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### JRNL 370.01: Beat Reporting

Christine L. Trudeau

*University of Montana, Missoula*, [christine.trudeau@umontana.edu](mailto:christine.trudeau@umontana.edu)

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# JRNL 370-Beat Reporting

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**Fall 2022 (Subject to change)**

**3:30- 4:50 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday**

**Don Anderson Hall 210**

*Assistant Associate Professor Christine Trudeau*

*DAH #406/ christine.trudeau@umt.edu*

*Office hours: 10 to 11:45 am & 1 to 4 pm Wednesday and by appointment*

## Course Description

Beginning today, I am your city editor, and you are my beat reporters. You will be assigned beats, under which you are required to cultivate sources and produce news stories on a regular basis. Also, as a class we will spend up to a couple of weeks at a time covering police, courts, city hall, public schools and education. During the 15 weeks we are together, 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.

Beat reporters are the core of a news organization. There's little that's more fun, or more challenging. Your beat is your turf, a wide-open playing field full of stories that you own. Beat reporting is also competitive, consuming and very hard work. So is this course. You will often be responsible for reporting and writing at least one story a week. I'll edit each of your stories. In addition, we will regularly critique assignments in class, giving everyone a chance to see and contribute in how best to improve stories in both writing and reporting. The pace is fast, but it's the pace you'll need to run if you want to do the job.

## Course Outcomes

By the end of the semester, you will gain:

- Perspective in covering all aspects of our community in terms of age, race, culture, gender and sexual identity. Diversity will be an important component in the work you do both in this class and in the profession.
- Experience covering police agencies, local government, criminal- and civil-court proceedings, schools and other government institutions.
- The ability to generate interesting, useful story ideas.
- Improved reporting and writing skills applicable to all types of writing.

- Experience writing breaking news on deadline.
- An understanding of government organization and functions.
- An appreciation of the societal value of public affairs reporting.
- An understanding of access to and use of public records.
- Familiarity with news beats and methods for successful beat coverage.
- An understanding of ethical and professional challenges of reporting public affairs.
- Necessary skills needed for reporting internships with news organizations.
- Ability to accurately use numbers and math in a journalism context
- Experience acquiring and using data and documents for reporting
- Experience using writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Experience formulating and expressing written ideas that are developed, logical, and organized
- Experience composing news stories that are appropriate for a given audience, purpose and context
- Experience revising stories based on constructive comments from an editor
- Experience finding, evaluating, and using information effectively and ethically from diverse sources
- The ability to demonstrate appropriate English language usage

### **Advanced writing requirement**

In addition, this course meets the University of Montana Advanced Writing requirement in the School of Journalism. As such, you will also gain:

- The ability to identify and pursue more sophisticated questions for academic inquiry
- The ability to find, evaluate, analyze and synthesize information effectively from diverse sources
- The ability to manage multiple perspectives as appropriate
- The ability to recognize the purposes and needs of discipline-specific audiences and adopt the academic voice necessary for the chosen discipline
- The ability to use multiple drafts, revision, and editing in conducting inquiry and preparing written work
- The ability to follow the conventions of citation, documentation, and formal presentation appropriate to Associated Press style
- A developed competence in information technology and digital literacy

You will also have a project story, which will make up 10% of your final grade, that will be due in three phases:

- Story pitch, a fully developed and researched story pitch
- Story draft, a fully developed and thoroughly researched story
- Rewrite, a final version of the story that has been revised and rewritten based on feedback from the professor

## Important dates

Mark your calendars now:

- Diverse U, the campus-wide initiative on diversity does not yet have a schedule. If they do hold the event, it usually occurs during the first week of November.
- Also note that the Missoula City Council meets on Monday evenings, please work now to start clearing your schedules so you can start attending these meetings during the final five weeks of class.
- You WILL be covering at least one race in the midterm elections, so please make yourself free on Nov. 8 so you have time to report, write and file a story that evening.
  - You are encouraged to register to vote, and do so via absentee ballot, to ensure you have the time to complete the work assigned for that day. You can find more info at: <https://sosmt.gov/elections/absentee/>

## Course Policies

### Reporting in the age of a pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is looking to make this yet another difficult semester. I want nothing more than for you all to succeed, but also to do so with your health intact. This will require all of us to be flexible and adaptable when it comes to the semester schedule, assignments and class attendance. Please attend every class unless you have been ordered to quarantine or fall ill. I will provide frequent updates on the schedule and let you know what to expect. But first and foremost: Masks are required in Don Anderson Hall and absolutely required while in class, at least through Sept. 20. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

With that said, we also have new institutional policies regarding our building.

### Don Anderson Hall

- Don't come inside if you're not feeling well
- Mask up before entry and stay masked when in the building
- Wipe down your classroom space when you enter
- Sit in the same place in your classroom each meeting
- Wipe down your classroom space as you leave
- Maintain social distance always

The mask policy is mandatory campus-wide. If you cannot wear a mask because of medical reasons, please go to Disability Student Services to explore your options, they will handle these situations case by case. Please be considerate of your classmates, your professors and your staff. Maintain healthy practices when you are not on campus to avoid exposing others to COVID-19. You must commit some Monday evenings to firsthand coverage of Missoula City Council meetings. Court

proceedings and other coverage also require an extraordinary commitment of time and local travel.

With that said ...

### **Reporting During the Pandemic**

This is a brief guide to go over before reporting for the School of Journalism. It is based on briefings and planning done by the Wall Street Journal and NPR. It is not intended to replace your judgement or that of your professor and if you have concerns about your health during your reporting, please contact and work with your professor.

Remember, journalism is a job that involves talking with members of the public and interacting with people. Our goal is to do that as safely as possible. There is no way to stay completely safe (whether reporting or not) and therefore this guide is aimed at helping you plan for and conduct reporting as safely as possible.

### **Before Reporting**

Do as much research and reporting as possible remotely. This should include in-depth digital searching and researching, phone interviews and occasional email interviews.

If you are intending to do in-person interviews or event coverage consider whether this can be done outside versus inside. Outside venues give you better ventilation which will reduce the possibility of aerial transmission. Large indoor venues are also better than small ones and places with low rates of infection are safer than areas reporting higher rates. Consult with the Missoula County and Governor's task force sites for more information about where active cases are more pronounced.

### **Out in the Field**

- Maintain 2 meters (6 feet) or more distance between you and the person you're interviewing. If possible, avoid shaking hands.
- Interview the person at an angle; not face-to-face. Interview outside if possible, and consider the wind direction. Wind that passes through both parties is the best kind.
- If the interview must be indoors, pick a spot near an open window. Some kind of airflow is better than none.
- Be aware of your surroundings, and maintain a heightened level of vigilance.
- Avoid eating or drinking items that have come into contact with other people (cups, forks, knives, etc.). If you come into contact with these items, wash your hands afterwards and avoid touching your face.
- Remove all jewelry, watches, etc. before going out on assignment.
- If you wear eyeglasses, clean them regularly, but avoid hand to eye contact.
- Avoid using cash. Sanitize debit/credit cards regularly.
- Ensure you wash hands before, during, and after leaving any affected area. Dry with disposable napkins.

- While using mass transit, use hand sanitizer when disembarking.

### Level 1 PPE

- Examples: photoshoot that allows social distancing, Interviews in open-air with six feet of separation.
- Requirements: Hand sanitizer and 3-ply surgical or clean cloth mask.
- As of July 21, 2020, Hong Kong (7.1 million people) only has a little more than 2,000 cases total. New York City (8.3 million people) has more than 226,000 cases. Why the difference? Answer: Face Coverings.
- If a 3-ply surgical mask is not available, cloth masks work in a similar fashion. As long as the nasal passages and mouth are covered with the proper support.

### Level 2 PPE

- Examples: visiting a person's home, meeting a source at a closed in office.
- Requirements: Hand sanitizer, protective eyewear and N95 mask or clean cloth mask.
- Be sure to clean your hands before and immediately after being in the location. Maintain six feet of distance between yourself and others. Do not shake hands.
- Minimize your time inside and if you must do the interview inside, keep your mask on and try and position yourself near an open window.

### Level 3 PPE (Known infected areas)

- Requirements: full Tyvek hazmat suit, hand sanitizer, N95, and eyeglasses. Before embarking on a level 3 assignment, you will need to purchase a spray bottle of surface cleaner. The latter is due to dangerous cargo and import restrictions.
- Examples: ICU wards, morgues, quarantine locations, and nursing homes.

### What is COVID-19?

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

- Coronaviruses usually have mild effects on their hosts. It is not to be confused with influenza, or the common cold.
- The current outbreak was termed SARS-CoV2 in January 2020. The west commonly refers to the virus as COVID-19.
- The virus requires a host to divide and multiply.
- The main vector for transmission is through a sneeze of an infected person, and particles (fomites) reaches the palate of a target.
- Proteins that cover the virus fomites attaches to receptor cells at the back of the palate, and the trachea or windpipe. Think of a three-pronged plug, attaching into an outlet.
- On average, people are asymptomatic (presymptomatic) for 5.1-5.5 days before symptoms appear.
- The virus cannot enter via your blood, or through open wounds. The fomites must be ingested or inhaled.

- The virus can live on clothing for 7 hours, and stainless steel for 10 hours.
- The New England Journal of Medicine notes that fomites can live on cardboard for 18 hours, and 48 hours on shiny plastic surfaces.
- Fomites can live outside of the body at minimal strength for 80 hours. In comparison, HIV is only 15-45 seconds.

**Classroom discussion is an essential part of this course.** Attendance and active class participation are essential to your grade. That means completing assigned reading and other homework before class. You are also expected to read and think like a journalist. If you are adequately conversant on the news, we'll enjoy excellent discussion. If not, there will be news quizzes. As for the participation grade, you'll lose five percentage points for every unexcused absence.

**All writing for this class must be original.** As stated in the University of Montana Student Conduct Code, you may not submit for this course any assignment that you have submitted or will submit for another class or publication, unless you receive prior approval from me. To do so without permission will result in an F for the assignment and could result in an F for the course. You may not recycle pieces previously written for publication. You must be able to identify the sources of all information you use. Upon request, you must provide story notes and contact information for all sources. Stories from this class that are published will receive extra credit.

**Rules of integrity.** Cheating will not be tolerated. All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code.

**Plagiarism.** Submitted work **must** be entirely original; you may not copy or borrow phrasing or sentence structure, unless you attribute clearly. You may not take story ideas directly from the Missoulian, or any other newspaper, unless you plan to bring something fresh to an old story. **If you are uncertain about what is or is not appropriate, ask me.** Submitting the work of someone else as your own is a serious violation of journalistic ethics and the University of Montana Student Conduct Code. An act of plagiarism will result in an F for the course and possible disciplinary sanction by the university.

**Collaborative efforts.** Discussing stories among colleagues often helps you generate better story ideas, work through reporting challenges and improve your reporting and writing. Feel free to discuss your ideas and writing and seek feedback from other people. But the reporting and writing for this class must be your own.

**Double-dipping** No element (recordings, story ideas, scripts, etc.) for another class can fulfill assignments for this class without DOCUMENTED ACCEPTANCE from instructors of all involved courses. Failure to do so will result in failure on that assignment.

**A note on unnamed sources and granting sources anonymity.** Unnamed sources are not allowed unless cleared with your professor. In addition, writers will not change the names of sources for publication. **Every story must include a list of sources with telephone numbers and email addresses.** Nothing will be written

“for class only.” You will report as if your stories will be published and should strive to make that happen. Treat sources accordingly.

**Moodle.** Grades, the syllabus, class notes, some readings and assignments can be found at the UM Online/Moodle listing for this course. All email communication will happen through Moodle to your university-assigned addresses. It’s your responsibility to check the Moodle site and your student email regularly. Not checking this address will not be an acceptable excuse for missing information about this course.

## Texts

The AP Stylebook. No older than 2018. Online versions not acceptable.

The Missoulian, the Kaimin, PBS News Hour, NPR, Indian Country Today, Poynter, the Washington Post, the New York Times, and Nieman Reports.

Optional: Grist, The Marshall Project, Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting, The War Horse, and High Country News.

Subscribe to the Times here with an education discount: [New York Times Educational Discount](http://www.nytimes.com/subscriptions/edu/lp8LQFK.html?src=898Q4&campaignId=393W8)  
(<http://www.nytimes.com/subscriptions/edu/lp8LQFK.html?src=898Q4&campaignId=393W8>)

Subscribe using the Post’s education discount: Washington Post academic rate  
(<https://subscribe.washingtonpost.com/acqlite/edu-offer/>)

## Course Outline

Classes will consist of lectures, discussions, critiques of your work, and mandatory one-on-one meetings with your professor. 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 us and the media.

## Attendance

You are expected to attend each class meeting. The success of this course depends on the quality of our discussions, including feedback on homework critiques. 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

Your course grade will be based on an average of all individual assignments and quizzes, plus your participation. Here's the formula: Assignments and quizzes (70%) + Project story, including re-write (10%) + participation (20 percent) = final grade.

**Remember:** You are required to re-write the project story based on feedback from the professor. Failure to do so will result in a grade of "Zero." Also, you have the option to rewrite up to three additional assignments based on feedback from the professor and your colleagues offered during class critiques. Every draft of a story is required to have a legitimate news hook (meaning, submitting a rewrite on a city council meeting that occurred two weeks ago will not count) and will carry the same weight. Each draft will be considered an independent assignment.

**Accuracy:** In journalism, accuracy is obviously important. Specifically, it's important that we strive to get the names of our sources correct. Therefore, it is a grading policy in this class that any assignment that contains a misspelled name, whether a result of a type-o or under-reporting, will automatically get a grade of "Zero," with no opportunity to rewrite.

## Deadlines

Journalism is deadline-driven. A late assignment is a failed assignment. In rare instances involving documentable extenuating circumstances, such as hospitalization, I may grant an extension or, in the case of breaking news, make an alternative assignment. Please remember that a crummy story filed on deadline trumps an excellent one filed late.

## 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:

[https://staging.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/um\\_student\\_code\\_of\\_conduct\\_effective\\_8-1-2021.pdf](https://staging.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/um_student_code_of_conduct_effective_8-1-2021.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, 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 Web site at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/)

## COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject ... likely to change)

### Week 1 – Getting started

Introduction to Public Affairs Reporting—a boot camp approach. Practice writing a police story on deadline. Basics of AP style, using quotes, attribution, finding and using sources, etc. The art of the telephone interview.

**In-class assignment** – Write a crime story on deadline from a press release and PIO interview.

Week 2 – Diversity. We have to improve how well we cover people of color. This will be a focus throughout the semester in all of our assignments.

Begin cops coverage. Crime, fires, crashes, and other pandemonium on the public safety beat

Reporting boot camp continued. Critique of week one story. Review news story structures.

**In-class assignment** – Second deadline crime story.

### Week 3 – Cops continued

What's a story and how do I find them? Learn to find and pitch stories from a beat. Explore the lifecycle of a news story. Beyond breaking news – intro to other types of news stories. Pitch critiques.

**Assignment** – Three story pitches. Research and prepare pitches for a crime trend story.

### Week 4 – More crime, intro to courts

Critique trend pitches. Introduction to reporting on criminal and civil legal proceedings.

**Assignment**—Write a crime trend story from one of your pitches.

### Week 5 – Courts

How to find, read and understand court records. Learn to follow a case from an arrest to the prison system.

**Assignment**—Write a story incorporating details from a court record.

Week 6: Courts continued

Critique court record stories. Covering hearings and trials. Field trip to Missoula County Courthouse. Learn to search for court records.

**Assignment**—Write a daily deadline story on a hearing or an ongoing trial.

Week 7: Justice wrap-up, Intro to the city beat

Working the mafia beat. Skype visit from Michael Zuckerman, former USA Today reporter and editor and expert on organized crime, terrorism, cyber-security, the Justice Department and national security issues.

Intro to city hall reporting. Prep for Monday's Missoula City Council meeting.

**Assignment** – Write a preview of Monday's City Council meeting. Due in class Monday

Week 8: City beat continued

Continue prep for Monday's City Council meeting

**Assignment**—Write a story on the council meeting

Week 9: Reporting the issue story. Understanding diversity. Reporting in diverse communities.

How to find and write an issue story. Reporting and writing in diverse communities.

**Assignment**—Write an issue story that reflects cultural diversity and examines issues of race, class or sexual orientation.

Week 10: Advancing the story

Learn to develop and write an issue folo.

**Assignment**—Develop pitched for an issue folo and write the approved pitch.

Week 11: Digging deeper on the city beat

How to read a city budget. Finding stories in the agate type.

**Assignment**—Three story pitches from the budget.

Week 12: Reporting on public officials. The art of the profile

Learn to cover politicians and elections beyond the horse race. Learn to write a strong profile of a public figure.

**Assignment**—Write a profile of a public official.

Week 13: The elements of investigative reporting

Finding investigative stories in your beat. The Gene Roberts "two notebook" method of making a name for yourself as a journalist. Critique candidate profiles. Leaks and documents, how to get them, how to use them. Reporting the data-driven story.

Intro to Microsoft Excel.

**Assignment**—Find, pitch and write a story incorporating data or documents.

Week 14: Education

Learn to report on public schools, community colleges, and for-profit schools.

**Assignment**—Localize a national story on K-12 or higher education.

Week 15: Law, ethics, and public affairs journalism

Review education story. Ethics of public affairs journalism. Feedback and student evaluations.