Journalism 112.10: Advanced Reporting

Albert L. May

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

Jour 112.10 Advanced Reporting (Spring, 2001)
11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., Monday & Wednesday
Phillips 411

READING MATERIALS

Required

- News in a New Century by Jerry Lanson and Barbara Croll Fought (Lanson
- The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual
- Somebody Told Me by Rick Bragg

Web Related

- Advanced Reporting Web Research Page - Gelman librarians have built a special web page to assist students in this course.
- Washington Post - Students are expected to keep abreast of the news, and current articles in the Post often will be discussed in class. Students should become daily readers of the national and metropolitan news.
- Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics - While ethics will be explored in-depth late in the semester, students from the outset of the course should familiarize themselves with the basic code of ethical conduct for journalists.
- Information Technology Services - Students in this course will need competency in Word and in Excel. Basic classes are offered through the university's ITS. Follow this link to learn more.

PREREQUISITES

Jour. 111: Restricted to Journalism majors

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To develop news gathering and writing skills and to apply those skills to the coverage of public affairs. Through hands-on experience, readings, discussions and classroom drills, students will learn reporting techniques in covering breaking news and in grappling with complex topics in depth. Through in-class exercises and outside assignments, students will hone the writing skills
METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

The course blends lectures and readings with hands-on exercises and other practical applications. Students will be introduced to a spectrum of reporting techniques from the traditional notepad to the latest computer aid. As in a modern newsroom, computer literacy will be expected along with writing competency. Unless otherwise specified by the instructor, all outside class assignments will be posted as Prometheus files in a word processing format that can be edited by the instructor. Students will use Word in the lab and should be familiar with it. Later in the semester, students will use Excel spreadsheets as reporting tools. Students who are unfamiliar with either of these programs should enroll in short courses offered by GW’s Information Technology Services. See above link to ITS.

Tests: There will be no midterm. The final examination will test deadline writing and knowledge of reporting techniques.

Class Assignments: Writing and reporting exercises and quizzes will occur periodically. The Lanson text and the AP stylebook should be brought to each class meeting.

Beats: Each student will select a local government body as a beat, which will be used to generate outside writing assignments. All beat selections must be approved by the instructor. Students should also check their own schedules to avoid conflicts with regularly scheduled meetings on their beats. The beat should be a major arm of local government in the Washington metropolitan area, such as a city, county or school district. State and federal agencies are excluded. The beat coverage will include the production of a beat memo and four stories, which will constitute 50 percent of the final grade. All stories must be double-spaced with standard margins and type size. Reporter notes are subject to request. Students are encouraged to read local news media coverage of their beat but any use of such material in stories must follow the rules of attribution. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and students should be familiar with university's Code of Academic Integrity and journalism's generally accepted ethical rules. A copy of the Society of Professional Journalist's code is linked above. Unless otherwise specified, deadlines are the start of class on the designated date. No late papers will be accepted after the last day of regular classes.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Stories will be graded on content, writing and newsworthiness. Grades will be applied as though stories were presented in a newsroom. To receive an A, a story should be of publishable quality or near publishable quality, requiring only modest editing. A story receiving a B would be one sufficiently developed that it could be published in the current news cycle with more reporting and some rewriting. A story that requires more reworking than can be accomplished in the
current news cycle would receive a C. A story receiving a D would fail to meet minimum reporting and writing standards, requiring a complete overhaul. A story that shows disregard of those standards and contains factual errors would receive an F. Grades will be lowered for errors in fact, AP style, grammar, word usage and spelling. The grade for stories that contain a misspelled name will be lowered a notch, automatically. Missed deadlines will also result in grade reductions and the reductions will become increasingly extreme with repeat behavior.

Note: With the exception of the Beat Memo, rewriting will be allowed for Stories 1-4. Stories that receive an A may be rewritten for practice, but will not be graded again. Stories that receive a grade of A- to C- may be rewritten for regrading but it will result in no more than one letter improvement. Stories that receive a D or F must be rewritten but they will receive a final grade of no more than a C. Failure to rewrite in these cases will result in an F. All rewrites will be due at the next session of class, unless specified differently by the instructor.

Participation: Punctuality in attending class will be expected. Unexcused absences will count against the final grade, even if no written assignments are required in class. Students should be prepared to discuss their writing during class and critique the work of others during class discussions. Attention in class will be expected, and e-mailing and other non-instructional uses of the computers during a lecture are prohibited.

Grade distribution:

Beat Memo - 5%
Story 1 - 10%
Story 2 - 10%
Story 3 - 10%
Story 4 - 15%
Class Assignments - 25%
Participation - 10%
Final Exam - 15%

Important Deadlines:
Jan. 29 - Beat choices
Feb. 5 - Beat Memo
Feb. 14 - Story 1
Feb. 28 - Story 2
April 4 - Story 3
April 11 - Story 4 Synopsis
April 25 - Story 4
TBA - Final Exam