

NEWS AND NEWS REPORTING

FALL 2014

JOU 3101-006 (3 credits)

CRN 25638

Boca Raton

Florida Atlantic University

School of Communication and Multimedia Studies

Meeting day and time: Thursdays, 1:00 - 3:50 p.m.

Classroom: FL 409

Prerequisites: ENC 1101, ENC 1102

Instructor:

Neil Santaniello

Office info –

CU 207 (Boca Raton) / SR 257 (Jupiter)

Phone: 561-212-7446

Fax: 561-799-8535

E-mail: nsantane@fau.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Required textbooks (2)

Reporting for the Media, 10th edition, by John R. Bender, Lucinda Davenport, Michael W. Drager and Fred Fedler (ISBN 9780199846412)

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, 2013 edition or no older than 2011, by the Associated Press (ISBN 978-0465082995)

Other required reading

Miscellaneous handouts and posted Blackboard readings

Course website

<https://blackboard.fau.edu>

Course description/learning objectives:

A gateway course to news writing studies at FAU, News and News Reporting will emphasize print or newspaper-style journalism – not broadcast journalism, where story-telling techniques differ. Among other things, the course will cover: how to determine news value, how to interview, how to write factually and objectively, how to present information in a fair and balanced manner, how to source and attribute information, how to structure hard news and feature stories and how to work public records into the reporting process. Students are expected to write stories in accordance with wire-service (Associated Press) style using their AP Stylebook for reference. Along with teaching reporting and writing strategy, the course will also cover legal and ethical issues for members of the media, including libel and privacy. And it will delve into other news gathering issues, including the challenge of sifting through ubiquitous PR industry tactics. The teaching methodology combines lectures, homework readings, classroom exercises, in-class and at-home writing assignments, open-book style quizzes and a closed-book final exam.

Reality check

1) The writing bar is high here. News stories are intended for immediate or near-immediate publication. In other words, student stories are evaluated not just for content, but for clarity (logical organization), accuracy (no factual errors) and writing gloss – meaning correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. **In essence, student writing is judged by the amount of editing required to make it publishable.** Consequently, you will be expected to proofread your work vigorously before delivering it to the instructor by deadline. Stories riddled with typos or clouded with confusing organization risk being rejected and sent back for a rewrite with points deducted on top of that. A repetitive pattern of sloppy writing can result in a grade below, or well below, the passing threshold of C.

2) You can learn a lot about non-fiction writing by reading examples regularly and paying close attention to the way journalists build sentences and assemble entire stories. For this course, you will be expected to read print or online news stories daily and not simply rely on lectures or the textbook to familiarize yourself with proper grammar and the nuances of news style. If you don't get into a news-reading habit it could be harder to adapt to this more restricted, bias-policed mode of writing.

Graded work

News stories – 4 total @ 15 percent apiece

Story 1: Hard news format – breaking news piece written from professor-provided notes or student reporting (homework, 500 words, due **Jan. 30**).

Story 2: Hard news format – coverage of a local live event or mock press conference (written on deadline in class, 600 words, scheduled **Feb. 20**).

Story 3: Feature format – profile story, student-selected subject (homework, 700 words, due **March 20**).

Story 4: Feature format – trend or explainer or other type of feature, instructor or student-chosen topic (homework, 800 words, due **April 17**).

AP style quiz – 5 total @ 2 percent apiece (totaling 10 percent)

Final exam – 20 percent

Attendance – 10 percent

Story submission requirements

Stories assigned at home or in class must:

-- Include the assignment name (Story One, Two etc.) at the top left of the first page with the student byline (*By Your Name Here*) below that

-- Omit any type of headline to avoid confusion with the lede

-- Be typed and double spaced on a Microsoft Word document using the 12-point Times New Roman font (a university standard) or Calibri (same size lettering)

--Be submitted electronically (via e-mail) to the professor as Word (.doc) attachment with the story text ADDITIONALLY cut and pasted into the body of the same email

-- Be delivered by the start of the due-date class or, in the case of an in-class deadline writing assignment, by the deadline designated by the instructor

-- Meet the minimum word count or exceed that (by no more 200 words)

--Incorporate the minimum number of required sources

-- Be significantly free of grammar, punctuation and spelling errors (through diligent proof reading) or risk being rejected and sent back for a rewrite or given an “F” grade

-- List contact information for any sources obtained by the student (not provided by the professor): For example: name and phone number or email address for a person; name of website and URL for a web document

-- Be written exclusively for this class. **No recycled stories – assignments written for other journalism classes – are permitted. Also, the instructor does not accept stories already**

edited and published by the University Press or other professional publications. The instructor needs to see raw/original student writing and not work spruced up by a copy desk.

Grading rubric for written work*

(*Some or all of the below-described qualities would apply)

A range. This means: Stories that require almost no editing or minimal at that; exhibit few to no grammar, punctuation or spelling; adhere closely to news-writing rules (objectivity, accuracy, attribution, quotation, AP style and such); flow smoothly and logically from start to finish; contain solid and accurate reporting. In other words, written to publishable or almost publishable standards.

B range. This means: Stories that show promise but requiring minor editing and some restructuring to meet the publication bar; contain no more than a small number of news-format mistakes; need stronger reporting; contain more minor accuracy issues.

C range. This means: stories that are borderline but salvageable; require moderate to heavier editing because grammar/punctuation/spelling problems and/or new style violations; employ a confusing or hard-to-follow structure; contain significant reporting holes or other significant problems.

D range. This means: Stories that exhibit seriously unclear writing and garbled story flow; require heavy-duty editing; contain too many writing errors or new style violations; show virtually no evidence of proof-reading; ignore assignment rules; include major factual errors or other key errors.

F: This means: Not worth an edit. Stories that are irreparably written or perhaps seriously off the assignment mark; that are riddled with mistakes; that are submitted well past deadline; that contain plagiarized material or fabricated content (facts and quotes) or break other journalism ethics rules.

Grade ranges

Grades for this course are posted on Blackboard and follow the default Blackboard grade range for FAU from F through A. Those values are:

A = 94 and above

A - = 90 to less than 94

B+ = 87 to less than 90

B = 84 to less than 87

B- = 80 to less than 84

C+ = 77 to less than 80

C = 74 to less than 77
C- = 70 to less than 74
D+ = 67 to less than 70
D = 64 to less than 67
D- = 60 to less than 64
F = 0 percent to less than 60

NOTE: Journalism majors must earn a minimum of a C in this class (C- or lower necessitates repeating the course).

Deadlines and late paper penalties

In journalism, deadlines are firm. So it goes in this introductory course. Late work can be rejected and graded “F” at the instructor’s discretion or assessed a late-paper penalty (a half letter grade or full letter grade deduction). If you are in danger of missing a deadline you must **email the professor in advance of the original deadline to request a time extension and explain the cause** – verbal communication does not count. The extension is not granted until the instructor responds with an approval. Be forewarned that deadline extensions are given out sparingly and only for justifiable circumstances.

Exam policy

Students must bring green Scantron cards to class for all multiple-choice tests (all AP style quizzes after the first) and the final exam.

Attendance

The summer term is an abbreviated semester with fewer class meetings. Consequently, it is even more important for students to attend all classes, including the first. Points are deducted for each missed session unless: 1) the absence is reporting in advance to the instructor 2) the absence meets the excused-absence criteria noted below 3) appropriate documentation explaining the missed class is provided within one week.

Students who make every class will typically earn an A for attendance; missing one lowers that to an A-, missing two lowers that to a B, missing three to a B-, missing four to a C- and so on. Attendance time is deducted as well for partial class attendance (for instance, showing up to take a quiz and then leaving early, especially without a word of explanation to the instructor).

All absences are unexcused with the following exceptions:

-- Illnesses and medical emergencies involving students or their immediate family and close relatives with an emailed or verbal explanation and **proper written documentation**.

-- Participation in university-approved activities, including athletic or scholastics teams, musical and theatrical performances, and debate activities, **with advance notice and proper written documentation.**

-- Religious observances, **with advance notice.**

Depending on the nature of an absence, a student might be offered the opportunity to do make-up work if a test or in-class assignment is missed, but that will be at the instructor's discretion.

Cell phone / lab computers policy

Mobile phones: These must remain off in the writing lab. The only exception is for a class-related interview authorized by the professor. The FAU policy on personal communication devices states: "In order to enhance and maintain a productive atmosphere for education, personal communication devices, such as cellular telephones and pagers, are to be disabled in class sessions."

Lab computers: These are restricted to class work only. Excessive use of FAU computers to surf the internet, check social media, shop online or perform other tasks unrelated to the course and its assignments can further pull down the attendance grade at the instructor's discretion (for reduced class participation).

Academic integrity

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf

Plagiarism / fabrication

Copying another author's written work verbatim, or close to it, and passing that off as your own without proper attribution or credit is plagiarism, a serious breach of journalism ethics. This prohibited practice can lead to an F for the assignment or the entire course and disciplinary action by the department or university. Since the mode of writing in this course is nonfiction, instances of fabrication – inventing or making up sources and information – will not be tolerated as well and will bring the violator an F for the assignment or course.

Students with disabilities

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students who require reasonable

accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) -- in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 240 (954-236-1222); in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8010); or at the Treasure Coast, CO 117 (772-873-3441) – and follow all OSD procedures. <http://osd.fau.edu/>

Course schedule

CLASS 1, Jan. 9: Course summary, syllabus explained. Journalism: An overview. Judging newsworthiness. Hard or breaking news: writing style and objectives. Simplified sentences, reaching the average reader, factual writing and objectivity, fairness and balance, accuracy, etc. Story dissection: example hard and soft news stories. News lab -- objectivity.

HOMEWORK: Read Textbook, Chapters 4 and 5; become familiar with structure of AP Stylebook.

CLASS 2, Jan. 16: The language of hard news continued: Precise words, strong verbs, active voice, show don't tell. When to use past vs. present tense. Third, second and first person narrative stances. Descending order of importance and the inverted pyramid format. Answering the key questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. The summary or basic news lede. Introduction to wire service style and the AP (Associated Press) Stylebook. News lab – lede writing.

HOMEWORK: Read Textbook, Chapter 5.

*CLASS 3, Jan. 23: **AP style quiz 1**. The rules of quotations, paraphrasing and attribution. Said and says. Other story ingredients: explanation, anecdotes (examples), timeline (chronology), perspective, numbers, etc. Stopping your story: the kicker, quote or last relevant fact. Detail and description. News lab -- the police report. Story 1 instructions.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 11 and 18; write Story 1.

*CLASS 4, Jan. 30: **Story 1 due**. More on news ledes. Interviewing: preparation and execution. On and off the record. Note-taking. Recording devices and the law. Tight writing / economy of language. Story dissection. News lab – practice group interview, discussion.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 12; come up with a profile story idea for instructor approval.

CLASS 5, Feb. 6: Beyond the inverted pyramid – the feature story. How feature writing differs from hard news. Telling a story vs. ordering the urgency of facts; delayed openings and other feature and narrative-writing techniques. Alternative ledes and examples. Story dissection: example feature stories. News lab – descriptiveness and making the reader see.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 17.

*CLASS 6, Feb. 13: **AP style quiz 2**. Fact vs. opinion. Active vs. passive voice. News lab: Evaluating and condensing ledes (hard news).

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 9; write Story 2.

*CLASS 7, Feb. 20: **Story 2 due**. Scheduled, due at end of class (press conference). Mock press conference, discussion, deadline writing.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 2.

*CLASS 8, Feb. 27: Writing the profile. Example profile stories (student and professionally written). Discussion of student-selected profile ideas. News lab -- alternative ledes.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapters 6 and 7.

MARCH 3 - 9: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASSES

CLASS 9, March 13: **AP style quiz 3**. News-gathering issues and media ethics. The journalistic dangers of libel and privacy. Case studies. Credibility, neutrality and getting close to sources. Ethical codes for journalists. News lab -- ethical decision points.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 20; write Story 3.

*CLASS 10, March 20: **Story 3 due**. Journalism and the PR industry. The press release, spin and media manipulation. Quote spontaneity and the influence of social media. Story 3 instructions. News lab -- press release dissection.

HOMEWORK: Read textbook, Chapter 18.

*CLASS 11, March 27: **AP style quiz 4**. The paper trail: having a documents mindset and reporting with public records. State public records policy: Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine law. How to file a public records request. Fill-in-the-blanks public records letter generators. News lab – discussion of possible public records-based story ideas.

CLASS 12, April 3: Public records and investigative reporting continued: The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Homework: None.

*CLASS 13, April 10: **AP Style Quiz 5**. Public affairs reporting, crime and accidents, local government and courts. The beat reporting system. Covering speeches and meetings. News lab -
- police report interpretation.

Homework: Read textbook Chapter 15.

*CLASS 14, April 17: **Story 4 due**. Final exam outline. Journalism movie, discussion.

April 24-30: Final exam week.

FINAL EXAM DATE AND TIME: To be announced.