

Loyola University Chicago

COMM 205

24W (3158)

Reporting and Writing Across Platforms

FALL 2015

Wednesday, 7 - 9:30 P.M.

School of Communications, Room 003

Frank Main, instructor

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### Course description

Welcome to Reporting and Writing! This course will introduce you to the skills necessary to function in a professional newsroom. You will attend simulated press conferences, write on deadline and learn to create stories for print, broadcast and the Internet. Students will be expected to read the assigned materials and provide a brief summary of each reading at the beginning of the next class. Lectures will describe how those readings apply to the real world of professional journalism. You will learn the fundamentals of interviewing, fact checking and choosing the best descriptive material for a story. You will also learn the importance of ethics and the laws concerning libel and slander, and how to avoid those mistakes. Students will be required to meet strict deadlines, keep informed on the past week's news and use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation in every assignment. Students are advised to closely read the section on plagiarism in this syllabus. There will be no tolerance for plagiarism. **This course is writing intensive. Students will write in a computer lab and will also have outside writing assignments. No assignment will be longer than 400 words.**

**Required materials:**

*Inside Reporting* by Tim Harrower, third edition.

*Associated Press Stylebook*.

**Grading:**

You will take quizzes on your basic knowledge of AP Style – which is the spelling, grammar and punctuation used in newsrooms. You are expected to apply this style to your writing assignments.

You will produce a 75-word analysis of the readings in *Harrower*. I expect to see thoughtful reaction to the readings. What surprises you? What do you find relevant to your own life? I don't want to read an elementary summary that simply skims the highlights of the material.

You also are expected to keep abreast of the news. Read the *Chicago Tribune* or *Chicago Sun-Times* for local news and the *New York Times* or *USA Today* for national news. Our classroom discussions will often touch on the news of the moment.

Students are expected to act in a professional way as if this were a job. That means attending class regularly, arriving on time, being prepared for class and participating in lectures. Surfing the web or checking your email and Facebook accounts won't get you very far in this class.

Tardiness is a factor in determining your final grade. If you expect to be absent or late, please call or email me – just like you would your editor.

**The grading criteria for written work:**

**A:** Publishable work with no spelling, grammatical, punctuation or AP Style errors. The work must be well organized and display the “five Ws” of news writing. Multiple sources and proper attribution are important.

**B:** Minimal spelling, grammatical, punctuation and AP Style errors; minimal missing information and source information; and minimal problems with the ‘lede’ (the first paragraph) and organization.

**C:** Notable number of the above errors.

**D:** Significant problems with the story.

**F:** Misspelled proper names; other major spelling, grammatical, punctuation and AP Style errors; an almost total lack of information and sources; and severe problems with the lede and organization.

**Total possible points for the semester: 1,000**

**In-class deadline writing assignments, total points: 120**

**In-class quizzes on AP Style, total points: 30**

- Three quizzes, maximum 10 points each

**Outside assignments, total points: 850**

- Brief summaries of six readings from *Inside Reporting*, maximum of 20 points per assignment: 120 points
- Five ledes: 80 points (due week three)
- AP Style newspaper analysis: 10 points (due week three)
- Man on the Street story: 100 points (due week five)
- Event story: 100 points (due week six)
- Courthouse story: 100 points (due week 10)
- Broadcast news story: 100 points (due week 11)
- Guest speaker profile: 40 points (due week 12)
- Final project: 200 points (due week 14)

**Format:**

Please submit hard copies of assignments and homework in Times New Roman, 12 point, double spaced in paragraph form with name, date, name of assignment and word count in the top right corner.

**Deadlines:**

Late assignments will drop one letter grade each day they are filed past deadline. No in-class work may be completed out of class due to an absence unless the instructor excuses the absence.

I expect you to print out your assignments and turn them in to me before class. Remember to follow the format above. This is how I grade, with comments handwritten on your printed assignment.

ALSO, please email me your assignment so that I have an electronic record of it (unless it's physically impossible to email your assignment, such as homework that requires you to circle information in newspaper stories).

**Rewrites:**

If a student receives a grade of 73 or less, she or he may rewrite the following outside assignments: Man on the Street story; event story; courthouse story or broadcast news story. You will have one week to submit the rewrite. The average of the two scores – the original and the rewrite – will be used to calculate the final grade for the 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

### **WRITING HELP:**

For additional help, please visit the writing center: <http://www.luc.edu/writing/home/> if needed. Be aware that journalism is a distinctive type of writing, so some of your issues may not be addressed by the writing center, which can help you with basic English and sentence construction. See me after class if you have a particular question about structuring a news story.

### **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:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled exam without the consent of the teacher.
- Providing information to another student during an exam.
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an exam.
- Using any material or equipment during an exam without the consent of the instructor, or in a manner that is not authorized by the instructor.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the stealing of ideas, language, work or intellectual property of another, either by intent or 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 thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of **specific** words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources. One example: lifting an entire passage from Wikipedia and using it as one's own.

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 neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description is 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, even in different semesters.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor assigning an F to the assignment or exam. The instructor may impose a more severe penalty such as a grade of F for 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's academic integrity policy is at <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>

### **The Class Schedule (subject to change):**

**WEEK 1, JAN. 20: Course overview; what does a journalist do?** What is news and what is the structure of a news story? In-class exercises. **HOMEWORK:** Read IR chapters 1, 2 and 3. Prepare a 100-word summary of the readings. Just give me the thing you found most interesting from the readings, succinctly. This doesn't have to read like a news story. Due before class on WEEK 2. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.**

**WEEK 2, FEB. 3: Using the *Associated Press Stylebook*.** IN CLASS-EXERCISE: AP writing and writing ledes. **HOMEWORK:** Read *Associated Press Stylebook*, A-D. Buy a *Chicago Tribune* or *Chicago Sun-Times*, read the stories in the front news section and circle examples of AP style, focusing on AP Style A-D. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 10.** **HOMEWORK 2:** Watch a few TV news broadcasts, take notes and write five newspaper ledes. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 80.**

**WEEK 3, FEB. 10: The first 5 'grafs': going into detail about the structure of a news story.** IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Write a story with five paragraphs. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** Quiz: AP Style, A-D. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 10.** **HOMEWORK:** Read *Associated Press Stylebook*, E-M.

**WEEK 4, FEB. 17: Interviews: how to do them.** IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Write a story after interviewing a classmate. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** QUIZ: AP Style, E-M. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 10.** **HOMEWORK 1:** Read IR chapters 4 and 5. Prepare a 100-word summary of the reading. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** **HOMEWORK 2:** Man on the Street story. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.**

**WEEK 5, FEB. 24: Covering fires, crimes and accidents.** IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Write a fire story and a crime story, both due at the end of class. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20 (10 each).** **HOMEWORK 1:** Read IR chapter 6. Prepare a 100-word summary. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** **HOMEWORK 2:** Event news story. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.** Also, read *Associated Press Stylebook T-Z*.

**WEEK 6, MARCH 2: Chicago Sun-Times field trip.** A look at how a daily newspaper works.

**SPRING BREAK, MARCH 9**

**WEEK 7, MARCH 16: Beyond breaking news: what are the different types of stories in journalism?** How does a profile, opinion and sports story work? **IN-CLASS EXERCISE:** write a sports story, due at the end of class. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** **QUIZ:** AP Style T-Z. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 10.** **HOMEWORK:** Read IR Chapter 7 and prepare a 100-word summary. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.**

**WEEK 8, MARCH 23: Law and ethics: don't get sued, fired or both.** Discussion – libel. **Press releases:** What is public relations? We'll review real-life examples of press releases and media kits. **IN-CLASS EXERCISE:** write a story from a press release. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** **HOMEWORK:** read IR chapter 8 and prepare a 100-word summary. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.**

**WEEK 9, MARCH 30: Investigative reporting: How to use documents in a story.** We will learn how to use the federal court's PACER document system and how to navigate the system for documents useful in telling a story. **IN-CLASS EXERCISE:** finding and reading the criminal complaint and telling a story from it. **HOMEWORK:** Go to the federal courthouse at Adams and Dearborn in Chicago, go through security, locate the clerk's office, and use the PACER system to find your assigned case. Read the complaint and learn whether there is a disposition in the case such as a sentence or a not-guilty verdict. Take notes and write a 400-word story based on the information. Remember the courthouse closes at 5. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.** **HOMEWORK 2:** Read IR chapters 9 and 10 and prepare a 100-word summary. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.**

**WEEK 10, APRIL 6: Broadcast journalism.** **IN-CLASS EXERCISE:** write a broadcast radio script based on a news event. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.** **HOMEWORK:** create a broadcast story, including a one-minute digitally recorded broadcast and a script. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.**

**WEEK 11, APRIL 13: Guest speaker from a local news outlet or public relations firm,** TBD. **HOMEWORK:** Write a 150-word story on the speech, including descriptive information about the speaker and using at least two quotes. **POSSIBLE POINTS: 40.**

**WEEK 12, APRIL 20: Final project – a profile of a neighborhood.** We'll look at a neighborhood map and select a neighborhood for each student to profile. We want to

avoid overlap. This project will entail at least one walking tour through a neighborhood to gain descriptions and conduct man on the street interviews to learn about the conditions in the neighborhood. We'll discuss the types of sources to interview about the changing history and demographics of the neighborhood, such as crime, population and ethnicity. **HOMEWORK:** Begin your reporting; keep a progress sheet documenting your work and your goals; keep a source list with names and phone numbers. Try to conduct your interviews with video camera, such as a smart phone.

**WEEK 13, APRIL 27: Discussion of final project** – You will have one-on-one consultations with me on the direction your assignment is heading while you continue to do your research in class.

**WEEK 14, MAY 4: Final project due, 400 words. Also due, a one-minute radio story to be emailed to me. POSSIBLE GRADE: 200 points. Prepare to deliver a 3-4 minute oral report on your work, including your findings and what you went through to get the story.**