

JOURNALISM 501

FUNDAMENTALS OF WRITING AND EDITING

Section 0101, Fall 2006

Mon. & Wed., 2 p.m.-3:50 p.m.

Room 3111

Instructor: Steve Crane

Phone: 301/405-8806 (office)

301/699-5947 (home)

Office: Room 2116H (in the AJR suite)

Office hours: After class or by appointment

E-mail: scrane@jmail.umd.edu

THE COURSE:

JOUR501 is a skills-based immersion into the world of journalism. Students will learn the foundations of journalism and its two main components, reporting and writing the news. At the successful conclusion of the course, students will have demonstrated proficiency -- at a professional news level -- of the following:

- Fundamentals of Journalism -- accuracy, newsworthiness, deadlines, objectivity and fairness.
- Basic News Writing Skills -- spelling, grammar, Associated Press style, attribution, the inverted pyramid structure, single-sentence paragraphs, crisp and compelling news ledes and the use of quotations.
- Basic Reporting Techniques -- rudimentary interviewing skills and the use of commercial databases (LexisNexis) and the Internet to background stories and find news documents.
- Basic Reporting and Writing of Short (300 word) News Stories -- obituaries, accidents, speeches/meetings and crimes.

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to write clearly and concisely under deadline pressure. They will have a basic grasp of AP style and both a journalist's passion for accuracy and disdain for sloppiness and theft. They will have a basic understanding of interviewing and news-gathering techniques and knowledge of different types of stories and approaches to each.

JOUR501 is the foundation for the entire skills-based curriculum at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism. It is designed, therefore, to be extremely rigorous and challenging. Be forewarned and prepared. This is reporter's boot camp, probably unlike any other course you have faced in your college career. It's a lot of work packed into a short time period and you will find yourself frazzled and frustrated at times. But if you stick with it, you will be thinking and writing like a reporter by the end of the class. So stick with it.

REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS:

- The Washington Post. Students must read The Post for an hour every day, online or on paper, focusing particularly on the front section and the Metro section. News stories should be analyzed for both the quality of writing and depth of reporting. We will discuss the content and structure of stories regularly in class.
- "Writing and Reporting News," by Carole Rich, fourth edition.
- "A Journalist's Guide to the Internet," by Christopher Callahan, second edition.
- The Associated Press Stylebook. A reference guide that you must bring to class each day.

RECOMMENDED:

- A pocket dictionary (there's no spell-check here).
- A detailed map of Maryland (bring to class each day).

COURSE STANDARDS:

JOUR 501 is designed to instill in you the immutable rules of our business. Toward that end, the college has adopted strict standards that are enforced **without exception**. They are:

- **Accuracy** is the most important aspect of journalism, which is why a single factual error -- including something as simple as a wrong age or a misspelled proper name, even if it is only a typo -- will result in an F for the assignment. No exceptions.
- **Deadlines** are tight and unbending in a real-life newsroom, and they will be tight and unbending in our classroom. In-class assignments must be on my desk promptly at the designated time and out-of-class assignments must be on my desk promptly at the beginning of class (2 p.m.). Assignments that are turned in late -- and one minute late is late -- will receive an automatic F. No exceptions.
- **Basic math** is a skill required of every reporter, which is why the college requires that all students pass a 20-question test covering basic arithmetic, rounding and percent change. Students who get one or more questions wrong will fail the test, just as one error in an otherwise correct story would color the entire story. Students may repeat the test up to six times: Any student who fails to pass the test on the sixth try will receive an F for the course.
- **Plagiarism and fabrication** are the worst sins you can commit. They are firing offenses in the real world, and we will apply the academic equivalent in class: Plagiarism, fabrication and cheating in any course in this college will result in **an F for the course and the student will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs with a recommendation for expulsion.**

COURSEWORK:

Students in this class are required to get 10 published clips, separate from their classroom work. Additionally, there will be five types of assignments, plus a final examination for this course. All writing assignments for this class must be typed and double-spaced. Submit paper copies of all assignments. Electronic copies (diskettes or e-mail) will not be accepted in lieu of paper copies.

- In-Class Assignments. These will include about 20 stories reported and written on deadline in class. The lowest three grades will be dropped.
- Outside Writing Assignments. There will be about 10 outside reporting and writing assignments. The lowest single grade will be dropped.
- Daily News Quiz. There will be a daily news quiz, of two to 10 questions, drawn from the headlines of the day. The news quiz will be given at the beginning of most class sessions.
- AP Style Quizzes. There will be about 10 take-home, open-book quizzes. None will drop.
- The Math Test, which is discussed in "Course Standards" under basic math.
- Final. The final will be a single news story written in class, on deadline.

This is a skills course. You will be writing -- and getting a grade -- almost every day. Clearly, absences will affect your grade. While there is no mandatory attendance policy at the University of Maryland, the university's Academic Requirements and Regulations policy notes that "in some courses, attendance and in-class participation are ongoing requirements and an integral part of the work of the course." JOUR501 is such a course. In accordance with the college's policy, there will be no excused absences or lateness for any reason. The dropped-grade policy described above is designed to account for any assignments missed due to illness or emergency. Additionally, it is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor, at the beginning of the semester, of any religious holidays that conflict with the class schedule.

Publication Requirement: Each student will be required to submit a minimum of 10 news stories or news features (sporting events, movie reviews, commentary and the like do not count) that

were published between Aug. 30 and Dec. 11, the last day of class. Stories published before the start of the semester, or that you turned in during the semester but were held for publication until after Dec. 11 will not count. Stories must be printed in news publications. Submissions from internal (public relations) magazines, newspapers, newsletters or Web sites will not be accepted. Please consult the instructor if you have questions about whether a specific publication would qualify.

Your final grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each story short of the required 10 clips. Any news story beyond the required 10 that is published by Dec. 11 will bring your final grade up by 1 percentage point. Up to three published stories may be submitted for **extra credit**. Please note: you cannot count on a newspaper to publish your story on a particular day or week. That is why it is critical that you develop a relationship with a newspaper **immediately** -- by early next week. In addition to the five-day-a-week campus newspaper, The Diamondback, there are opportunities at a range of other area newspapers, from weeklies to dailies.

GRADING:

As noted above, stories that are late, have errors of fact or contain libelous language will earn an automatic F. Plagiarism, fabrication and cheating will result in **an F for the course and a referral to the Office of Judicial Affairs with a recommendation for expulsion.**

Stories that are not guilty of any of those journalistic sins will be graded on following criteria: news sense, clarity, construction, completeness, spelling, grammar and AP style. An "A" is a story that could be published in a major metropolitan newspaper with little or no editing. A "B" is a story that could be published in a major metropolitan newspaper with some editing. A "C" could be published in a major metropolitan newspaper with significant editing. A "D" would be a story that could only be published in a major metropolitan newspaper with a rewrite. An "F" is a story that could not be rewritten into a useable form, is lacking in critical information or had one of the journalistic "sins" listed above.

Your final grade will be based 45 percent on in-class assignments, 40 percent on out-of-class assignments, 10 percent on news and style quizzes, and 5 percent on the final.

Students with disabilities: Students with a specific disability (permanent or temporary, physical or learning) needing special accommodation during the semester should make an appointment to meet with the instructor.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Along with certain rights, students also have the responsibility to behave honorably in an academic environment. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty and plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Adhering to a high ethical standard is of special importance in the world of journalism, where reliability and credibility are the cornerstones of the field. Therefore, the college has adopted a "zero tolerance" policy on academic dishonesty.

Any abridgment of the university's academic integrity standards in a College of Journalism course will be referred directly to the dean. The dean will send all confirmed cases to the university's Office of Judicial Affairs with a recommendation of expulsion from the university for any violation of the code. To ensure this is understood, all students will be required to sign an academic integrity pledge at the beginning of the semester that will cover all assignments in the course.

THE SCHEDULE:

(The instructor reserves the right to modify the schedule to better meet the needs of the class.)

Aug. 30: Intro, overview of class.

- Sept. 4:** Labor Day. No class.
- Sept. 6:** What is news? How is it presented? (Students should have read Rich, Chapters 2 and 4, and the appendix before class.) *In-class: Profile (not graded.)*
- Sept. 11:** Finding and constructing the basic news story. (Students should have read Rich, Chapter 1 and pp. 35-45) *In-class #1, Fable.*
- Sept. 13:** Obits. Just 'cause they're dead doesn't mean they can't hurt you. (Rich, Chapter 19; handouts, assigned Web readings) *In-class #2, Obit.*
- Sept. 18:** Finding the facts; Lexis-Nexis overview. *In-class #3, Obit.*
- Sept. 20:** Working the Web (Read Callahan, pages 3-8 and chapters 4 and 5; Rich, Chapter 6) *In-class #4, Obit.*
- Sept. 25:** Math review and first math test. FIRST OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Sept. 27:** Working the Web (Read Callahan, pages 3-8 and chapters 4 and 5; Rich, pages 99-113)
- Oct. 2:** The all-important lead. (Read Rich, Chapter 9) *In-class #5, Leads.*
- Oct. 4:** Accidents and disasters. (Rich, Chapter 23) *In-class #6, Accident.* SECOND OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Oct. 9:** More accidents and disasters. (Handouts, Web readings)
- Oct. 11:** Guest speaker. *In-class #7, Accident.* THIRD OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Oct. 16:** Cops and criminals. (Rich, pp. 425-439) *In-class #8, Crime.*
- Oct. 18:** Courts and criminals. (Rich, pp. 439-455) *In-class #9, Crime.* FOURTH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Oct. 23:** Crime and the crime you shouldn't commit -- libel. (Rich, Chapter 15) *In-class #10, Crime.*
- Oct. 25:** Talking heads (Rich, Chapter 20); Focusing your story. (Rich, Chapters 8, 10 and 11) *In-class #11, Speech/News conference.*
- Oct. 30:** Individual discussions of midterm grades. *In-class #12, Speech/News conference.* FIFTH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Nov. 1:** More talking heads and spinmeisters. (Read handouts on FOIA and surveys.) *In-class #13, Speech/News Conference.* SIXTH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Nov. 6:** Covering officialdom. (Rich, Chapter 21) *In-class #14, Meeting.*
- Nov. 8:** Lies, damn lies and statistics. (Read handouts on polls, statistics) *In-class #15, Meeting.* SEVENTH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Nov. 13:** But that's what they told me! How to deal with liars, hoaxers, cads and other typical sources. (Callahan, chapters 3 and 7; Rich, pages 91-100). *In-class #16, TBA.*
- Nov. 15:** Do ask, do tell. Interviewing people you don't know when you don't want to. (Rich, Chapter 7) *In-class #17, TBA.*
- Nov. 20:** EIGHTH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Nov. 22:** Can I say that? Sources, quotes, attribution and plagiarism. (Rich, pages 45-56) *In-class #18, TBA.*
- Nov. 27:** Right and wrong. (Rich, Chapter 16) *In-class, #19, TBA.*
- Nov. 29:** Avoiding dumb blondes and troubled inner-city youth. (Rich, Chapter 17) *In-class #20, TBA.* NINTH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Dec. 4:** What have I gotten myself into? Discussion of careers in journalism. (Rich, Chapter 26)
- Dec. 6:** Wrap-up. Final assignment. 10TH OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT DUE.
- Dec 11:** Final exam.

As a student in the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, I understand that I must adhere strictly to the academic integrity policies of the University of Maryland. Specifically, I understand that ALL assignments – whether in or out of class – must be done without any help or collaboration with other sources, including classmates, unless otherwise stated by the professor for a specific assignment. I further understand that any unauthorized help or collaboration will be considered a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity of the university, and the dean will send all confirmed cases to the Office of Judicial Affairs with a recommendation of expulsion from the university.

By signing this document, I am testifying that I have read in full both the University Code of Academic Integrity and this document, understand the policies and vow to adhere to them.

Student Signature

Date