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JRNL 270.02: Reporting

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JRNL 270/Reporting

Tuesdays, Thursdays 11:10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., DAH 009

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Office hours: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, noon-2 p.m.;
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-2 p.m., or by appointment

Introduction

This class is an introduction to real, working journalism, giving you the basic tools to be competitive in an increasingly competitive environment. You will be treated like the professionals you aspire to be. The demands may feel daunting, but the rewards will be great. Much has been (rightfully) made of the dire straits in which journalism finds itself these days, but it remains one of the most enjoyable jobs out there. It's a tremendous privilege to go places you'd never otherwise go, and meet people with whom you'd never ordinarily come in contact, and tell their stories. Likewise, given today's information overload, journalism's watchdog function—holding the feet of the powerful to the fire; providing accurate information about the workings of taxpayer-funded institutions—is more important than ever. It's a job for people with fire in the belly. I hope this class sparks that fire.

Course objectives

Successful JRNL 270 students will:

- Develop sound news judgment
- Find proper news sources and conduct interviews
- Understand which facts are necessary and how to gather them
- Learn to write basic news stories with accuracy, clarity, logic and precision
- Understand and employ story formats for both print/online and broadcast
- Learn the basics of gathering and editing audio
- Understand basic legal and ethical principles of journalism

How we'll do that

We'll gauge your progress through frequent exercises, writing assignments and quizzes on the news and points of grammar and style. In fact, every class will

feature a quiz or exercise on one of these things, which means you need to attend every class.

Each class also will feature a short current events quiz. That means you'll need to follow the news. Be prepared to discuss what's happening around the world and in you town by reading the Missoulian, the Kaimin and a national/international news site like the New York Times, the Washington Post, the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera America. Start following journalists you admire on social media.

Ground rules

Did I mention that you need to attend every class? Remember, this class will be treated like a journalism job. Late to class is late to work. A working reporter who shows up late to a story gets beaten on that story. Unacceptable. Here's another reason why: You won't be allowed to make up work that you miss due to an unexcused absence, and you can't get an excused absence without prior permission from the instructor. Good excuses include illness and death, and that's about it. Missing class will affect (not *effect*, by the way) your grade.

Texts

- The required text is "News Writing and Reporting" by Chip Scanlan and Richard Craig. It's available in the bookstore.
- If you think you'll continue in journalism, this would be a good time to buy the AP Stylebook, also available for purchase online. The [online edition](#) is constantly updated, and you can access it for free from the Mansfield Library's site. But you're better off buying the hard copy. You'll use it the rest of your life.

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1 – News judgment, stories. A discussion of what makes something newsworthy, and the different types of stories. Read Chapters 1 and 11 in the text.

Week 2 – Planning stories, reporters' tools. Now that you know what makes a good story, how do you get it? Read Chapter 2/

Week 3 – Research/sourcing, grammar/style. Your story is only as good as your advance research, and the sources you contact. But bad grammar and improper style can scuttle those efforts. Chapters 7, 8

Week 4 – Ledes, ledes, ledes. Kickers, too. We focus on the first sentence of a story, the lede (old school for lead), and the last. Grab your readers' attention and hang onto them until the end. Chapter 10

Week 5 – Interviewing: How to ask the questions to get to the heart of your story. You'll interview someone in class, and write a story. Chapter 6

Week 6 – Print vs. online, deadline writing. Increasingly, the distinctions between print and online are blurred, and deadlines are 24/7. We'll learn how to manage the tap dance. Chapters 12,13

Week 7 – Features/profiles, story idea, pitching. How to write the human interest stories full of the telling details that that readers love. And how to get an editor to buy into your story ideas. Chapter 19

Week 8 – Midterm. Diversity, libel, privacy, ethics. We'll take a little test. Then we'll talk about why diversity matters so very much, and how make your stories scrupulously fair. Chapters 15, 16

Week 9 – Writing for broadcast. It's different. Make a point of listening to newscasts and noting the conversational quality that imparts key nuggets of news in brief. Chapter 14.

Week 10 – Gathering & editing sound. You'll work in pairs to identify stories and get the sound you'll need for those stories. We'll use the free program, Audacity, to edit those stories. Handouts, online tutorials.

Week 11 – Broadcast exercises. You'll be putting those stories together. Handouts.

Week 12 – Present and critique radio packages. We all get to enjoy your good work.

Week 13 – Covering a beat, accuracy in numbers. How to develop the sources who are so crucial to good and efficient coverage. And, how to use numbers to best effect, providing the hard facts that illustrate your anecdotes. Chapters 9, 18

Week 14 – Review/drills. Everything we've learned, in one breathless week.

Week 15 – Wrapping it up/Final/Sending you out to be awesome

Homework and assignments

Assignments will include increasingly ambitious articles/scripts as the course progresses. Writing and reading assignments will be discussed in class and posted on the UM Online/Moodle site for this class. You're responsible for

checking it (Log in with your NetID) I won't track you down to let you know you've missed one. Missing an assignment is like missing deadline; i.e., unacceptable. And, it hurts your grade.

I'll send email via UM online/Moodle to your university address. Failure to check your university email is not an acceptable excuse for missing information.

Grading

- Participation (attendance and quizzes): 20 percent
- Writing assignments: 50 percent
- Midterm: 10 percent
- Final: 20 percent

The grade equivalents are:

90-100 percent: A
80-89 percent: B
70-79 percent: C
60-69 percent: D
50-59 percent: F

UM's plus/minus system also makes the following distinctions:

A+: 97-100
A: 93-96
A-: 90-92
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: 59 or lower

Writing and radio assignments will be evaluated according to how well you incorporate what's learned in class and readings, and what your skills bring to a story. They'll be judged on accuracy, news judgment, clarity, completeness and fairness. Grammar and spelling count as do, within reason, the rules of journalistic style. Check your work before you turn it in. Use grammar and spellcheck in Word.

A misspelled name is the No. 1 sin of journalism. If you hear someone's name as someone John Smith, chances are it's Jon Smythe. Always ask. Misspelled names and other obvious factual mistakes will count heavily against your grade for that assignment.

Grades will reflect professional standards. The closer an assignment to being publishable/airable, the better the grade.

Missed deadlines are not an option in this class or in journalism. Unless you make prior arrangements with me, an assignment submitted after the deadline will earn a 0. Your grade can't survive many of those.

Once again, treat the class like a job. Meet your deadlines. Get the instructor's permission in advance for any necessary absence. Be thoughtful and engaged. Grades are based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana's plus/minus system. Letter grades will not be used in this course, although the final grade (per requirement) will be given as a letter grade. Please note: a 70/C is the minimum passing grade for JRNL classes. You will not receive credit toward the requirements of a Journalism degree if you earn lower than a 70/C in this class.

Academic honesty

Honesty in presenting your own work is mandatory. Academic misconduct at the University of Montana is subject to an academic penalty ranging from failing the assignment to expulsion of the university. It's your responsibility to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

Plagiarism

As defined by "The University of Montana Student Conduct Code," plagiarism is: "Representing another person's original works, ideas, data, notes, or other materials as one's own." This is strictly prohibited in this class, and any case of plagiarism in this course will be subject to the penalties outlined in the student code of conduct. In addition, fictions (made-up facts, made-up people) presented as journalism are grounds for immediate failure.

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 instructor for this course. To do so without permission will result in an F for

the assignment and could result in an F for the course. However, you can and are encouraged to publish any work you do for this class.

Equipment

Later in the semester, small teams of students will receive audio recording equipment. You will manage sharing the gear among your teammates.

You are financially responsible for any lost, stolen or damaged equipment. Be careful with all equipment you use. Don't leave any equipment in your car or anywhere it may be stolen. Do not lose your temper and take it out on your equipment. Problems will happen, whether you're at the network level or in college. Everything breaks down eventually. Batteries run down. Computers mysteriously stop working. All of these things will happen to you at some point. As part of becoming a professional, you'll learn to adapt. Be patient and learn to solve your problems.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

This course is accessible to and usable by 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. For more information, visit the [Disability Services website](#).

After-hours admission to DAH

For after-hours access to the rooms and doors in Don Anderson Hall, please complete and submit the [after-hours access form](#). Complete only ONE request per semester. Be sure to select all courses you are taking which pertain to Don Anderson Hall, and include information in the "Comments Section" (300/400-level courses) to further clarify your request.

A keypad access code will be assigned and provided to you via email, after submitting this form. This request will also activate your GrizCard for the building. All codes will remain active until the last day of the semester. All requests must be submitted by 5 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 6.

Writing assessment

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. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following writing learning outcomes.

Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose

- Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing
- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (largely style conventions like APA or MLA)
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage