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JRNL 270.02: Reporting

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JRNL 270/Reporting

Fall 2015/Section 1

Instructor: Nadia White

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Office hours: Mondays 1-3p.m., Wednesdays, 9-11 a.m. 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, Vice News 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 no higher than 59. 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.

Writing assignments

This course will feature numerous news briefs, breaking news blog posts and nine full writing assignments, four of which will be revised. The feature assignments are:

1. Story based on coverage of a 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.

Note: Assign this two weeks ahead of the event.

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 report 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.

Pitching stories:

<http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/writing/185746/6-questions-journalists-should-be-able-to-answer-before-pitching-a-story/>

<https://ijnet.org/en/blog/how-pitch-story-ideas-tips-journalists>

A template:

<https://rorypecktrust.org/getmedia/7708fd28-36fa-496e-8738-5ad897fcb48a/Pitching-Template.pdf.aspx>

Bad pitches:

<http://www.theopennotebook.com/2012/01/04/how-not-to-pitch/>

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=Writing

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; sample scripts.

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 a newsworthy aspect of a local controversy. p. 287. I will present background information an ongoing controversy and assign teams of two or three student to explain its various effects on locals.

* Story will be revised

Our blog: Breaking news, current events and blog maintenance

To know news you need to make it a part of you – breathe it, eat it, live it. That's easier to do when you're part of a community of people who are living and breathing from the same newsshed. We'll use a class blog to make it easy to build that community and keep the news, like oxygen, flowing. That's where you'll post weekly current events and breaking news, stories that relate to class discussions and comments about what's going on in the world. We're going to try to keep it focused on news events. Along the way, you'll also learn how to work the back side of a blog.

Team work: Weekly news recap and breaking news

Working in teams, you will be responsible for providing a weekly news recap on Tuesdays and for breaking news on the blog. Each team will be responsible for breaking four news stories a week. The class will vote for best breaking news brief each week.

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 (breaking news briefs, stories): 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](#).

Cell phones in class

Please do not use your cell phones or computers in class for anything other than note taking or scheduling. It is hard for me to teach when you are distracted by a screen. It is impossible for you to learn. I reserve the right to turn off your computer and take possession of your cell phone if you cannot manage your use of those devices appropriately.

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.