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JRNL 201.01: Diversity in Media

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JRNL 201-Diversity in the Media

Fall 2019
11-12:20 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday
Don Anderson Hall 005

Professor Dennis Swibold
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Office hours: 3 to 4 p.m. DAH 432, or by appointment

“Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.”
– Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics

Course Description

We will examine how the American news media portray the nation’s growing racial, ethnic and gender diversity. By studying examples of news coverage, students will develop an understanding of best professional practices in news media regarding diversity, and how to become better consumers of news and information.

Despite major changes in the news industry, fewer minorities are getting the opportunity to work in news. Meanwhile, news providers are losing the ability to empower and represent minorities in their communities – especially in places where doing that entails knowing a language other than English.

“The lack of diversity isn’t just a problem for aspiring journalists; it’s ultimately bad for everyone, especially news companies and their audiences,” writes Gillian B. White, a deputy editor at The Atlantic. “That can lead to news coverage that is incomplete, tone-deaf or biased. Those possibilities are especially troubling as the country’s complex and often ugly relationships among people of different races, cultures, ethnicities and religions are pushed to the forefront of the American conscience.”

Course Outcomes

By the end of this class, successful students should be able to:

• Demonstrate an understanding of diversity, particularly as it relates to race and ethnicity and gender.
• Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of assuring the presence of diverse voices and perspectives in the news, and how that relates to truth, accuracy and fairness.
• Be able to critically evaluate how the news media portray diverse populations.
• Improve your own reporting media literacy skills pertaining to reporting on diverse populations.

Important dates

Mark your calendars now: DiverseU, the campuswide initiative on diversity is scheduled for the first week in November. We aim to make a class presentation. Stay tuned for details.

Classes won’t be held on the following days: Nov. 27-29 (Thanksgiving).

The final exam is scheduled for Dec. 13 from 10:10 to 12:10

Course Outline

Classes will consist of lectures, discussions and exercises. We will have guest speakers, which will change our course schedule, depending on their availability. We’ll also keep our options open so we can react to breaking stories and issues.

Since this is a journalism class, you are expected to keep up with the news for discussion. This is truly an interesting time for journalists and how the public views people of color. Our era’s cultural conversation is tinged with racism. It also reflects inclusive discussion of America’s history about race and ethnicity, and other diversity topics (gender, LGBTQ, people with disabilities). We won’t avoid talking about those things in this class, but let’s keep the discussion civil and constructive.

In this course, students will:

• Study outstanding reporting on generally uncovered communities.
• Look for untold stories about diversity and consider how best to tell them.
• Present the best of that research at DiverseU
• Research and pitch ideas for stories to the class.
**Attendance**

You are expected to attend each class meeting. The success of this course depends on the quality of our discussions, including discussions with guest speakers. Each unexcused absence will lower your grade by 5 points (see below for grading basis). An excused absence means you have contacted me before class and have an approved, valid reason, such as illness or family emergency. I will take roll in this class.

**Grading**

Attendance and in-class participation are part of your grade. There will be four quizzes to assure that you keep up with the reading assignments and pay attention to lectures and presentations by our guest speakers. In addition, you will have assignments that get you out of the classroom attending events and interviewing other people, and that call for personal reflection. Your final grade will be based on total points earned. (For example: 90-100% of total points = A.)

Grading: Maximum possible points: 200

- Quizzes (four worth 10 points each) 40 points
- Short essays (four worth 10 points each) 40 points
- Class presentation 20 points
- DiverseU assignment 20 points
- Final exam 50 points
- Attendance/class participation 30 points

**Suggested text:**


**After-hours Building Access**

If you’re not a Journalism major, minor or graduate student and you need access to the building after 5 p.m. for Journalism class assignments, you need to fill out this form by Sept. 5.
Ethics/Academic Integrity

The University of Montana School of Journalism is committed to the highest standards of academic and professional ethics and expects its students to adhere to those standards.

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to a penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. You need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code, online at: http://life.umt.edu/SA/documents/fromWeb/StudentConductCode1.pdf

Class Conduct

Student participation is essential for this class to be truly effective. This class is highly interactive so we can learn from each other. I expect student participation and urge students to speak up constantly without fear of being right or wrong. I will assign participation grades based on the courage it takes to participate in discussion.

Students are also expected to set cell phones to the silent – NOT vibrate – setting while in class. You may keep your phones readily available to read incoming messages in case of emergencies, but please do not use class time to compose text messages of any type during class. Computers and tablets are welcome only for the purpose of note taking. If I see anyone using a device for any other purpose, then that student will lose the privilege of using the device for the remainder of the semester.

Disability Services for Students

If you are a student with a disability and wish to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, contact the instructors privately to discuss the specific modifications you wish to request. Please be advised we may request that you provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying your right to reasonable modifications. If you have not yet contacted Disability Services, in Lommasson Center 154, please do so to verify your disability and to coordinate your reasonable modifications. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at www.umt.edu/dss/

Course Resources

See Moodle page for links.
Course Schedule


Sept. 10, 12 – “This American Life: The Problem We All Live With,” class discussion. Assign short essay.


Oct. 1, 3 – A Maori filmmaker and the fight for proper Indigenous narratives (High Country News) Assign short essay.

Oct. 8, 10 – Alex Not Amy: Growing up Transgender in the Rural West, class discussion. Assign written questions for Thursday’s guest speaker.


Oct. 22, 24 – American news rooms and diversity.

Oct. 29, 31 – The Under-told Stories Project

Nov. 5, 7 – DiverseU presentations

Nov. 12, 14 – Class presentation

Nov. 19, 21 – Class presentations

Nov. 26 – Class presentations

Dec. 3, 5 – Final presentations and course wrap-ups

Final exam – Dec. 13, 10:10 to 12:10, DAH 004