

Loyola University Chicago
School of Communication
Spring 2017
COMM 362-201 Journalism Research Methods
M-W-F/2:45-3:35 p.m.
SOC 015

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Instructor Office Hours
Wednesday: 3:45-4:30 p.m. and by appointment.
Lewis Towers, Suite 900

Course Description:

Welcome to Journalism Research Methods. This course will teach you how to sift information with skill in both the digital and analog worlds. The rise of technology has democratized access to information, and at the same time, made it much easier to spread misinformation and propaganda. The journalist's role as investigator and interpreter of information accordingly is more important than ever.

- We will learn how to find and mine public records and interpret them, both via databases and old-fashioned shoe leather reporting. We will master the art of reading documents such as city budgets and property records; corporate reports and legal filings as well as police and fire reports.
- Research also comes from interviewing people and learning to be a deft listener, whether in a one-on-one conversation or at a press conference. And when you've done the digging, it's time to present what you found in the most impactful, concise and impeccably factual way. These are not just journalism skills; they are skills that will put you ahead in the game of life, and in any other profession requiring accuracy and communication.
- Writing is the yin to reporting's yang, and every reporting exercise we undertake will end with a story. The mission here is to challenge you to be creative, organized and improvisational in how you discover the facts, and to be equally strong in those attributes when you decide how to present the facts.
- NOTE: It goes without saying that you can't be creative with facts – only how you unearth them, and the manner in which you present them. They speak for themselves.

Housekeeping and Ground Rules:

- **Electronics in Class:** Phones and tablets must be kept off during class, please. You may use laptops to take notes. However, please don't update Facebook or otherwise use it to amuse yourself. Doing so will result in losing the privilege to use your laptop in class. Active listening is a crucial skill for a journalist to have. It's also easily lost in the glare of an electronic screen.

- **Assignments and Deadlines:** All assignments are due by 5 p.m. on the deadline date via TurnItIn. All written assignments should be double-spaced, proofread and set in Times New Roman 12-point font. Late assignments will not be accepted, since news has to get out on time. Extensions will be granted only with prior permission, and on a very limited basis.
- **Professionalism and Participation:** This class will be run like a newsroom with me as the editor and you as the reporting staff. As such, I expect you to show upon time, with a reporter's notebook/recorder/pens and ready to rock if news breaks. The news business has no regular hours, and news comes when it wants. Treat this like a job: that means call/email me BEFORE class if you're going to be unavoidably absent or late. Note that I said unavoidably.
- **Absences, Lateness and Disruptions:** Be on time. You get one late for free; after that, it comes out of your participation grade. If you're going to miss class, let me know *beforehand* – just as if you had a job. If you miss four classes without proper medical documentation, you will be marked down a full letter grade. Obviously there are reasons you can't make it to class that are excusable: medical emergencies, approved travel for the university, bereavement and the like. Oversleeping, forgetting, etc., doesn't cut it. As far as disruptions go, you're grown-ups and I assume you know how to avoid being disruptive.
- **Academic Dishonesty Policy:** Please see the entire policy at the end of the syllabus. If you plagiarize, intentionally or unintentionally, you fail the course. Journalism and communications rely entirely on the value of your word and reputation. Never, ever risk it for anything because you can't get it back. Better to be late or ask for help than make an irreversible mistake.
- **Final Note:** There's a reason that reformed poachers make great game wardens. That's to say I've seen and/or done it all, so let's respect each other. I firmly believe that a fun, challenging environment makes for the best learning and I will deliver it. Do your part, please.

About the Instructor: I'm a former foreign/war correspondent who spent the bulk of his career reporting for Reuters from 18 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. I cut my teeth on small-town newspapers in Connecticut and Texas, then joined the Associated Press in Dallas. Despite going to journalism school to avoid math, my path overseas opened up after Reuters hired me in Houston to do business reporting. That bilingual fluency in financial and general news helped me win postings in Nairobi, Kenya; Colombo, Sri Lanka; and once again in Nairobi with Bloomberg. I've done TV, radio and print interviews and many speeches for clients. Now, I write, edit and consult on communications and journalism for a variety of clients. I've ghostwritten one novel and am working on the sequel now.

Required Materials:

The Associated Press Stylebook

Grading

As you learn journalistic research skills, you'll also be asked to demonstrate your

acquired knowledge by reporting and writing articles using statistics, research and information found in spreadsheets, budgets, reports and other documents.

Census Story: 100 points
Police/Fire Story: 100 points
Legal Story: 100 points
City Budget Story: 100 points
Election Story: 100 points
Property Tax Story: 100 points
Business Story: 100 points
Weather Story: 50 points
Sports Story: 50 points
Final Project (Profile or Spot Story): 100 points
Professionalism: 100 points

Grading Criteria for Writing Assignments

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 the Outside Assignments, you have one week to rewrite the story for an improved grade.

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

Style and Spelling

It is important that you learn proper newspaper style, so refer often to your Associated Press Stylebook. Spelling and grammar are equally important. Your grade will suffer if your copy contains style and spelling errors. Note that MS Word has a decent spellchecker, but you've got to watch over it and ensure the machine doesn't make a mistake a human wouldn't. It's not going to help you when it comes to your vs you're.

Course Schedule (Topics Subject to Change):

Week One: Jan 18, 20

Introduction to the class. A review of the syllabus and ground rules, as well as a round of introductions. Everybody be ready to introduce themselves and tell us one distinctive fact that can't be found on your social media pages or resume. Review of AP Style and overview of skills, topics. Basic math for journalists review.

Week Two: Jan 23, 25, 27

Finding story ideas. AP Style for fun and profit. How to write simply and with flair. In-class exercises. Please read [this brief story](#) before class on Friday Jan 27.

Week Three: Jan 30, Feb 1, Feb 3

Police & Fire reports, Mock press conference exercise, crime statistics. [City of Chicago data portal](#) Round 1.

CENSUS STORY DUE MON JAN 30.

Week Four: Feb 6, 8, 10

Legal documents – Criminal & Civil, State & Federal. How to find them and how to digest them quickly and accurately.

POLICE/FIRE STORY DUE MON FEB 6.

Week Five: Feb 13, 15, 17

Municipal documents & local/state/federal budgets; [City of Chicago data portal](#) Round 2; Open meetings and FOIA laws.

LEGAL STORY DUE MON FEB 13

Week Six: Feb 20, 22, 24

Income/Property Tax/Appraisals and how to write them up. Basic property review, plus everything you wanted to know about tax but were afraid to ask for fear of dying of boredom.

BUDGET STORY DUE MON FEB 20

Week Seven: Feb 27, March 1, March 3

Elections: How NOT to report them. Campaign Finance reports, polls & voting results/Exit polls.

PROPERTY TAX STORY DUE MON FEB 27

Week Eight: March 6, 8, 10

Spring Break – No Class.

Week Nine: March 13, 15, 17

Business reporting basics: How to find the magic in the numbers without your eyes (or your reader's) glazing over. Please [read this](#) before class on Monday March 13 to prepare for our discussion. SEC filings, annual & quarterly reports, press releases and a little PR tactic known as strategic ambiguity.

ELECTION STORY DUE WEDS MARCH 15

Week 10: March 20, 22, 24

Corporate press release exercise; How to research weather and sports stories, and write them with flair.

BUSINESS STORY DUE WEDS MARCH 22.

Week 11: March 27, 29, 31.

The art of building and assessing sources, whether working a beat or jumping in at the last minute. Understanding how demagoguery and propaganda work. Discerning real news from fake and verification. (April Fool's syndrome.) In-Class exercise to test your ability to cull the wheat from the chaff on Friday.

SPORT STORY DUE TUES MARCH 28; WEATHER STORY DUE MARCH 30.

(Both to be based on data given the day before.)

Week 12: April 3, 5, 7

Researching the unfamiliar quickly and fluently: the journalist as paratrooper or medium for experts. Introduction to international reporting; in-class team exercise to figure out how to report on something totally unfamiliar.

EVERY STUDENT MUST BRING AN ARTICLE (OR EMAIL THE LINK) ABOUT AN UNFAMILIAR INTERNATIONAL OR TECHNICAL TOPIC TO CLASS ON APRIL 3

Week 13: April 10, 12. (NO CLASS ON FRI APRIL 14)

The art of questions and the interview: from spontaneous/on-the-street to press conferences, to getting ready for the pre-arranged sit-down. Using interviews to create a compelling profile, and how to use repeat interviews to build your expertise/sourcing on a beat.

WEATHER STORY DUE THUR APR 20, BASED ON AN APR 19 DATA

Week 14: April 19, 21 (NO CLASS ON MON APRIL 17)

Working the streets: newsgathering and researching in the field. Operating safely and judging whether the news is worth the risk. Be ready to work outside the classroom as a group or in small teams.

Week 15: April 24, 26, 28

Summarizing all the tactics into a holistic approach toward newsgathering and writing. Preparation for your final projects.

**FINAL PROJECT DUE DATE TBD BUT NO EARLIER THAN APRIL 28.
NO FINAL EXAM**

Academic Dishonesty Policy

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. 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.;
- 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. 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.

A complete description of the School of Communication Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>

Special Accommodations: Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.