

July 2003
Unity College/U.S. Cox Center Short Course:
Practicing Civic Journalism in Ethiopia

Civic journalism is both a philosophy and a set of values. At its heart is a belief that journalism has an obligation to public life that goes beyond just telling the news or presenting facts. The way newspeople practice journalism can affect the quality of life in both positive and negative ways. Journalism can help empower a community by involving its people in the work of building civil society, in spite of political, educational or other restrictions.

This is not a traditional lecture course. In class, students will engage in discussion, work in groups, and come up with story ideas. Outside of class, students will spend time in a selected community to develop their ideas, find sources and conduct interviews. Stories will be written and shared with classmates in a workshop setting during the final week. The class also will produce a four-page publication with its stories.

1: Civil society and civic journalism.

- What is civil society, and why is it important? What are the conditions that encourage/discourage its development?
- What is civic journalism? What role can journalists play in the process of nation building? How does this concept fit in with the idea of a free press and the role of watchdog on government?
- Official responses versus “real people”. “Soft” vs. “hard news” Knee-jerk, reactive journalism, or proactive, grass-roots stories? Knowledge versus information.

2: Tapping your community; improving coverage

- What stories are not being covered because they don't fit traditional news values?
 - What don't you know about your coverage area, and how can you find out?
- Assignment: Spend several hours walking around your assigned area. Who lives here? What are their main activities? Who are the unofficial leaders? What do people say are their concerns, their aspirations? Come up with five story ideas.
- Practical ways to improve coverage: asking better questions, finding new sources.
- Assignment: Refine story idea. Interview sources.

3: Workshopping your stories

- Framing and writing your story.
- What information are you missing? Whom do you still need to interview?
- Write, share and critique stories.
- Session on basic publication design.

Assignment: Working in two groups, design a two-page newspaper with your stories and drawings. Paste up and lay out publication, *Our Addis*.