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JRNL 270.02: Reporting

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JRNL 270/Reporting

Fall 2015/Sections 2 & 3

Instructor: Nadia White

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Office hours: Mondays 3-5, Wednesday 9-11 or by appointment

Course description

Building on what you've learned in JRNL 170 and 257, this course will expand your ability report news stories and features for an online audience. We'll bolster your news writing and news judgment. We'll help you identify, research and pitch potential news stories; find and interview credible sources; and write, edit and post better stories, photos and audio files to a class website.

Learning outcomes

Successful students will demonstrate their understanding of the values of truth, accuracy and fairness in reporting and of the importance of meeting the needs of a diverse audience. They will show their ability to:

- Think critically and independently.
- Research and evaluate information.
- Critically evaluate and tailor their work to the appropriate audience.
- Write correctly and clearly.
- Apply basic numerical concepts.
- Produce news on deadline.

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 constructive feedback, begin to use 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 build toward each writing assignment. Each class will feature an exercise or quiz that builds on previous class discussions, so it is crucial that you attend every class. You must also stay abreast of the news by reading the Missoulian online, the Kaimin online and national or

international news sites like the New York Times, CNN, BBC, CNN, the Huffington Post and others.

After the first week or so, 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 cannot 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 average can't survive more than a couple of those. This is a professional school, and professionals hit deadlines. Even so, I realize that stories can fall apart for reasons beyond a reporter's control (situations change, sources bail out, etc.) If that seems to be happening, you must tell me about it **well before** the deadline so we shift to a different story. I won't have sympathy for excuses that come after deadline.

* Each student will get one and only one Mulligan. This allows you to submit one story after deadline in September or October. No Mulligans are allowed after Oct. 31. You must tell me you'll be using your Mulligan on the day of the original missed deadline and you must write Mulligan on the top of the story when you do submit it. It must be submitted within a week of the missed deadline. It must be similar in substance (a speech story replaces a missed speech story.) You may earn up to 59 points (a high F) for a Mulligan, but not more.

Participation and cell phone/computer in class

Attending class is essential but I do not consider your mere presence equal to participation. Your actual engagement in the class is essential for you – and your classmates – to learn the skills of reporting. You will learn from each other in class, just as you learn from me. To that end, I ask that you refrain from using your cell phone, tablet or computers for anything other than note taking or calendar functions unless I explicitly ask you to do otherwise.

Holidays this semester

- Monday, Sept. 7 – Labor Day.
- Wednesday, Nov. 11 – Veterans Day, no classes. Although this class does not meet on Wednesdays, this holiday may affect your ability to reach sources for assignments. Plan accordingly.
- Wednesday Nov. 25- Sunday Nov. 29: Thanksgiving, no classes.

Writing assignments

This course will feature nine writing assignments, four of which will be revised*. Other brief writing exercises will be assigned as relevant. The assignments are:

1. Story based on coverage of a video press conference.

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.

Readings in the text: p. 313-323 (Speeches and press conferences.) See also p. 81-105 (Quotation and attribution). Refresh your memory of common grammar problems (p. 489-498) and AP Style (p. 499-505.)

2. Preview story about an impending event.*

Goal: To improve your skills at online searching for background about an individual, organization or issue. As always, we'll assess your news judgment and the writing.

Readings in the text: 111-127; 131-145 (Gathering and verifying Information; finding the news in news releases.)

3. 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.

4. Basic police story from an affidavit.*

Goal: To introduce you to reporting precisely on a specialized beat, one that requires you to translate legal language and avoid legal and ethical pitfalls. p. 329-354.

5. 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 nail down human and documentary sources. I'll give you some resources to help you prepare your pitches.

6. A profile with photo*

Goal: To improve your skills as an interviewer and storyteller in a longer story. p. 59-78; provide examples of good student-produced profiles. See top five entries in Hearst 2014-15 contest. http://hearstfdn.org/hearst_journalism/competitions.php?year=2015&type=Writin
[g](#)

7. Radio feature package (script, audio and photo)

Goal: To build on your skills in producing an audio story. You'll pitch a story and then gathering audio interviews and natural sound, write a script, and edit the audio package for broadcasts. P 265-283.

8. Diversity/numbers story

Goal: You'll write a trend story for an online or broadcast audience that requires an understanding of the importance of diversity and basic numerical concepts.

9. Issue coverage (Goal: To learn collaborate in producing an online package, featuring text, audio and photos on an newsworthy aspect of a local controversy.) p. 287. I plan present an ongoing controversy and assign teams of two or three student to explain its various effects on locals.

Texts and tools

We'll supplement classwork with readings from "News Writing and Report Working With Words," by the Missouri Group, Eleventh Edition. You may buy the text online as either a paper textbook or an e-book, or you can rent the e-book for the semester. Do it today. The UC Bookstore has a few paper texts and instructions on how to order the downloadable version.

We will pay special attention to:

- Appendix 1, "20 Common Errors"
- Appendix 2, "Wire-Service Style and Summary."
- Part Two: Reporting Tools
- Part Three: Storytelling
- Part Four: Writing for Specific Media
- Part Seven: Rights and Responsibilities

You will need some tools of the trade. Those of you with laptops, tablets or smartphones probably already have decent camera and voice-recording apps. We'll make a few recording units available through the school's equipment check out. I'll be asking those of you with laptops to bring them to class on occasion.

Grading

- Participation (exercises, quizzes, discussions): 30 percent
- Writing assignments: 70 percent

Grades will be based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana's plus/minus system. Your final grade will be given as a letter grade, but I'll be using numerical grades throughout the course. The equivalents are as follows:

A: 95-100
A-: 90-94
B+: 87-89
B: 83-86
B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79
C: 73-76
C-: 70-72
D+: 67-69
D: 63-66
D-: 60-62
F: Below 60

Building access

For after-hours access to the rooms and doors listed below, please complete and submit [this form](#). Complete only ONE request per semester. Be sure to select all courses you are taking which pertain to Don Anderson Hall. Here's the link again: <http://jour.umt.edu/current-students/afterhoursaccess/default>

Please note that the building and its equipment are for the sole use of journalism students, who pay a special fee access.

Additional requirements

Academic honesty: Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. Students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

No double dipping

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive prior 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 program modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](#) will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process.

