

JRMC 8350: Special Topics in Journalism Graduate Newsroom -- Fall 2009

9:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Tuesdays

Room 130 Journalism Building

Reporting and writing instructor: Patricia Thomas

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Purpose of the course

Graduate Newsroom offers a practical introduction to the purpose and practice of journalism. You will learn the foundations of journalism as a public service; analyze and compare print, broadcast and online media; learn basic multimedia skills; and report and write publishable news stories in a simulated newsroom environment.

Readings

- Cheryl Gibbs and Tom Warhover, “Getting the Whole Story: Reporting and Writing the News”
- Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, “The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect”
- Mark Briggs, “Journalism 2.0: How to Survive and Thrive” (this book is free online)
- Associated Press Stylebook

Students should read the Athens Banner-Herald and The Red & Black daily, visit a major news organization’s Web site (such as washingtonpost.com or cnn.com) at least once a day, and follow at least one daily television or radio news broadcast.

Academic honesty

All academic work must meet the standards contained in UGA’s “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

Requirements

Attendance and participation: This is a learning lab and a graduate course. Punctuality, perfect attendance and active participation in class discussions and exercises are expected. Collegiality and a sense of humor are helpful as well.

Deadlines are not negotiable. Late work will not be accepted or graded.

Reading responses: On five occasions, you will e-mail Professor Thomas a 250-word (and no longer) response to the aspect(s) of the assigned reading that intrigued, confused or disturbed you the most. The responses are due by **noon on Monday** and should be informal, first-person responses that capture your own thinking. They should not be summaries of the material.

In-class exercises: These will include interviewing, lead- and story-writing.

Online-multimedia assignments: The final part of the course is devoted to multimedia reporting skills. You will produce **one audio profile**, **one audio slide show** from an event and **one video project**.

Outside reported stories: You will report and write **at least five** original stories by the end of the semester.

Deadline story: When we meet in the lab on September 15, you will be assigned a story that must be reported and written by the end of that day.

First outside story: You will conceive **one story** idea early in the semester and pitch it for publication in any professional daily, weekly or monthly news outlet in Georgia – including but not limited to Athens-area periodicals such as The Red & Black, Flagpole or the Athens Banner-Herald; other daily or weekly newspapers; alternative publications; or Georgia-based foreign-language or ethnic press. You must keep the instructor apprised of your pitching efforts. Students whose stories are published or accepted for publication in an approved periodical by the final day of class will receive a one-third letter grade bonus on their final grade. Students who don't show substantial effort toward getting published will receive a one-third letter grade deduction from their final grade.

Beat stories: For the middle weeks of the semester, you will choose a public affairs beat in a targeted community within commuting distance of UGA, such as Athens-Clarke education, Barrow County economic development, Oconee County government, etc. Coherent proposals for regional beats also will be considered.

When the “newsroom lab” portion of the class begins, you will submit a two-page **beat report** describing the beat's location, subject area, demographic information, key sources, hot issues, and at least three story ideas.

During the final weeks of class, you will report and write **three stories** from your chosen beat. Stories must include at least one meeting, one speech and one enterprise/trend story. Stories must be from 600 to 700 words and include at least three fully identified sources, interviewed by phone or in person. At least one story must involve multimedia elements. *Story ideas must be approved in advance by the instructor.* Any of these stories can be pitched to a local publication or published on The Grady Journal. Any beat story accepted by a professional publication will receive extra credit.

The “open newsroom” class sessions will include group critique and brainstorming, time for reporting and writing, and opportunities for coaching and consultation with the instructor.

Grading

Seven reporting/writing assignments and three multimedia projects will be graded on a point system and valued at 100 points each. The assignments are: the in-class deadline reporting assignment, the first outside-reported story, the beat report, four beat stories, the audio slideshow, the audio profile and the video project. There are 1,000 total points possible for these assignments.

Each graded writing assignment and outside story will be based on a content grade from 0 to 100 points. The content grade evaluates the news judgment, organization, clarity and completeness of the story. Guidelines for the content grade 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

After the content grade is established, points will be deducted for errors of fact, style, spelling, grammar or punctuation as follows:

Factual error: minus 30 points

Spelling or grammar, style or punctuation error: minus 1 point

Example # 1: The student turns in a decent story with a solid lead and good organization, but some of the writing is unclear and two paragraphs are poorly attributed. The story receives a content grade of 80. There are also two misspellings (minus 1 point each), a comma error that changes the meaning of a sentence (minus 1 point), and a title capitalized after a name (minus 1 point). The story grade is 80 minus 4, for a total of 76.

Example # 2: The student turns in an excellent story that needs almost no revision for

publication. There are no problems with clarity, completeness or organization, no style or punctuation errors, no problems with grammar. But one source's name is misspelled in the final paragraph. The story grade is 98 for content, minus 30 for a factual error, for a total of 68.

As you can see, the fastest way to a poor grade is to make a factual error. Accuracy is paramount in journalism.

Each of the five reading responses will be worth 20 points (for a total of 100) and will receive full credit if it is on time and meets the standards described in the requirements section. Particularly thoughtful or original (not long) responses will receive a five-point bonus, and responses that fail to demonstrate careful reading, original thinking or command of the language will receive five- to 10-point deductions.

The total points possible for the class, therefore, are 1,000. Grades will break down as follows:

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

Remember that you can earn a one-third letter grade bonus (from a B+ to an A-, etc.) for having your first outside story published in an approved publication. You can receive a one-third letter grade penalty for making an insufficient effort to get the story published, and/or for missing more than one day of class. In addition, getting any of your beat stories published by a professional news organization, print or online, adds a bonus of 50 points for that story. Producing additional stories based on beat reporting – approved in advance by the instructor -- will also earn extra credit of up to 100 points per story.

Finally, most assignments completed before Oct 27 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.

Weekly schedule

PART I: Foundations of Journalism

Lab 1 – Aug. 18: *Your first reporting assignment*

In class:

Introductions and housekeeping details
 Reporting and writing on deadline
 Expectations about reading responses

Homework:

- Read “Elements,” Introduction, Chapters 1 (purpose), 2 (truth), and 3 (accountability)
- Read “Getting the Whole Story,” Chapters 1 (role in society), 2 (what journalists do), and 3 (news writing)
- Reading response
- Bring Tuesday’s Banner-Herald and this Friday’s The Flagpole to class next week

Lab 2 – Aug. 25: *The fundamentals of journalism*

In class:

Analyze today’s Athens Banner-Herald and Friday’s The Flagpole
 Discuss where *you* turn for news and information
 Discuss how reporters and journalism function
 Review last week’s stories

Homework:

- Read “Elements,” Chapters 5 (independence), 6 (monitoring power), and 7 (public forum)
- Read “Getting the Whole Story,” Chapters 4 (community as context) and 9 (basic reporting skills)
- Reading response
- Discover potential markets for your work by perusing periodicals at the UGA library, the Drewry Room, the magazine section at Borders or Barnes & Noble and online. Make a short (and realistic) list of print and online publications you want to write for. This may include mainstream, alternative, foreign-language, ethnic or niche news organizations.
- Go online on Monday night and review www.ajc.com and www.theatlantavoice.com

Lab 3 – Sept. 1: *Defining communities and news, practicing skills*

In class:

Analyze the day’s www.ajc.com and www.theatlantavoice.com
 More discussion of news judgment, defining and covering communities

Reporting exercise (10:30 – 12:15)

Homework:

- Read "Getting the Whole Story," Chapters 5 (reporting basic news), 6 (writing basic news) and 7 (framing stories)
- Reading response
- Bring Sept. 8 New York Times to the next lab

Lab 4 – Sept. 8: *Theory into practice*

In class:

Analyze today's New York Times
 Discuss news judgment and community
 Discuss basic story types, types of leads
 Brainstorm ideas for outside story

Discuss last week's reporting exercise

Homework:

- Read "Elements" Chapter 4 (verification)
- Read "Getting the Whole Story," Chapter 8 (interviewing)
- Reading response

Lab 5 -- Sept. 15: *Deadline story*

In class:

Discuss interviewing skills, verification

Report and write a story on deadline (due at 6:00 p.m. today)

Homework:

- Read "Elements," Chapters 8 (engagement) and 9 (balance)
- Read "Getting the Whole Story," Chapter 11 (general assignment reporting)
- Reading response
- Begin reporting outside story
- Rough draft of story pitch

Lab 6 – Sept. 22: News writing

In class:

Feedback on deadline story

Discuss story pitches

Writing exercise: imposing order on information (used canned chunk of facts; circulate and edit at workstations)

Homework:

- Read “Elements,” Chapter 10 (conscience)
- Read “Getting the Whole Story,” Chapter 14 (rights and responsibilities)
- Reading response
- Polish story pitches based on feedback/keep pitching and reporting
- Finish outside story

Lab 7 – Sept. 29: Wrap-up -- First outside story due

In class:

Analyzing broadcast news: CBS, FOX and NPR
Wrap-up on foundations
Preview open newsroom requirements

Homework:

- Getting the Whole Story,” Chapters 12 (beat reporting) and 13 (in-depth stories)
- Work on beat reports

Part II: Open Newsroom

Lab 8 – Oct. 6: Open newsroom – Beat report due

In class:

Present beat reports
Reporting, writing and consultations

Homework:

- Report, write and pitch stories

Lab 9 – Oct. 13: Open newsroom – First beat story due

In class:

Group critiques
Reporting, writing and consultations

Homework:

- Read “Elements,” Chapter 11 (citizens’ role)
- Report, write and pitch stories

Lab 10 – Oct. 20: Open newsroom – Second beat story due

In class:

Feedback/questions/concerns
Reporting, writing and consultations

Homework:

- Read "Getting the Whole Story," Chapter 15
- Report, write and pitch stories
- Sign up for Knight Case Study and read background

Lab 11 – Oct. 27: Open newsroom – Third beat story due*In class:*

A Knight Case Study
Feedback/questions/concerns/evaluations
Reporting, writing and consultations

Homework:

Read "Journalism 2.0," epilogue; additional readings may be sent

PART III: Skills and Concepts for the Web**Lab 12 – Nov. 3: Multimedia***In class:*

Publish it: HTML, CSS, CMS, blogging

Homework:

- Read "Journalism 2.0," Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 7
- Post and comment on new class blog

Lab 13 – Nov. 10: Multimedia*In class:*

Audio for the Web: How to record, what to record, editing audio

Homework:

- Read "Journalism 2.0," Chapter 8; additional material may be sent to read
- Finish editing audio interviews, post online

Lab 14 – Nov. 17: Multimedia

In class:

Photojournalism for the Future: How to shoot, what to shoot, basics of Photoshop and image editing

Homework:

- Read "Journalism 2.0," Chapters 9, 10 and 11; additional material may be sent to read
- Post photos online

Nov. 24: Thanksgiving week, no class

Lab 15 – Dec. 1: Multimedia

In class:

Online Video. How to shoot, what to shoot, basic video editing

Homework:

- Post video online
- Finish beat report

Lab 16 – Dec. 8: Multimedia

In class:

Video critiques, social networking, what's next?

Disclaimer

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course. The instructors may find it necessary to make and announce deviations to the course plan.