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JRNL 270.02: Reporting the News

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JRNL 270/Reporting

Instructor: Joe Eaton

Phone/email: 243-6825, joe.eaton@mso.umt.edu

Class meetings: 12:30- to 1:50 p.m. TR, DAH 210.

My office: DAH 409

Outside class meetings: Stay tuned

Office hours: by appointment.

Course description

Building on what you've learned in JRNL 170, this course will further introduce you to the skills required to report news stories and features. We'll bolster your news writing and enhance your news judgment. We'll help you identify, research and pitch potential news stories; find and interview credible sources; and write, edit and pitch stories. In addition, you will develop broadcast/audio skills.

During the 15 weeks we are together, you will learn to cover police, courts, city hall, public schools and higher education. You will learn the basics of covering local government and writing about the key issues that affect a community. In the process, you'll gain experience making sources, rooting out public information, and digging for documents and data that help break big stories. You will learn to write factual information and differentiate it from hype, spin, speculation or opinion. You will learn the elements of a good story, how to pitch editors and the nuts-and-bolts skills of turning a good story idea into a great read

Learning outcomes

Successful students will demonstrate their understanding of the importance of truth, accuracy and fairness in reporting. They will also develop an understanding of the importance of free speech and the need to report for a diverse audience.

In addition, successful student will further develop their ability to:

- Think critically, independently and ethically.
- Research and evaluate information.
- Critically evaluate information and report for their audience in the most appropriate format or platform.
- Write with precision and clarity.

- Understand and report on the importance of diversity.
- Apply basic numerical concepts.
- Produce news on deadline.
- Gather and edit audio

Because this is an approved lower-division writing course, all students will write stories appropriate for a given audience and purpose. They will form and express ideas in writing, use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts, revise written work based on helpful feedback, apply journalistic writing conventions (AP style, story forms for different platforms) and demonstrate appropriate English usage.

How we'll work

We'll learn by doing, and I'll gauge your progress with frequent exercises and quizzes that will prepare you for the course's major writing assignments. Each class will feature an exercise or quiz that builds on previous class discussions, so *it is crucial that you attend every class* and stay abreast of the news by reading the Missoulian online, the Kaimin online and national or international news sites like The New York Times, The Washington Post and others. I will take attendance.

As soon as possible, you'll be doing real stories, based on assignments from me or from your ideas that I've approved in advance. We'll do some team reporting, but you'll be working individually on most assignments.

Attendance and deadline policy

You will not be allowed to make up any exercise, quiz or writing assignment that you miss due to an unexcused absence, and *you can't get an excused absence without prior permission from the instructor*. Acceptable excuses include confirmed illnesses and a death in your immediate family. That's about it.

Assignments turned in after deadline will receive a grade of 0. Your grade average can't survive many of those. This is a professional school, and professionals show up and hit deadlines. Even so, I realize that stories can fall apart for reasons beyond a reporter's control (the story changes, sources bail, etc.) If that seems to be happening, ***you must tell me about before the deadline*** so we can shift you to a different story. Be a pro. Your professional reputation begins with this class.

Writing assignments

This course will feature several writing assignments, many of which will be subject to revision. Some of the assignments will combine more than one of the goals listed below.

- Pitching a local-angle story. Goal: To brush up your news judgment, note taking and news writing. In the writing, we're looking for accuracy, clarity and news style. We'll have you tweet a lead too.
- Preview story about an impending event * Goal: To improve your skills at online searching necessary to finding good background about an individual, organization or issue. As always, we'll assess your news judgment and writing.
- Story about a live event. Goal: To show you how to report accurately and interestingly on deadline. You'll get to use the context you gathered in the previous assignment.
- Basic police story. * Goal: To introduce you report precisely on a specialized beat, one that requires you to translate legal language and avoid legal and ethical pitfalls.
- A pitch. * Goal: To introduce you to the art of persuading an editor to publish a story, in this case a profile. To do that, you'll need to do some pre-reporting to find the story's premise and what makes it interesting. You'll also have to find human and documentary sources.
- A profile. * Goal: To improve your skills as an interviewer and storyteller in a longer story. Here's a chance to do long-form writing and take photos to accompany it.
- Radio feature package (script, audio and photo). * Goal: to introduce you to the skills needed to produce an audio story. You'll pitch a story and then gather audio and natural sound, write a script, and edit the audio package for broadcasts.
- Diversity story. * Goal: To produce a story about the importance of diversity in your community.
- Numbers story. * Goal: To produce a story that refreshes and enhances your understanding of basic statistics (mean, median, etc.), percentages, percentage increase and rates.
- Issue coverage. * Goal: To collaborate in producing an online package, featuring text, audio and photos on a newsworthy aspect of a local controversy.

* Stories or scripts will be revised.

Texts

We'll supplement classwork with readings from "News Writing and Reporting," by the Missouri Group, 10th Edition. I will make copies, but you might already own the book from 170.

Grading

- Attendance and Participation (20%)
- Reporting and writing assignments (80%)

I'll base grades on this 100-point scale. Letter grades will not be used in this course, although the final grade (per requirement) will be given as a plus/minus letter grade. The equivalents are as follows:

A: 96-100	C: 73-76
A-: 90-95	C-: 70-72
B+: 87-89	D+: 67-69
B: 83-86	D: 63-66
B-: 80-82	D-: 60-62
C+: 77-79	F: Below 60

Majors and minors must earn at least a C- in the course to advance to be eligible for courses in the professional programs.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Think of it as stealing words or ideas without giving the original writer credit. Professionals get fired for doing this. It could result F for the course. The solution is simple: attribute.

Academic honesty:

Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. Here's UM's [Student Conduct Code](#).

No double dipping

You may not submit any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive approval from the professor of this course. Doing so without permission will result in an F for the assignment, and could result in an F for the course.

Accommodation for students with disabilities:

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](#) can help instructors and students in the accommodation process.

This is a UM-approved Writing Course. So ...

This course requires an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university's writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database.

This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university. Here's the [rubric](#) that will be used to score the papers.