to cover breaking news stories.</u> Missing meetings or arriving to meetings without story ideas will affect your course grade.

Course expectations: Here's what I'll be listening for in everything you produce:

- <u>Audio quality:</u> There's nothing worse than bad audio on the radio or on a podcast. If your listeners can't understand what they're hearing, they'll likely turn it off. Clean, understandable audio is a minimum requirement for all stories. Get to know your equipment, test it before you use it, and promptly report any problems. Wear headphones ALL THE TIME while recording to monitor your sound quality, and check your recording before leaving each location to make sure the quality is acceptable.

  Conduct your interviews face-to-face and gather sound and scene for every story. An important part of journalism is getting out into the community, meeting a diverse group of people, and seeing how they live, work, and play. You're expected to meet your guests in person for all Interviews on campus and the surrounding area. **Remote interviews (using Zoom, Report-It, the telephone, or other tools) are acceptable only for guests who are outside the immediate campus area.**

  Set aside enough time to mix your stories! It can take several hours to properly mix a radio story or podcast. All sound should mesh seamlessly, and all edits should be undetectable to the ear.

  There's a lot of important information about production matters under the RESOURCES tab on Canvas. You're responsible for reading it (or at least knowing to look there when you need it) and following it.

- <u>Accuracy:</u> Our expectation is 100% factual accuracy. You must fact-check every sentence in your story, whether you say it or somebody else does. Factual errors can affect your final grade, and all errors – big and small – must be corrected on the air and on the web as soon as they come to our attention.

- Clarity: In addition to being accurate, our stories must be comprehensible. You'll be expected to write in clear, conversational, grammatically correct English. Your delivery should be polished and understandable.

- Transparency: Good journalism gives listeners all the information they need to assess the credibility of a story. That means we **fully identify all voices**, attribute our facts to reputable sources, and disclose any potential conflicts of interest (for instance, if the athlete you profile is your sorority sister, or the political science professor you interview is a consultant for a political party). We don't repeat rumors, we confirm information we see on social media or in other media sources, and we don't use anonymous sources except in extremely rare cases. **I must approve the use of any unnamed source.**

- Diversity: Your stories should include multiple voices who represent a range of stakeholders in the story. Good journalists make a special effort to include voices from underrepresented parts of society. In addition to holding powerful people accountable, we also give voice to those who have less power and are less frequently heard.

- Innovation: Rather than mimicking what you already see and hear on mainstream TV and radio, think about innovative ways to present quality journalism. Can you come up with a better structure for your story than the standard piece? Can you do a story or a podcast as a compelling personal profile? A vibrant audio portrait that lets listeners hear the sounds of an interesting place? Is there a role for reporter involvement? An online component that invites listener participation?

- Importance: Carolina Connection strives to tell *important* stories about news events, issues, and lifestyle trends. Our audience includes not only students, but also the North Carolina community as a whole. You should strive to tell stories about vital issues, and identify and analyze trends. One factor in your course grade is whether you take on **challenging, important** stories. Every student is expected to do several stories that involve sources who are not necessarily eager to talk to the media.

- Participation: As in a professional newsroom, every student is expected to be an active participant in the news team. That means pitching solid story ideas every week, making yourself available to cover spot news, helping with the Carolina Connection website, and providing content to our broadcast partners if they request it. Unexcused absences – or attending on Zoom without notice or explanation - will affect your course grade.

Honor Code: All students must conduct themselves within the guidelines of the UNC honor system (honor.unc.edu). While this class is more collaborative than some others, you may not represent anybody else's work as your own. **You must never fabricate any aspect of your stories, plagiarize other people's work, or use audio that's not our own (from YouTube or other sources) without proper permission and credit. To do so is an honor**

code violation. Always consult with your instructor or a producer before using any audio you did not record yourself!

Diversity and accommodations: UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment and does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please inform me as soon as possible. For more information, visit 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: www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps. This class teaches students:

- *To write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.*
- *To critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.*
- *To demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;*
- *To think critically, creatively and independently.*
- *To understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press.*
- *To demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.*

Equipment will be issued by the Park Library, beginning approximately January 12. You can make arrangements to pick it up at https://equipmentroom.mj.unc.edu/. Instruction manuals are at: https://guides.lib.unc.edu/equipment-room/instruction-manuals.

Use of AI tools: You may use AI tools in this class to assist you in making your writing more concise, more clear, and grammatically correct. (Example prompt: "Rewrite this paragraph in active voice with short, clear sentences.") However, you are personally responsible for all content you turn in. The burden remains on you to assure that AI doesn't introduce content into your story that's inaccurate, plagiarized, fabricated, or otherwise violates class or UNC policies.

AI tools should not be used as for primary research and should not be trusted for fact-checking.

AI may NEVER be used to alter audio, photographs or video.

Q. SO IF THERE ARE NO EXAMS IN MEJO 426, HOW IS MY GRADE DETERMINED?

A. THE <u>QUANTITY</u> OF YOUR WORK, THE <u>QUALITY</u> OF YOUR WORK, AND YOUR ABILITY TO MEET <u>DEADLINES</u>.

QUALITY: "A" students produce content that is excellent in every detail. Their stories are well researched and contains the voice from a diverse group of sources. They use sound and scene creatively and effectively. We hear ACTION in their stories. The natural sound furthers the narrative of the story and isn't used just as "audio decoration." The writing is clear and accurate. The editing and production are flawless. Finally, they're creative and use innovative story-telling techniques. They stand out (in a good way) from everything else on the radio or online.

"A" students also are willing to take on <u>challenging</u> stories. "Carolina Connection" always needs strong, hard-news stories. These may be late-breaking stories about campus events, in-depth analyses about local issues, or enterprise stories about issues important to your generation. These are often stories that involve difficult interviews with somebody who may not be eager to talk with the media. While the show also needs lighter features, I expect students to challenge themselves several times this semester to tell important stories. **If every voice in your story is a friend or somebody you already know, that's not an "A" story.**

"B" students occasionally meet the above standards and consistently do good work. Their stories stick to more conventional topics and typically employ a predictable story structure. They sometimes seek difficult subjects and interviews, but they may require more coaching on story focus, writing, and production. They may do some producing and anchoring. While their work is solid, it fails to consistently stand out.

"C" students stick to the easiest stories. They tend to seek interviews from their own circle of acquaintances and rarely go outside their comfort zone to find stories. Their writing and production is adequate, but average. They rarely deliver late-breaking stories or volunteer to cover campus news. They take little interest in expanding their responsibilities beyond the minimum required to meet course expectations.

"D" students struggle to meet minimum course expectations. They may miss deadlines, fail to pitch stories, or fail to deliver stories they've pitched. Their scripts often require substantial re-writes and their production may fail to meet professional standards.

"F" students fail to reach 150 points or fail to meet course expectations in other ways.

QUANTITY: I'll assign a point value to each story you submit based on its content. You are expected to earn a minimum of **150** points for the semester. **(Important:** Earning 150 points does NOT guarantee an "A" grade; 150 points is the minimum requirement to pass the class!)

You can keep track of your points on Canvas.

- <u>30 points:</u>   These are stories or podcasts that are exemplary in every way. They involve significant research and original, time-consuming reporting. They include multiple interviews, use natural sound and scenes in sophisticated ways, and require extensive editing and mixing effort. These are stories that we would be proud to distribute statewide and submit as award entries.

- <u>20 points:</u>   These stories and podcast explore an interesting subject in a complete and creative way.   They're thoroughly researched, include compelling natural sound and compelling characters, are written and mixed well, and typically include multiple interviews recorded in multiple places. Interviews are conducted where the interviewee is carrying on activities relevant to the story. *Anchor/producers and technical directors also earn 20 points per show.*

- <u>10 points:</u>   These reports would typically include interviews conducted mostly in one place, such as a news conference or a public event such as a speech. They require minimal research and little effort to arrange the interviews. They involve minimal use of sound other than interviews. Most sports game coverage fits into this category, as do man-on-the-street segments and stories about performances.

- <u>5 points:</u>   Writing readers, providing raw tape or bites for somebody else's story. Taking a photo for your story that's usable on the Carolina Connection website (5 points maximum photo credit per week.)

- <u>Other ways to earn points:</u>
    - Producing/hosting the Carolina Connection podcast: 20 points.
    - Talking about your story on the Carolina Connection podcast: 20 points.
    - Director: 10 points per show, maximum 60 points for directing per semester.
    - Webmaster for the Carolina Connection web site: 10 points per show; maximum 60 points per semester.
    - Contributing to Carolina Week, SportsXtra, or Carolina Now (Maximum 40 points per semester). 10 points for VO/SOTs or packages, 5 for crew positions.

DEADLINES: Nothing causes more problems for our production team than missed deadlines. If even a single script or story comes in late, the entire production process can grind to a halt. If your script comes in late, we can't give it the attention it may need during the editing process. If you're frantically trying to produce a story on deadline, the quality almost certainly will suffer. I log when each script and story is submitted, and I deduct points for missed deadlines. **LATE STORIES OR SCRIPTS CAN RESULT IN A 20% POINTS PENALTY. IF IT COMES IN TOO LATE FOR THE SHOW, YOU MAY NOT GET ANY POINTS FOR IT AT ALL!**