

## COMM 362 201 – Journalism Research Methods – Fall 2020

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### Course Description, Goals and Outcomes

This course will help you become a better reporter and a more discerning and insightful consumer of news, skills that will serve you for a lifetime in whatever profession you pursue.

Our journalism is only as good as our information. During the next 14 weeks, we will explore some of the bedrock sources and investigative methods good journalists rely upon. You will learn how to find and use public records accurately, as well as some of the pitfalls that lie in records reporting. And you will also learn the importance of being transparent with your audience, telling them exactly what you know, what you *don't* know, and how you know it.

You will learn about the Illinois Freedom of Information Act, and why it is such an important and powerful tool for reporters and citizens alike, but how it also is saddled with shortcomings that can make it difficult to access information that rightfully belongs to the public. You will file a FOIA request yourself and follow it through the process.

You will learn how business reporters expose the financial workings of the companies that make and sell us products such as food and drugs; how environment databases can reveal dangerous polluters; how to find and read a federal indictment; how police make information public; how to discern the validity of a scientific study; and how cities and towns across America account for spending the tax dollars of the people who live there.

Also, this is an election year, a perfect time to dive into campaign contributions and voter data.

As we learn about these sources and methods, we will explore important issues of ethics and accountability for journalists, as well.

Sound journalism relies upon trusted information and explains that to readers. By the end of this course, you will know how to access many of the most important sources of information journalists rely upon and be a savvy reader who is able to assess the reliability of the information coming at you every day.

The best part – all of this is deeply interesting. Many journalists will tell you they think this is the fun stuff. I am one of them.

## Class Schedule

This is an asynchronous course, so we will not have live meetings. All the class work will be available on Sakai.

Classes will be posted in full each Tuesday at 3 p.m. You will have until the following Tuesday at 3 p.m. to complete the readings, the lecture and the assignment. For that reason, you should get to it as soon as possible after 3 p.m. each Tuesday.

An important caution: Assignments vary in length and complexity, so waiting until the last minute is perilous.

## Class Structure

Here is a typical structure of the coursework each week, although it might be modified for any given topic:

- Introduction to the topic and the week. I will prepare a short video introducing the topic and the readings. Watch this first, then plunge into the readings.
- The readings. These can include news stories we are focusing on that week, as well as guides others have written on how to handle the topic we are covering that week.
- Video lecture. Watch this after you have done all the readings.
- Occasional guest video. You will get to hear from some great reporters and editors working in Chicago right now.
- Assignment. Most classes will end with an assignment based on the topic that week. **It will be due by 3 p.m. the following Tuesday.**

Again, all of this will be posted each week by 3 p.m. Tuesday, and any assignments from the previous week will be due at that time.

## Class Calendar *Subject to Change*

Week 1	Tuesday, Aug. 25	Introduction and general readings	Assignment: News exercise (50 points)
Week 2	Tuesday, Sept. 1	FOIA: How to use the Freedom of Information Act, its shortcomings, and important examples of journalists using it.	Assignment: FOIA writing exercise (50 points)
Week 3	Tuesday, Sept. 8 <small>Labor Day Week</small>	Police: How police provide information today, how to interpret it, and some ethical issues to consider when covering arrests.	Assignment: Police story (100 points)

Week 4	Tuesday, Sept. 15	Courts: How to obtain and read a lawsuit and an indictment and present it to the reader fairly and accurately.	Assignment: Courts story (100 points)
Week 5	Tuesday, Sept. 22	Juvenile Justice: Some of the special challenges and ethical considerations when covering juvenile justice issues.	Assignment: Attribution exercise (50 points)
Week 6	Tuesday, Sept. 29	Business: How to use public records to learn about the companies we interact with every day.	Assignment: Business records exercise (50 points)
Week 7	Tuesday, Oct. 6	Midterm: We will use this week for individual conversations and an assessment of our progress so far.	Midterm assessment: (100 points)
Week 8	Tuesday, Oct. 13	Environment: How to access public information on environmental issues and how journalists have used it to get important results.	Assignment: Environment records exercise (50 points)
Week 9	Tuesday, Oct. 20	Elections I: How to find out who is funding the candidates and how journalists interpret that to reveal connections between donations and influence.	Assignment: Contributions story (100 points)
Week 10	Tuesday, Oct. 27	Science and Studies: How to determine whether a study is scientifically sound and how to interpret surveys.	Assignment: Study exercise (50 points)
Week 11	Tuesday, Nov. 3	Budgets: How to read a municipal budget at a time when the pandemic is slashing revenue. (Also, what to look for in the election.)	Assignment: Budget story (100 points)
Week 12	Tuesday, Nov. 10	Elections II: Analyze the results.	Assignment: Election exercise (50 points)
Week 13	Tuesday, Nov. 17	FOIA Part II: Analyzing the results of our FOIA requests.	Assignment: Database exercise (50 points)
<i>Thanksgiving week</i>	<i>Monday, Nov. 23</i>	<i>No class</i>	
Week 14	Tuesday, Dec. 1	Summary, Overview and Final Project	Assignment: Final Project (100 points)

Finals	Tuesday, Dec. 8	Final Project Due	
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### Your Instructor

Peter Kendall is a veteran Chicago journalist who has worked at nearly every level of the profession, from covering overnight cops to managing the largest newsroom in the Midwest.

He spent more than 30 years at the Chicago Tribune, including five years as managing editor. Prior to that position, he was Metro editor for seven years, overseeing all aspects of local news coverage. He was also an enterprise editor and supervised the Tribune's science coverage. As a reporter, he specialized in environment writing and science reporting and also spent many years on general assignment in the city and suburbs.

He began his journalism career at the City News Bureau of Chicago, which for more than a century was a storied training ground for journalists.

He has a master's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois and a bachelor's degree in English from Reed College.

A lifelong Illinois resident, he lives in the northern suburbs with his wife, Alison. Their two children are both entering their senior year of college.

### Required Materials

You must have access to the AP Stylebook. If you do not have online access, you will need the book.

All readings for this class are online.

### Assignment Requirements

All assignments must be turned in as Word or Excel documents. (Please contact me if this is an issue with you.)

Assignments must be turned in on time. Any late assignments will have 10 points deducted unless there is a valid reason for the delay.

Please contact me prior to an assignment deadline if you cannot turn in the assignment on time.

### Office Hours

As this is an asynchronous course, we will not be meeting in person. However, I am eager to talk by phone, Zoom or email about issues large or small. My contact information is at the top of the syllabus.

### Grading

Assignments will be given each week, varying in scope and complexity and weighted accordingly.

- Exercises: 50 points each
- Writing Assignments: 100 points each
- Midterm Assessment and Final Project: 100 points each

Grading criteria for assignments involving writing:

- A: Publishable work with no spelling, grammatical, punctuation or AP Style errors and the proper information and sources written in a lively, well-organized manner.
- B: Minimal spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Minimal missing information and sources; minimal problems with the lead and organization.
- C: Notable number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Noticeable missing information and sources; problems with the lead and organization.
- D: Significant number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Significant missing information and sources. Significant problems with the lead and organization.
- F: Misspelling of proper names. Other major spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Almost total lack of information and sources. Severe problems with the lead and organization.

*Rewrites: If you receive a grade of C- or below on a writing assignment, you have one week to rewrite the story for an improved grade.*

Grading Scale:

- Individual assignment grade scale: A: 100-94; A-: 93-90; B+: 89-88; B: 87-83; B-: 82-80; C+ 79-78; C: 77-73; C-: 72-70; D+: 69-68; D: 67-63; D-: 62-60; F: 59-0
- Final grade scale: A: 1,000-940; A-: 939-900; B+: 899-880; B: 879-830; B-: 829-800; C+: 799-780; C: 779-730; C-: 729-700; D+: 699-580; D: 679-630; D-: 629-600 F: 599-0

Important: Assignments must be turned in on time. Any late assignments will have 10 points deducted unless there is a valid reason for the delay.

### Personal Safety Practices

This is an asynchronous class, so we will not be meeting in person or on campus. You will be able to complete all assignments from any location within the time allotted.

Here is a link to the required personal safety practices that must be followed on any of the University campuses:

<https://www.luc.edu/returntocampus/healthandsafety/requiredpersonalsafetypractices.shtml>

### Academic Integrity

#### **School of Communication Statement on Academic Integrity**

(School of Communication Faculty Teaching Handbook, 2019)

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty.

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or

by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.; Faculty Teaching Handbook 13
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism.

A more detailed description of this issue can be found at <http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source> . In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. A student who submits the same work for credit in two or more classes will be judged guilty of academic dishonesty, and will be subject to sanctions described below. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication. The office of the Dean of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances.

The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together. Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of the dean or deans. Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can

be found at: [http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg\\_academicgrievance.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.shtml) .  
The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations.

(The School of Communication policy is based entirely on and is consistent with the Academic Integrity Policy of the College of Arts & Sciences.)