

Journalism 202. Reporting and Writing
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Howard University
Department of Journalism
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CLASS MOTTO: You can get anywhere from nowhere, starting with little or nothing -- provided you have a burning desire to learn and rise above mediocrity and the will to invest time and energy. Writing is hard work. Slackers and triflers never make it as writers.

LIFE SKILLS LESSON NO. 1 By rewarding mediocrity, we discourage excellence. In this class, we strive for excellence and discourage mediocrity. Excellence is a way of thinking. Think excellence in whatever you do, especially in this class. I expect quality journalism and I will get quality journalism out of you. Instead of focusing on grades and graduating in a specified time, focus on LEARNING.

Accommodation:

MAKE THIS CLASS A PRIORITY. We will not make any accommodations in class requirements and expectations. Part-time work, course load, family/personal and medical issues will not be accepted as excuses for not performing at expected levels. Inform the instructor immediately about any issue beyond your control that restricts or potentially restricts your ability to meet the course requirements. Excuses presented at the end of the semester or during grading time will not be entertained.

We will not tolerate tardiness, absenteeism, chitchats, text messaging, unauthorized use of computers or laptops during class --- or anything that disrupts the class or takes your attention away from the class. No eating food in class (because of the computers).

If you have to miss class for any reason, contact Prof. Sturgis by voice mail or e-mail beforehand, NOT after the fact.

If you miss class, you're responsible for getting class handouts from your classmates.

1. Prerequisite: Completion of Writing for the Media with a grade of C or higher. Basic understanding of the content of a news story and its development, regardless of the platform in which it is published.
2. Textbook: Associated Press Style Book. Keep it by your computer or laptop all the time. No other textbook is required, but daily reading of quality news web sites, newspapers and magazines is a necessary condition for survival in this class. So is listening to newscasts, especially the all-news WTOP-FM (103.5).
3. Other equipment and supplies: Flip Video camera or comparable equipment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Reporting and writing is an intermediate professional course demanding attainment of professional competencies in reading, reporting and writing as a

journalist. It also demands internalizing professional attitudes and work habits that distinguish superior journalists from mediocre ones.

It explores the techniques used to research and report complex political, social, and economic issues for all media. Students learn advanced strategies for how to investigate the most common areas covered by reporters, including education, zoning and development, crime, legal affairs, public forums and other governmental entities. Advanced writing techniques for various types of news articles, including tight deadline reporting and writing, are also taught. Strategies are developed for individual reporting projects in print, broadcast, and digital media. Published examples are critiqued to lead students toward an ethical and analytic approach to public affairs reporting.

The course is based on the professional opinion that quality journalism requires intense practice not only in writing, but also in the preliminaries to writing – gathering and critically evaluating information from archives and other records, observation and interviewing – and verifying the facts of the story before hitting the “send” button.

The plan: This course is designed to bring students into the professional world of journalism. After being challenged on reporting and writing skills and knowledge of Associated Press style, students will be broken into groups that will work as competing news agencies. While the work will be graded individually, the atmosphere will be collaborative. Journalists work as teams within their news organizations to cover a variety of angles when a story breaks. It is a fast-paced environment where the strong survive. Your ideas and stories will be subject to criticism within your group and the class, and with editors in my copy editing class, but the goal is for the criticism to be useful and respectful. Still, remember that you will need a thick skin in this business.

There are a series of assignments throughout the semester, but it is better to think of it as one proposition: You’ve been hired as a reporter to cover the Washington and the surrounding area. To succeed in this job you need to get out into that community and meet people, find out the issues, uncover the unreported stories and coordinate with your colleagues on how to best report them. Fire, business, sports and science are some of the topics that you will be covering, but don’t restrict yourself by tackling these in order. Instead, you should be working contacts with the idea that anyone you meet could be a source for any one of these topics.

Part of your job in this class is to tell stories from the local community, not the Howard University community. In this class you have the opportunity to use the city and the surrounding areas as your “real world” news market. Part of your grade comes from the story you pitch. If you pitch a Howard story, it better be something the community as a whole would be interested in. You are not to use Howard University students as sources unless you have cleared it with me.

Plagiarism and Ethics:

The Department of Journalism is committed to the highest standards of professional conduct and integrity. Journalists lose their jobs if they copy the work of others and pass it on as their own. Fabrication or falsification of information and sources is another No-No in journalism. Stories based on fictitious information and sources earn an automatic “F” grade.

Diversity:

The profession of journalism is committed to diversity. As such, you are expected to strive for including in your reporting ethnic, racial and religious minorities, gay men and lesbians,

the elderly, disabled and poor. The intent is to craft stories that reflect the diversity of your beat, neighborhood or The Greater Washington community and your readership.

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

1. Working a beat for a news organization. Demonstrated by writing news stories and video for the Web, as well as writing a blog and covering issues in collaboration with your fellow students.
2. To sharpen a student's news judgment and to develop the mindset of a newsperson – How news people think, live and act.
3. To develop in the student critical reading, thinking and analytical skills that separate superior writers from mediocre ones, as demonstrated in the seriousness of your story ideas, identification and cultivation of news sources, reporting and writing the news. Start with researching and understanding the news beat you choose as the focus of your reporting and writing. The basic news beats for this class will be the 8 Wards of Washington DC, the 9 Districts of Prince George's County, the City of Alexandria, Arlington County and Silver Spring.
4. To advance the student's reporting skills beyond surface reporting – the kind you did in Writing for the Media. Veteran writers will tell you that quality writing is the result of in-depth reporting. In-Depth reporting requires use of multiple sources and multiple reporting techniques. The critical role your five senses (observation), record searching and interviewing play in strong reporting will be stressed.
5. To develop in the student the ability to work into non-fiction writing (narrative journalism) the techniques and elements of fiction writing --- character, drama, images, scenes, settings, places and dialogue – as tools to help shape thrilling stories while developing story-telling writing skills.
6. To develop the student's ability to write clear, appropriate descriptive and narrative journalism leads that pull readers into stories. You should pay particular attention to examples of narrative journalism from previous classes that will be liberally handed out to you. You will also get examples of strong narrative journalism stories that won awards in the annual Hearst writing contests and samples from daily newspapers and national magazines. You should read and analyze these samples to gain an understanding of how bone-chilling, gripping or thrilling stories are developed. These various samples and the ones you discover in your daily two- to three hour reading of quality news sources will be excellent models for you to use in your reporting and writing for this class. "Emulating learning" is the basic learning theory we are going to apply in this class. It basically, says: "You learn writing thrilling stories by emulating thrilling writers."
7. To develop a student's understanding and use of the different platforms (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, Internet and new media) for distributing news and information. Professors Lewis, Herndon and Sturgis are experts in area of broadcast journalism, photojournalism and Internet/New Media. You can meet the publication requirements of this class through print, broadcast, photojournalism, Internet and new media. However, to do so, you must successfully complete required workshops these professors offer at the beginning of the semester.
8. To expose students to the Greater Washington neighborhoods where they develop story ideas and stories to build proficiency in core journalism skills and storytelling

techniques for any platform (newspaper, magazine, audio/video broadcast, online/web-based).

9. Optimizing the Web to reach an audience. Demonstrated by posting stories and video on blogs and YouTube.
10. Editing video in a variety of software. Demonstrated through editing projects with iMovie and Final Cut Pro.
11. Using audio, video and Web elements in a news report. Demonstrated by writing for and posting blogs online.
12. Writing for all aspects of journalism. Demonstrated through written news stories, video reports and online journalism.
13. Understanding the importance of voice pitch and clarity when telling a story. Demonstrated through video news reports.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Weekly class and office one-on-one meetings to discuss and critique assignments and stories. Prof. Sturgis will offer these weekly coaching sessions, based on your actual weekly stories. Every weekly deadline missed without permission lowers your grade a letter grade on the assignment. The goal is to make each story you complete better than the previous story you completed.
2. To help you read a lot, learn to recognize and appreciate narrative and descriptive (story telling) writing, you will turn in every week, one sample of strong narrative/ descriptive writing you read that week.
3. Each student will publish at least 15 stories during the semester. At least half of your 15 stories will come from the news beat you choose. The rest can come from assignments editors at the Hilltop, District Chronicles or Howard University News Service ask you to do for them.
4. Twelve of your stories will be written for print or Howard University News Service publication. One photojournalism submission, one broadcast news submission (scripted and voiced or videoed) and one reported blog with links will be allowed. No music reviews will be accepted.
5. Regardless of platform of publication, all story ideas, except assignments from editors, must be pitched to Prof. Sturgis for approval before undertaking them. Before starting on assignment, it's important to first walk through with Prof. Sturgis what material you will need to get the story done quickly. Consider Prof. Sturgis as a teammate there to offer guidance and to ensure that you succeed in this class and in life.
6. At least one tutorial session a week based on your story of the week or re-writes from previous weeks. Prof. Sturgis will provide these tutorials.
7. Each story will go through at least three re-writes; the final grade will be assigned to the third or later drafts.

8. Please turn off your laptops, desktop terminals and other distractions while class is in session.
9. Take advantage of the time management, crisis management, writing and financial management workshops Mrs. Williams in the SOC counseling office offers.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION:

The coaching method, rather than traditional lecturing will be stressed. The class will duplicate as much as possible the relationship and interaction between a reporter and an editor in professional newsrooms. The bulk of learning in this class will invariably take place in the instructor's and Chairman Dixon's offices in one-on-one critiques and discussions of each student's weekly stories. This method of teaching/learning makes the weekly class meetings and individual office meetings mandatory.

At the end of the semester, you will turn in a folder/portfolio/scrapbook containing a minimum of 15 published stories reflecting your effort for the semester. In the folder, also include stories with letter grades of "A", "B", or "C." You will also turn in a list of sources (Names, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses) you used to gather information for your stories and a one-page critique of the course, suggesting ways to improve it.

GRADING METHOD: Grades on each story will be based on overall content and quality of writing. Did you have a thrilling story line (topic, theme, central idea)? Did you craft a gripping lead? Did you get all the information available a reader would want on the story? Does the story flow effortlessly? Does the story have the right tone and voice? Is the story free of errors of spelling, style, grammar and facts? Does the story comply with AP Style Book guidelines?

To help you stay on course, you will need to publish at least seven stories by the 8th week of the semester. Your mid-term progress report will be based on this effort.

COURSE EVALUATION:

The number and quality of stories you publish will determine the semester grade. To earn a "C," you will have to have eight publications of "C" grade or better.

For a "B" grade, you will need at least 11 publications of "B" grade or better.

An "A" grade will be for 14 publications of "A" grades.

NOTE: Think twice about choosing a "C" as your goal. If you fall short, you will be required to start all over in this course in a subsequent semester.

Note that stories published in the Hilltop before grading will be subject to the mandatory three revisions on each story. Where appropriate, the graded drafts will be posted on Howard University News Service or published in the District Chronicles.

Weekly assignments:

Most weekly stories will come from your beat, either as pitched to an editor or as assigned. Editors may assign you stories outside your beat, but such stories shall not constitute more than half of your total semester 15 required stories.

The editors you work with determine story deadlines, but all weekly stories are due via Blackboard at 6 p.m. on Fridays in text format. If you have to use attachments, only Word or PDF formats are allowed. If you miss this deadline, your grade will automatically be dropped one letter grade. Assignments turned in at the end of the semester receive an "F."

Re-writing assignments:

All assignments that get a "D" or "F" grade must be re-written for a higher grade and publication. The most common reason for "D" and "F" grades is INADEQUATE reporting! Therefore, all re-writes must be preceded by a face-to-face discussion of what additional reporting needs to be done. All re-writes must be completed before the next week's assignments due date.

BEATS AND ASSIGNMENTS.

Each student will be responsible for a geographic unit in the Greater Washington Area – DC, Prince George's County, Alexandria and Arlington County. The most useful reason for picking a beat is because you know nothing about it. Then spend a semester learning a lot about a part of Greater Washington you wouldn't otherwise know. In the District, the beats will be:

Ward 1

Ward 2

Ward 3

Ward 4

Ward 5

Ward 6

Ward 7

Ward 8

(Prince George's County)

District 1

District 2

District 3

District 4

District 5

District 6

District 7

District 8

District 9

Silver Spring (Montgomery County)

City of Alexandria (Virginia)

Arlington County (Virginia)

The instructor and campus-based news media will make non-beat assignments as the need arises. Some non-beat assignments will require quick turn-around of the nature of localizing national and international stories, or adding a community angle to local stories.

On your beats, focus on: (1) Ordinary people doing extraordinary things, (2) business profiles, (3) events, meetings, and issues affecting the lives of ordinary people, (4) anything people on your beat care about. It helps to start with a profile of your beat as your first publishable story. It also helps to find out if your beat has yahoo groups and join them. It's a great way to get a handle on what people on your beat care about. You can get these yahoo groups from Google or other search engines. It also helps to get on the mailing lists of political operatives and activists on your beat as well as the mailing lists of business and civic organizations.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 1. Introduction, course overview, reviewing the basics and AP Style. Beat assignments. Chose a beat before the end of this week and start cultivating sources on your beat. Use Google or any other search engine you prefer to learn as much as you can about the boundaries, landmarks, elected officials, community activists and "historians",

businesses and organizations in your beat – in other words get familiar with the profile of your beat.

- Assignment: THE TRYOUT – find and report a news story for print.
- Assignment: Beat memo due

Week 2. First story due by 6 pm on Friday. What is reporting: searching records for background information prior to observation and interviewing. Appropriate background information and writing models are generally readily available in Google, Yahoo, Lexis-Nexis. Working in a newsroom, working a beat and developing sources. Pitching story ideas, writing skedlines, beatnotes and future files. Turn in tryout assignments.

Week 3. Second Story and re-writes due. What is reporting? Your five senses as powerful tools of information gathering. The senses are, sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. If there is a profound secret to good writing, it lies in the engagement of the senses. Your writing should “show” your readers what you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt at the scene of your story, the mood at the location of your story, the feeling and emotions of the people you encountered on your assignment. You have feelings; readers have feelings, too. Give them stories that touch their hearts. And they will never forget you as a writer!

- Picking teams that will work as news agencies. Learn iMovie HD or Final Cut Pro. Individual sessions to review tryout assignments.

Week 4. Third story and re-writes due. What is reporting? Interviewing is engaging interesting people into a conversation to get information for engaging general stories, features and profiles.

- Pitching and planning the fire/rescue assignment. Fire assignment due.

Week 5. Fourth story and re-writes due. Recap of information gathering techniques and tools – records, observation and interviewing.

- Choosing a theme, writing a budget, making assignments within groups. Blog assignment: Observation writing.

Week 6. Fifth story and re-writes due. Introduction to multiple platform elements and writing for distribution through new media. By this week, you should have taken workshops to introduce you to visual elements and writing for distribution through radio, TV, Internet, blogs and other new platforms. If necessary, we will have Guest Coaches.

Week 7. Sixth story and re-writes due. Application of reporting techniques and tools to specific story types. Speeches, meetings and press conferences- covering more than the meeting. Who, what, where and why of meetings.

Week 8. Seventh story and re-writes due. Education coverage. Board of education meetings, public schools, area universities, Congressional actions affecting education.

Week 9. Eighth story and re-writes. Profiles – ordinary people and unsung community heroes.

Business Writing – mom and pop business stories, general business news; technology/ Internet. The business assignment. Pitching business stories. Business packages due. AP Style test.

Week 10. Ninth story and re-writes due. Health, fitness and nutrition - environmental news of interest to a community newspaper readers.

- The sports, health, fitness and nutrition, environmental. Pitching and planning the sports, health, fitness and nutrition, environmental assignment. Packages due.

Week 11. 10th story and re-writes due. Covering politics – Localizing international, national and state stories.

Community/local politics.

Week 12. 11th story and re-writes due. Covering technology. Pitching and planning the medical/science/technology assignment. Assignment due.

Week 13, 14 and 15. Rest of stories and re-writes due. Closing out the semester. Catching up on semester work and evaluating your portfolio.

Interview Sources Information:

Name: Title: Tel. #: Cell Phone: E-mail:

Grading:

The tryout 5%

Beat notes/blog 10%

AP Style test 10%

Fire assignment 10%

Business assignment 10%

Sports assignment 10%

Science assignment 20%

Final project: 25%