

Journalism 428

Advanced Reporting

Spring/Winter 2012

Tuesday and Thursday 8-10:10 a.m.

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“You know, I’m gonna really enjoy this. You just remember that you did this, Jack, OK? You brought this on yourself.”
-Don Cheadle, “The Family Man.”

Introduction

A year or so ago, I spoke with a group of students just before graduation and asked them what they felt they missed out on when it came to the writing/editing sequence or the journalism curriculum in general. In most cases, students weren’t shy about sharing.

More video. More audio. Deeper reporting. Investigative journalism. The comments and concerns poured forth. Then, one of the more forward students looked at me and asked, “So what are you going to do about it?”

The answer is this class. It’s deeper reporting. It’s stronger writing. It’s video. It’s audio. In short, it’s advanced.

Course Material

- The Associated Press Stylebook, 2010 or 2011 Edition. Bring this to every class. (If you prefer to buy the digital version via ap.org, go for it. It’s a good investment.)
- A digital voice recorder that has a decent mic (or mic jack) and allows for the importing of audio (either via output line or USB port)
- A jump drive capable of carrying video (a couple gigs)
- Headphones (We’ll be doing loud things in here)

You will also need access to a video camera of some kind. The department has some available for check out through the main office. These are a bit high-end, so if you’ve got one of your own or had an inkling to buy one, it might be worth your time.

(Readings are all on D2L. No textbook. Use the money to put it toward the other stuff.)

Rules of the game

This course is complex, but the rules that govern it are simple:

- 1) READ.** You must read all the stuff I put online for you. Each chapter/reading augments the stuff that we'll be doing in class. It's not up there because I liked playing with a scanner. If you fail to keep on top of the reading, you will find yourself up a creek without a paddle.
- 2) BE HERE.** In-class assignments will be conducted in class. In addition, you'll be getting information in class that you can't get anywhere else. You're paying for this class, so I'd imagine you would want to get your money's worth. Everyone gets two absences. If you have more than that, your grade starts to slide. If you don't inform me you'll be missing, you get a zero for everything we're doing that day.
- 3) ASK.** You need to be engaged with the material and the course. Ask a ton of questions, raise a ton of issues and make yourself a vital part of this course. If you sit back and text or play Words with Friends all day, you'll annoy me, bother your classmates and cheat yourself.

Policy on Academic Misconduct

Cheating and plagiarism are prohibited. Whatever you do for this class must be done on your own, unless expressly noted during class. Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarizing and cheating, is a death knell for your program and your career as a journalist. The best way to make sure you aren't messing up is to ask me in advance of doing whatever it is you think might be problematic.

For some reason, at least once per year, someone decides to try something they know they shouldn't and I manage to figure it out. In most cases, the person cheats because the person is drastically overcommitted to work, school, extracurricular activities and a million other things. This person then gets caught short and tries to play an angle, figuring I'll never catch them.

The kid tries to be a weasel. I figure it out. They end up in my office begging for mercy.

Don't be that person.

If you get caught, the university will deal with you and that can range from probation to expulsion. The university website contains a list of procedures regarding dishonesty. I will follow those procedures.

Shorter version: Don't cut a corner. If you're in over your head, come see me.

Policy on Sources

You need to reach beyond people that are easiest for you to contact. Thus, best friends and significant others are off limits. Acquaintances are fine. The only exception to this rule is if the family/friend member is the only source who can answer the questions you need answered (e.g. Your best friend is the head of the student government and you're working on a student government story) or the primary news source (e.g. The kid is named valedictorian (or kills six people with an axe) and you get an interview.).

Statement for Students With Special Needs

The university's policies regarding disability will be followed here. Contact the dean of students at 424-3100 or head to the web at: <http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/disabilities.htm> for information. The university and I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with disabilities.

Grading

The grades in this class aren't nearly as important as what you learn and how you progress as a writer and reporter. If you make this all about the grades, you will deprive yourself of a great opportunity to learn these skills and you will be kicking yourself later in life. As for getting out of here alive, the department and the university set the standards.

Don't panic about bombing out. I have found that students who operate that way often find themselves the victims of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

100-91	Outstanding work. Work that is ready for publication
90-81	Above average. With minor revisions and editing, it could run.
80-70	Average. Work requires some editing/additional info/revision.
69-60	Below Average/Poor. Requires some major changes.
59-41	Failing. Paper has inherent problems in reporting/writing.
40-0	Beyond problematic. Work that is unacceptable because of factual, spelling or other major errors or reporter missed deadline.

Official course grades:

A	100-91	C	78-71
A-	90-89	C-	70
B+	88	D+	69
B	87-81	D	68-61
B-	80	D-	60
C+	79	F	59-0

Major ways you can cost yourself points:

You will be graded on three basic areas: reporting, writing and style. While much of this will be subjective, here is a discussion of those areas and how to grade for them.

Reporting:

This grading area is meant to determine how well a student researched a topic and how much of the important information they garnered from that search. When I'm grading you for reporting, I'll be asking the following questions:

Is all of the necessary information here?

Can I understand the whole story based on what has been presented?

Are all sides of the issue been presented equally and fairly?

Are all of the student's facts correct?

Have the appropriate people been interviewed?

Does it emphasize any of the elements of news value?

Has the student properly incorporated background information necessary to understand the story?

If you're missing half the story, you're likely to be missing half (or more) of your points in this area. Weakness in background or a little imbalance between the sides is likely to cost you a good chunk of points. Occasionally, you'll see a story that loses a few points due to minor pieces that are missing. I'll do my best to keep pointing these out to you.

BIG TIP:

Factual errors will cost you ½ of your reporting grade per error. If that factual error is a misspelled proper noun (name of a person, place, company etc.) you'll get a ZERO for that section of the assignment. Accuracy is the paragon of our virtues. You screw that up, you might as well pack it up and find a new major.

Writing:

The information in the story may be terrible, but it may be immaculately constructed. Conversely, all the facts may be in place but it is written so poorly that you couldn't find all the pieces with a map and a compass. This is where the writing grade comes in. In grading the writing you should ask the following questions:

Does the lead tell the story?

Are the sentences well written or are they awkward?

Is the story easy to understand?

Is there flow to the whole story? *Does it have a beginning, a middle and an end?

Does the writing transition between sentences, paragraphs and ideas?

Are sentences paced or are there really long and then really short sentences without rhyme or reason?

Is the story clear or do vague notions abound?

Is the story lean or is there a lot of flab?

A great story has a point, tells you what it is and moves you through the facts in an orderly and proficient manner. I usually know a well-written story when I have gotten to the end and haven't stopped to make a mark on it. That is when it flows. The more I have to stop and scratch my head, the lower the grade is likely to be in this area.

Style:

Style is one of those areas that can make the difference between an A and a B or a B and a C. It is imperative that reporters get used to the AP style guide and the guide of their own papers. Editors don't have the time to fix all the style errors. Most errors in this section are caused by sloppiness. By knocking you a bit for style, it helps you get used to using the book, checking spellings and making sure you are using the proper words. Although some students have really racked up the points in this area, I have a policy of using 0 as the lowest number they can get in this area. No negatives.

Other point deductions will be noted within the text of your story.

Course Assignments

Grades and assignments are not meant to be punitive. However, since the university does require the grades, here are the assignments for the class and what they're worth:

Small Stuff: 25 percent

You are expected to show up EVERY DAY. I understand deaths in the family, emergency surgery etc. If possible, let me know ahead of time. If not, I expect a good explanation of what went wrong. Your grade on this will include audio editing assignments, small writing assignments, Web editing assignment and more. Most of these things will be done or at least started in class.

Big Stuff: 30 percent

You will be responsible for three major stories: one video, one text-based and one multimedia. In each of these stories, you will be asked to apply a specific set of skills that you will have learned during the course. More on each of these later.

NEWSPA: 35 percent

You will be responsible for planning, coordinating and executing the full audio, video and textual coverage of the Northeastern Wisconsin Scholastic Press Association annual convention. NEWSPA is a half-day event that consists of dozens of sessions that have varying potential for coverage. We will have several sessions in class for planning and several more for the creation of your content. You will be required to make this an epic multimedia project. More on this later.

Professionalism/Participation: 10 percent

This is probably the most important part of your grade, even though it is among the smallest. The grade part of this is not like every other class where if you show up you get an easy chunk of A. When you operate as a reporter, you will be representing the newspaper/ organization you are working for. You need to show the people you talk to that you are not a fool or a child. You need to operate with the utmost care and perform difficult tasks in a seemingly effortless fashion. How I will judge this includes the way I see you work in class, the kinds of things you do when we go into the field and my contact with the people you have as sources. Good Reporter's Motto: No Whining.

All assignments will be dealt with digitally. We're going to try to save some trees. It'll also be easier for you all to read my comments if we're doing this digitally. Deadlines for assignments will be set in class and the expectation is that I'll receive your work via email no later than that deadline. If you are having trouble email, contact me and we'll work something out. Don't wait until after the deadline has passed to get in touch with me.

Final Thought:

This course is not required. You can choose your way around it or bow out if you want. However, if you want to learn how to do these vital skills and you want to push yourself to do more than you thought possible, stick with this. Those who remain will be champions.

Schedule for Advanced Reporting

(This may change, but assume for now it's solid.)

Week of Jan. 31:

Tuesday: Introduction to course; Basics of Writing

Thursday: Writing for various media

READINGS: Papper, Chs. 2 & 4

Week of Feb. 7:

Tuesday: Audio for the Web; Gathering Audio

Thursday: LAB- Audio Lab

READINGS: Papper, Ch. 7

ASSIGNMENT: Audio Assignment (In Class)

Week of Feb. 14

Tuesday: Video for the Web; Shooting Video

Thursday: Basic Editing

READINGS: Papper, Ch. 6, Rosenauer, Broadcast Chapter

Week of Feb. 21:

Tuesday: Editing suite

Thursday: More editing suite

READINGS: NONE

ASSIGNMENT: Canned Video Story due 3/1 by noon

Week of Feb. 28:

Tuesday: Video project

Thursday: Video project

READINGS: NONE

STUFF DUE: Canned Video Story due 3/1 by noon

ASSIGNMENT: Shooting/Editing Video Story Due 4/3 by noon

Week of Mar. 6:

Tuesday: Linking

Thursday: Open Lab: Video Work

READINGS: Rosenauer, Hyperlinking Chapter

ASSIGNMENT: Linking Assignment (In Class)

Week of Mar. 13:

Tuesday: Convergent Packages

Thursday: Planning meeting: NEWSPA

READINGS: Rosenauer, Convergent Packages Chapter

ASSIGNMENT: NEWSPA Advance Story Due 4/10 by noon

Week of Mar. 20:

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week of Mar. 27:

Tuesday: FOIA

Thursday: Reporting and writing CAR Story

READINGS: Houston, Ch. 10

ASSIGNMENT: FOIA/CAR Story assigned. Draft due in class 5/8; Final due 5/10 by noon

Week of Apr. 3:

Tuesday: Basics of statistics

Thursday: Data Analysis

READINGS: Houston, Ch. 3

ASSIGNMENT: Analysis Assignment and Essay Due 4/19 by noon

STUFF DUE: Shooting/Editing Video Story Due by 4/3 by Noon

Week of Apr. 10

Tuesday: Investigative journalism

Thursday: Writing the investigative story

READINGS: IRE, Chs. 1 & 6

STUFF DUE: NEWSPA Preview Due 4/10 by noon.

Week of Apr. 17:

Tuesday: Social Media

Thursday: Graphics

READINGS: Rosenauer, Social Media; Rosenauer, Graphics Chapter

STUFF DUE: Analysis Assignment Due 4/19 by noon.

Week of Apr. 24

Tuesday: Prep: NEWSPA

WEDNESDAY: NEWSPA COVERAGE

Thursday: LAB: Work on NEWSPA

READINGS: NONE

Week of May 1:

Tuesday: LAB: NEWSPA

Thursday: LAB: NEWSPA

READINGS: NONE

ASSIGNMENT:

Week of May 8:

Tuesday: Draft of CAR/FOIA lab; Finish NEWSPA

Thursday: Evaluations, last-minute issues

READINGS: NONE

STUFF DUE: NEWSPA Final Due 5/8 by noon

STUFF DUE: CAR/FOIA story Due 5/10 by noon