

Reporting—Fall 2012
Journalism 61-327, Sage 3422
Mondays & Wednesdays 3 p.m. to 5:10 p.m.

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Required Texts & Materials:

- “The Night of the Gun,” David Carr (Simon & Schuster, 2009).
- “Connecting the DOT,” Maguire (handouts).
- The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (2012 or earlier version).
- A pocket-sized or steno notebook for interviewing.
- Pens or pencils.

Optional Equipment

- A cell phone with voicemail or an answering machine with remote access.
- A handheld voice recorder. (There are pros and cons to this. The department has a limited number that it can lend to students on a short-term basis.)

Course Content

Reporting is, without a doubt, the best job in the world.

Reporters get not just a front row seat on history but also the opportunity to get up from that seat and affect history. And then, when they want, they get to sit back down.

Reporters get treated like royalty, sometimes; they also get treated like trash. Reporters get to travel to the top of the town, and they also get to see life’s underside. Reporters get to meet the most fascinating people in the world. They get to ask intimate, inappropriate questions, and no matter how boorish their behavior they almost always get invited back.

Sometimes reporters feel like pinballs—bouncing from one story to the next, repeatedly changing speed and direction, and setting off lights and noises as they move along. The good ones are rarely bored.

This course is designed to introduce you to the basics of reporting, a discipline that is built upon three interconnected activities: gathering information, evaluating information and communicating information.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will have been given the chance to learn how to:

- Ground yourself in current issues and events.
- Develop and apply news judgment.
- Identify and cultivate sources.
- Use standard research methods and techniques.
- Evaluate and synthesize information that is inconsistent or even contradictory.
- Write articles on a variety of topics.
- Assess the quality of others’ reporting and writing.

All of this boils down to just three essentials that we will try to develop this semester. We will work on improving writing/production skills, interpersonal skills and critical analysis skills. Indicators of good writing can be found in areas such as vocabulary, AP style and sentence structure. Your interpersonal skills are reflected in such things as your ability to put yourself in uncomfortable situations, your ability to put others at ease and your ability to maintain your poise even when dealing with difficult people and questions. Critical analysis is sometimes described as skepticism, and good reporters are always skeptical both of what others are saying and of what they themselves think they know. Critical analysis is based on an awareness and appreciation of the complexity of human existence and leads good reporters to mirror that complexity in their articles.

Course Activities

The core of this course is a series of reporting assignments, some of which your instructor will make and some of which students will develop on their own. See the syllabus for due dates. The class will be covering several specific events in Oshkosh:

- The Oshkosh Common Council's meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 9, at 6 p.m.
- A campus symposium about the Iraq War on Saturday, Nov. 10.
- Either (your choice) the men's basketball game on Nov. 15. or the women's on Nov. 20.

Please clear your schedules so that you can attend these events. If that is not possible, please see me ASAP to develop alternative assignments.

As you work on your assignments you will be aided by a particular reporting methodology that we will study this semester. This methodology will help guide your reporting so that your reports are thorough, well-rounded and fair. Fortunately it is flexible enough that it can be applied in all of the story situations that you will encounter.

As much as possible, we will focus our attention on reporting about events that occur on or near campus. In some cases, you will use class time to go out and seek out sources. Some additional reporting will have to be completed outside of class time. To the extent possible, scheduled class time will be shortened on those occasions when you are expected to do substantial outside reporting. If your schedule prevents you from covering a particular event outside of class, you can propose an alternative assignment.

We will be covering actual events as they come up during the course of the semester, and your instructor will work to craft (or help you craft) assignments based on those events. This should make the course more interesting, but it may also require significant changes to the planned course schedule and syllabus. In addition to the story assignments, you will have four smaller assignments that will not necessarily result in full articles but will help broaden your experience with current reporting practices.

Grades

Your grade for the course will be based on the points you earn in the activities listed below.

Article assignments (600 points). Over the course of the semester, you will complete six articles. Each one will be worth up to 100 points.

Reporting tasks (100 points). You will be given four specific tasks over the course of the semester that will not necessarily lead to full-blown articles but will introduce you to some activities that even print reporters are expected to engage in. If you do want to take one of these assignments and write a story based on it, you may do so for extra credit. The tasks are:

- Submit and follow up on a written public records request (20 points).
- Obtain three or more pages of court documents (20 points).
- Conduct an audio-taped interview and convert at least 10 minutes of it into an mp3 file (30 points).
- Plan and execute a three-shot sequence of a news source (30 points).

Participation (100 points). You can earn up to 10 percent of your final grade based on participation, including online discussions and class exercises. For the assigned readings, you may be asked to respond to one or more brief questions in advance of class using a D2L discussion forum and will lose credit if you do not do so.

Term project (200 points+). A final article, worth 100 points, will be based on some story idea that you develop (what's called "enterprise" reporting). We will work on this throughout the semester. This article should be substantial, reflecting depth reporting based on data and/or documents and bringing to light previously unknown facts or, at least, showing them from some interesting new perspective. If you do an exceptionally good job with this article, you may receive more than the "maximum" 200 points.

The grading system for the story assignments in this class may seem idiosyncratic, but it has been devised to reflect the way news stories develop and the way professional editors react to the copy that is put in front of them.

Your articles will be evaluated according to the following benchmarks:

O (as in outstanding): 100 points. This grade will be given to an article that is outstanding in all respects: newsworthiness, reader engagement, sourcing, writing, AP Style, punctuation, formatting.

P (as in publishable): 90 points. This grade will be given to an article that sparkles—with real news, thorough reporting and excellent writing. It may have a small gap in facts or in background or minor writing problems, but it would be good enough to be published with just a little bit of polishing.

E (as in editable): 70 points. This grade will be given to an article that has significant flaws but also some strengths. For example, a generally well-reported story that has a major writing mistake or a large number of AP errors would be considered editable because it could be worked into shape even though it's not ready yet. A story that gets this score might have missing information or structural problems.

NRE (as in not ready for editing): 50 points. The grade will be given to an article that is not ready for publication without major fixes. It may be missing critical information or contain a careless factual error. Also, the story may have structural flaws and multiple writing problems, such as word choice, grammar, punctuation or AP errors.

NA (as in not acceptable): 25 points. The grade will be given to an article where the reporting is insufficient and the writing is weak. A major factual error could result in this grade, as well as something that may look minor to you but isn't: misspelling the name of a source.

NOT (as in not on time): 0 points. This grade will be given to an article that is not filed by deadline and without an acceptable excuse. The following are **NOT** acceptable excuses: *I ran out of time ... no one would call me back ... my battery died* (in my cellphone, my car, etc.). Just about the only acceptable excuse would be a situation in which you were conducting an amazingly great, make-or-break interview just as class was starting.

Final letter grades will be based on the following scale:

A	940 to 1,000	C	700 to 775
A-	920 to 939	C-	650 to 699
B+	890 to 919	D+	600 to 649
B	840 to 889	D	550 to 599
B-	820 to 839	D-	500 to 549
C+	776 to 819	F	< 500

Course Policies

To the extent possible, class sessions will be conducted in a manner simulating the style and atmosphere of a working newsroom. Among other things, this means:

- You should get in the habit of addressing your instructor by his first name.
- You don't necessarily have to show up for class on time but should expect to be severely penalized (as much as 100 percent) for any assignments on which you fail to meet deadline. At a minimum, late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 10 percent of the total points available per day that the assignment is not available for grading, including weekends, holidays and other days that the instructor is not on campus.
- You had better have an extremely good reason for missing class. You will not be penalized directly for an absence, but unless you come to class you will not learn the skills you need to carry out the assignments on which you will be graded. Some assignments will be done during class, which means if you are not present you not be able to earn the points associated with those assignments.
- You must complete the six articles, four miscellaneous tasks and the final project or accept an Incomplete—even if you have accumulated enough points to get a passing grade already.
- Expect the unexpected.

Academic Integrity

Don't cheat. The university has rules and procedures that could lead to severe disciplinary action, including expulsion, for passing off someone else's work as your own, aka plagiarism. But most significantly, you are cheating yourself if you do not do your own work.

Special University Services

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to students with special needs. Please contact the Dean of Students office at 424-3100 (voice) or 424-1319 (TTY). The website is <http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/disabilities.htm>.

Extra Practice/Extra Credit

The key to getting better at reporting is doing more of it. Over the course of the semester, we will cover several topic areas that do not have mandatory assignments attached to them. If you would like, you may write stories on these topics for extra credit.

Course Calendar

The schedule on the next page is intended as a guide and may be subject to change. Any revised due dates will be announced in class with ample warning.

DATE	TOPIC	READING	SKILLS/METHODS	DUE
9/5	Seeing the story.			
9/10	Story ideas.	DOT: Chapter 1.	Connecting the DOT.	
9/12	Documents.	DOT: Chapter 2.	Public records.	
9/17	B matter.	DOT: Chapter 3.	Art of description.	
9/19	Observation.	DOT: Chapter 4.	Human sources	Campus.
9/24	Cops; talk.			Public records req.
9/26	Human sources.			Cops.
10/1	Courts	Gun: through p. 14.		
10/3	Government	Gun: through p. 54.	Writing to be read.	
10/8	Data.	Gun: through p. 98.	Basic math.	Court filing.
10/10	Education.	Gun: through p. 137.	Excel.	Project proposal.
10/15		Gun: through p. 174.		Government.
10/17		Gun: through p. 223.	Fostering skepticism.	
10/22	Sports.	Gun: through p. 269.		
10/24		Gun: through p. 310.		
10/29		Gun: through p. 347.		
10/31	Profile.	Gun: through p. 365.		Election.
11/5		Gun: through p. 385.		
11/7		NYT readings.		
11/12				Progress report.
11/14	Obits.			Symposium.
11/19				Three shot seq.
	Thanksgiving.			
11/26				MP3.
11/28	Biz reporting.			Sports.
12/3				
12/5				
12/10				Pub. records folo.
12/12	Wrap-up.			FINAL PROJECT.

- <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F00614F63E5B0C758DDDA80994DC404482>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/21/international/middleeast/21battle.html>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/24/magazine/24filkins-t.html?pagewanted=all>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/12/books/12book.html?pagewanted=print>