

JRMC 7355: Health and Medical Journalism
Spring 2010
Wednesday 9:05 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.
Grady College, Room 205
Lab: Room 132

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Office hours: Tues 1:30 – 4:00, Wed 1:30 – 4:00 or by appointment.

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Introduction

This semester, you will acquire and cultivate the conceptual and analytical skills needed to craft accurate, timely, interesting and credible stories for audiences large or small. By the end of the semester, you should know how to gather and evaluate health and medical information from peer-reviewed journals, scientific meetings, government and institutional sources, institutional and community sources, watchdog groups and academic experts. You will use these sources to create stories exploring connections between health and wealth in the communities you cover.

You will spend the semester operating a one-person news bureau for a county in northeast Georgia. That county's UGA Agricultural Extension Service office will be your home base when you're in the field, and host agents will help you learn your way around. Your home on the Web will be www.deepsouthhealth.blogspot.com, which is set up with an editor's desk (for me) and bureaus for each of you. Multimedia kits and flip cameras will be available throughout the semester.

You are required to publish at least two of your stories on www.gradyjournal.com and you are encouraged to market your class projects to print, broadcast and online news organizations in northeast Georgia and beyond. Potential markets include *Red & Black*, *Athens Banner Herald*, *Athens Magazine*, *Flagpole*, *Athena*, *Athens Parent*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Atlanta Magazine*. WUOG, WUGA and WNEG are some of the broadcast outlets you should consider.

In addition to field research, this class involves readings, discussions, lectures, and writing workshops during class meetings. The goal is to help build your reporting, writing and editing skills. I am available to talk with you during office hours or by appointment.

Requirements and grading

Punctuality and attendance are required for all course-related activities. You are expected to complete all assignments on time, participate in discussions, and behave in a professional and collegial manner at all times. I promise to reciprocate and to share what I know, introduce you to scientists and journalists who can sharpen your thinking and broaden your horizons, and admit when I'm stumped.

You will complete, on deadline, the following:

- A two-page **beat report** on health issues and health and medical resources in the county you will be covering. This should contain three possible story ideas.
- One localized **news story** triggered by an article in a peer-reviewed journal (500-600 words)
- One **enterprise news story** from your beat (500-600 words)
- One localized **news story** about research presented during the American College of Cardiology Scientific Sessions (500-600 words).
- One locally reported **feature story** (1,000 – 1,200 words).
- One 1.5- to 3-minute **audio slideshow or video** to accompany your feature story.
- One **opinion or first-person** piece about health/medical on your beat or raised at AHCJ meeting (500-700 words)

In addition, you are required to:

- Publish two or more briefs, news stories or features on www.gradyjournal.com These may include stories written for this course but not published elsewhere.
- Write 10 blog posts during the semester. These should relate to your beat and may draw from guest speakers, outside lectures required for the course, peer-reviewed journal articles, or conference presentations as well as your own reporting experiences. Your posts can incorporate text, pictures, videos, links to relevant stories, databases or other resources. These blogs will be aggregated at <http://deepsouthhealth.blogspot.com> We'll work together to drive traffic to the site.
- You are expected to read and comment regularly on blog posts written by classmates.

This course requires the following activities outside regular class meetings:

- Field reporting on your beat. Your business-related mileage will be reimbursed at the state rate by the KnightHealth Graduate Student Travel Fund, using the mileage reporting form posted on www.elc.uga.edu
- Attend three of four Global Diseases: Voices from the Vanguard lectures scheduled for January 26, February 23, March 23 and April 13. All begin at 5:30 p.m. in the UGA Chapel.
- Spend one day in Atlanta (March 14, 15 or 16) reporting on the American College of Cardiology Scientific Sessions.
- Attend author Rebecca Skloot's public lecture on *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* at 5:00 pm on Thursday, March 25, in Coverdell 175.

Each graded assignment will be evaluated for news judgment, accuracy, organization, clarity and completeness. Guidelines for grading are:

90-100: Story publishable as-is

80-89: Good lead and organization, but minor revisions or additions required

70-79: Lead unclear or unfocused; organization lacks flow; moderate revising required

60-69: Lead misses the news or is indecipherable; major revising required

< 60: Story misses the mark altogether

Maximum points available for each assignment:

Beat report	= 100
News story (triggered by journal article)	= 100
Enterprise news story	= 100
ACC news story	= 100
Feature story	= 150
Multimedia project	= 50
Opinion or first-person piece	= 100
Two Grady Journal stories @ 50/ea	= 100
Ten blog posts @20/ea	= 200

There are 1,000 points available for the class and your total determines your grade.

926 – 1,000 = A

901 – 925 = A-

876 – 900 = B+

826 – 875 = B

801 – 825 = B-

776 – 800 = C+

726 – 775 = C

701 – 725 = C-

676 – 700 = D+

651 – 675 = D

You can earn a 50-point bonus for each story published by a professional print, online or broadcast news organization.

Finally, most assignments can be redone with the instructor's approval. The deadline for a re-do is one week after the original grade was received, and the final grade will be the average of the original and the second score.

Academic Honesty: All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing any academic work.” Full text may be found at <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>

Online Evaluation: At the conclusion of the course, you are expected to evaluate this course online at www.eval.franklin.uga.edu

Reading materials

Required text:

Victor Cohn and Lewis Cope, *News & Numbers: A guide to reporting statistical claims and controversies in health and other fields – Second Edition*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

Additional readings are listed in the syllabus or will be provided during the semester via www.elc.uga.edu or other means.

Media sources:

You are expected to keep up with health and medical news. Excellent sources include Tuesday’s *Science Times* section in the *New York Times*, available at <http://health.nytimes.com> and Friday’s email digest of science stories distributed by the *Los Angeles Times* (contact science@latimes.com to sign up).

Sign up for RSS or email feeds from www.healthnewsreview.org and <http://ksjtracker.mit.edu>. On the first, scientific experts rate the quality of articles in major publications; on the second, experienced journalists assess their peers. Both explain why some stories are better than others.

Health and healthcare-related blogs and Twitter feeds abound. Wide-ranging ones include <http://www.thehealthcareblog.com> (@THCBstaff) and <http://www.healthjournalism.org/blog>. The *Wall Street Journal* health care blog emphasizes the business of health care and is strong on drug and device news: <http://blogs.wsj.com/health>

It is also essential to read print and digital outlets where you will be pitching your stories: articles that have been accepted are a barometer of an editor’s interests.

KnightHealth resources:

Current and back issues of selected peer-reviewed scientific journals and popular periodicals are available in the Drewry Room. Medical textbooks and other hardback references are shelved in Room 256. These will help you keep up with your beat, frame ideas, prepare for interviews, research stories and check facts.

Tentative Course Schedule

(The syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.)

Class #1 – January 13

Introduction to the course: Bureau assignments, responsibilities and logistics. Blogs, online publishing and multimedia resources. Outside lectures, tours and conferences.

Researching and telling stories about health and healthcare in the United States: “Unnatural Causes, Part 1” as a case study.

Homework:

Read online:

“Covering rural health” <http://www.reportingonhealth.org/resources/lessons/covering-rural-america-abandon-stereotypes-pack-courage>

“Covering poverty and health” <http://www.grady.uga.edu/poverty/tutorials/health/>

Read handouts:

Gastel, B – photocopy of chapter 4, *Health Writer’s Handbook*

Zinsser, W – photocopy of chapter 12, *On Writing Well*

Complete for next class meeting: **two-page beat report**

Class #2 – January 20

Assignment due: two-page beat report

Discussion: Interviewing like a reporter – asking the right questions, listening to what people say (and don’t say)

10:45-12:00 Guest speaker: **Joanne Silberner**, NPR

Homework:

Cohn & Cope – Chapters 1-6

Class #3 – January 27

Discussion: Reading like a reporter (don’t believe everything you read in *Nature* or *New England Journal of Medicine*)

10:45-12:00 Guest speaker: **Dan DeNoon**, senior medical writer, WebMD covering medicine on deadline for various audiences.

Homework:
Colley readings

Report and write **news story based on peer-reviewed journal**

Class #4 – February 3

Assignment due: news story based on peer-reviewed journal

Video/discussion: “Naturally Obsessed.” What do basic scientists do?

10:45 – 12:00 Guest speaker: **Dr. Daniel G. Colley**, professor of microbiology, director of the Center for Tropical and Emerging Global Diseases – What reporters need to know about covering infectious diseases

Homework:
Cohn & Cope – Chapters 7 – 9
J. Hart, photocopy of “Mechanics,” chapter 11 from *A Writer’s Coach*

Class # 5 – February 10

9:00-10:30 Writing lab: Revise news story (Room 132)

10:45 – 12:00 Guest speaker: **Dr. Claude Burnett**, Health Director, NE Georgia Health District.

Homework:
Johnson readings

“Swamp Nurse” by Katherine Boo, *The New Yorker*
Readings: NYT “Life at the Top in America Isn’t Just Better, It’s Longer,” Janny Scott, *New York Times*

Examples of well-reported, well-written local health stories

Class #6 – February 17

9:00 – 10:30 Guest speaker: **Dr. Mary Ann Johnson**, Professor of Food and Nutrition – Using guidelines, separating credible sources from junk science

Discussion: What makes a good local story, and how can this help Ideas for enterprise story

Homework:
Read “A Hidden Shame: Danger and Death in Georgia’s Mental Health Hospitals,” available at [ADD LINK](#)

Report and draft your enterprise news story

Class #7 – February 24**Assignment due at 9:00: draft of enterprise news story****9:00 – 10:30 Writing lab: revise news story (Room 132)****Revised story due Friday, February 26**

Guest speaker: **Andy Miller**, formerly of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, inside an award-winning investigative series about death and neglect in Georgia's mental health system. Life after the AJC.

Homework:

Read Gastel, B – photocopy of chapter 3 from *Health Writer's Handbook*

Read ACC Website and online program for scientific sessions

For discussion of covering quality, read Cohn & Cope – Chapters 8 and 10; and Charles Ornstein lecture and links posted at

<http://www.grady.uga.edu:16080/KnightHealth/GNAT/Ornstein/index.html>

Class #8 – March 3

Discussion: Covering the quality of medical care

10:45 – 12:00 Guest speaker: Dr. Jonathan R Murrow, MD, Asst Prof of Medicine-Cardiology, MCG-UGA Medical Partnership and Clinical Asst Professor, Emory University School of Medicine – Introduction to the heart, heart disease and the American College of Cardiology Scientific Sessions

March 10 – SPRING BREAK**March 14, 15 or 16 – cover American College of Cardiology Scientific Sessions, Atlanta**Class #9 – March 17**9:00-12:00 Writing lab: draft ACC news story (Room 132)****Finished story due Friday, March 19**

Homework:

Paulos, JA “Mammogram Math.” http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/13/magazine/13Fob-wwln-t.html?_r=2&emc=tnt&tntemail1=y

Ebell readings

Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Chapter TBDClass # 10 – March 24**9:00-10:30 Guest speaker: Mark Ebell – How do doctors make clinical decisions and how can this be improved?**

Discussion: Covering your beat so far. Present your feature story and multimedia ideas.

Homework:

Deborah Blum, *The Poisoner's Handbook*, Chapter 7

March 25, 5:00 pm, required lecture by author Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, at Coverdell 175, followed by dinner with Skloot at Professor Thomas's home.

Class #11 – March 31

Guest speaker: Deborah Blum, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author of *The Poisoner's Handbook*

Homework:

Tutorials on writing for the web

Read www.howstuffworks.com and other web sites covering health/medicine

Class # 12 – April 7

Assignment due: feature story

10:45 – 12:00 Guest speaker: **Allison Loudermilk**, science editor, www.howstuffworks.com – Writing for the web, producing multimedia

Discussion: Writing for the web, placing op-ed and opinion pieces, refining feature pitches

Homework:

Read Fahmy articles

Read: Media Bistro “what worked.”

Class # 13 – April 14

Assignment due: multimedia package for feature story

9:00 – 10:30 Guest speaker: **Sam Fahmy**, science writer, UGA News Office, on being an in-house science writer

10:45 – 12:00 Writing lab: revise feature stories (Room 132)

Homework:

Ian Frazier, “Hogs Wild,” *The New Yorker*, Dec 12, 2005, on WEB CT.

SCWDS Briefs newsletters

Class # 14 – April 21

10:00 – 12:00 **Field trip to Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study**
Wildlife Health Building, UGA

Dr John Fischer, Dr. Joe Corn, et al. – What reporters need to know about covering the dynamic relationship between wildlife, domestic animal and human health. AND: How scientists tell good reporters from bad ones.

April 22-24, recommended outside event: Association of Health Care Journalists conference, Chicago

Class #15 – April 28 (last class)

Assignment due: draft of opinion or first-person piece from beat or AHCJ

9:00 – 12:00 Writing lab: revise draft

Finished story due Friday, April 30