



JOUR 207: Reporting and Writing I

3 Units

Fall 2019 – Mondays – 2-4:30 p.m.

Section: 21095D

Location: ANN 307

Instructor: Alan Mittelstaedt

Office: Media Center

Office Hours: By appointment

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I. Course Description

Welcome to JOUR 207, Reporting & Writing I. The goals of this course are to sharpen your writing, reporting, and critical thinking skills, as well as teach you about news values, ethics, copy editing, interviewing, fact-checking, and how to accurately report and write about a diverse world on deadline.

This course will introduce you to the step-by-step process of producing news content, from understanding the concept of news judgment – when an event is news and why – to the research, reporting, writing and dissemination of news in a 21st century news ecosystem.

We believe students should begin by learning what makes a story newsworthy and what elements should be included in basic news stories. From there we'll move to the acquisition of basic news skills, including the writing of tweets, leads, briefs, shorter stories and the basics of interviewing, reporting/researching and fact-checking through a variety of assignments.

All students will complete online self-directed learning modules on Associated Press style and Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation. You will learn how to copy edit the work of others and your own work. Finally, part of your training in this introductory newswriting and reporting course includes professionalism through a thorough review and discussion of the journalism industry's code of ethics.

You are expected to come to class on time, prepared (i.e., having done your readings and homework assignments), and be ready to discuss various news-related topics. If you're not already a newshound, it is strongly suggested that you become one. A good journalist knows what's happening in their city, state, country and around the world.

All homework assignments should be uploaded to Blackboard in a Word doc by deadline. Assignments will generally be due 24 hours before class, and will generally be returned with feedback from your instructor within a week. Please review this feedback and incorporate the recommendations in future assignments.

Every student is also required to schedule a one-on-one meeting with their instructor sometime during the semester, ideally around week seven or eight. You're all welcome to meet with the instructor more often, of course. Each student is encouraged to meet at least once with the writing coach this semester.

By the end of this course, you will understand what makes an event newsworthy - worth covering - and have the capability to produce accurate, well-written, well-sourced news stories on deadline for print, web and social media platforms.

This course teaches you to report and write hard and breaking news about topics including crime, courts and local government. The course that follows, JOUR 307, will build on the skills learned in JOUR 207 and expand into other kinds of stories such as profiles, features and longer enterprise stories.

In-class writing assignments will be complete/incomplete. If you miss class, you cannot make up an in-class assignment.

Please note: Do not interview friends and family members for stories. You should not misrepresent yourselves when seeking an interview (i.e., telling a source you are writing for The Daily Trojan or the Annenberg Media Center unless you are doing so). No single-source stories allowed unless specified in an assignment.

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

By the end of this course students will be able to:

Write a hard news story on deadline with multiple sources, effective quotes, and a compelling lead, using clear and concise language and correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and AP Style.

Conduct research and verify information using diverse primary and secondary sources.

Identify newsworthy elements for tweets, leads and news stories

Demonstrate knowledge of ethical issues that face journalists today and apply professional standards of journalism to ethical situations.

The learning objectives will be measured by:

Tweets

News quizzes

News leads

News briefs / homework assignments

News stories, including final 500 to 750-word story written on deadline

Completion of AP Modules on Blackboard

Completion of GSP Modules on Blackboard

A midterm that includes grammar, spelling, punctuation, style and AP questions, questions about news ethics, and writing.

Student-led team discussions about ethics

Media critiques of stories from professional media outlets

Concurrent enrollment: JOUR 206

III. Course Notes

Additional Policies

1. All readings assigned for that day should be completed *before* each class.
2. Homework needs to be posted on Blackboard in a Word doc at least 24 hours before the next class, or the deadline assigned by your instructor.
3. Always save all assignments and handouts. Keep them organized and bring them to class.
4. Read and RE-READ all handouts. You will write better.
5. Students may rewrite **one** assignment that received a low grade. The rewritten assignment will be graded at the discretion of your instructor. Instructors will return your graded assignments on a timely basis with comments and suggested corrections. If you don't understand a comment or correction, or you disagree, see your instructor.

6. There will be timed assignments that can **only** be completed in class. Make-up assignments for the in-class work will **not** be possible. You cannot be late on a story and you should not be late to class. There will also be periodic news quizzes in class. These cannot be made up and will be given at the beginning of class. *Please alert your instructor if you're going to be late or miss a class for personal emergencies or illness.*

7. Accuracy is the number one priority. Your reputation as a journalist and the reputation of the news organization you work for hangs in the balance. Is the information accurate, is the grammar correct, are the names spelled correctly? Have you identified the sources of your report? Is the writing clear and concise? Have you written a lead that will grab the viewers' attention? Is the style and tone appropriate for the report?

8. In addition to being ethical in developing and writing your stories, it is important that you also consider diversity. When looking at your work, you should consider who is involved and how it will impact others. Is your work fair and does it represent all stakeholders in a balanced manner? This class will help you learn how to write in a manner that includes diverse viewpoints. The class will discuss socioeconomic/class, race/ethnicity, religion, gender/sexual orientation, geography and generations in the context of current events and journalism.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

Tweets

News leads.

News briefs/assignments: You will write news briefs and short assignments as assigned by the instructor

News stories: You will research, report, write and update news stories assigned by your instructor.

AP/GSP modules on Blackboard. These self-paced modules must be completed before the midterm.

Ethics Discussions. Students will be paired up and assigned a specific journalistic ethical question to research. In class, students will be responsible for leading a class discussion. (How to lead a class discussion and what is expected will be discussed in class, and an outline uploaded to Bb).

Media critiques. Each week, a student will present a story from a news outlet to share with the class and discuss key questions about its production and merit. (How to lead a critique and what is expected will be discussed in class, and an outline uploaded to Bb.)

Midterm. At the midpoint of the semester, you will be tested on grammar, spelling, punctuation, AP Style, ethics and writing.

Final. You will report and write a 750-word story on deadline. You gather information in advance and then finish the story during the final exam period after listening to a guest speaker.

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignments will be graded on accuracy, grammar, spelling, AP style, clarity, deadlines, conciseness, structure, proper punctuation, quality of interviews/reporting and use of quotes, quality of sources, attribution, research, completeness, and newsworthiness.

You must abide by the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics (<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>), NPPA (<https://nppa.org/ethics>), SND (<http://www.snd.org>) and the RTNDA Code of Ethics (http://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics#.VTNMjItAwUU).

Assignments	% of Grade
(AP style, GSP modules. Must be completed by the midterm)	5%
In-Class Assignments (credit/no credit)	10%
Homework Assignments (first five)	10%
Homework Assignments (second five)	25%
Ethics Discussion (team assignment) and media critiques	10%
News Quizzes	5%
Midterm	15%
Final	20%
Total	100%

b. Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

All assignments will be judged first on accuracy and fairness. You will also be evaluated on your ability to highlight the most newsworthy aspects of a story; write active, concise copy; construct a compelling lead; incorporate diverse and appropriate sources; attribute information correctly; choose quotes that add interest and value; use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation; and adhere to word length requirements and AP style.

c. Grading Standards

“A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor copyediting (i.e., they would be published).

“B” stories require more than minor editing and have or spelling errors or one significant error of omission.

“C” stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors.

“D” stories require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted.

“F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both. **Any factual error, including misspelling a proper name, will also result in an automatic “F” on the assignment.** Accuracy is the first law of journalism. The following are some other circumstances that would warrant a grade of “F” and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Fabricating a story or making up quotes or information.
- Plagiarizing a script/article, part of a script/article or information from any source.
- Staging video or telling interview subjects what to say.
- Using video shot by someone else and presenting it as original work.
- Shooting video in one location and presenting it as another location.
- Using the camcorder to intentionally intimidate, provoke or incite a person or a group of people to elicit more “dramatic” video.
- Promising, paying or giving someone something in exchange for doing an interview either on or off camera.
- Missing a deadline.

d. Grading Timeline

Assignments will be returned within the week.

VI. Assignment Rubrics

Rubrics will be posted on Blackboard. You should check the rubric before you complete the assignment.

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.
- B. Assignments must be submitted on Blackboard in a Word document by the deadline specified by the instructor.

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Title: *Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism* (2012)

Author: Tim Harrower.

McGraw-Hill, 3rd edition, 2012

ISBN: 978-0073526171

“The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law,” edited by Darrell Christian, Sally Jacobsen and David Minthorn 2019 (Available June 11)

ISBN-10: 1541699890

ISBN-13: 978-1541699892

The following Diversity Stylebooks are on Bb:

National Center of Disability and Journalism: <http://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

LGBT Terminology: <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/>

NAJA Styleguide: <https://www.naja.com/resources/naja-ap-style-guide/>

NABJ Styleguide: <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>

AAJA Styleguide: <http://sjsujmc.com/MCOM285/alaban/2018/03/29/aajas-guide-to-covering-asian-america/>

Immigration Styleguide: https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/DTIW_update_JournalistStyleGuide4.pdf

Annenberg Media Guide to Thoughtful Language

NOTE: Please see additional reading links embedded in the syllabus.

As journalists, it is imperative you become a daily news consumer. Watch, read and check news sources every day. You must follow the news and be familiar with what is going on around the world, the country, California, and Los Angeles. You should read the LA Times and The New York Times EVERY DAY.

Develop a list of other news sources you check daily, sign up for newsletters and download apps from news organizations.

Follow at least three news organizations on Twitter and sign up for three push alerts. Watch at least one national and local newscast every day, and listen to NPR.

Add these news organizations (and others of your choice) on Instagram and watch their Stories:

The Guardian

CNN

The New York Times

Helpful websites:

BBC Social Media Academy: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/skills/social-media>

Media Shift: <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/>

Journalist's Toolbox: <http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/archive/mobile-journalism/>

NPPA: <https://nppa.org>

SPJ: <http://www.spj.org>

NPR training: <http://training.npr.org/category/social-media/>

NPR Social Media Code of Ethics: <http://ethics.npr.org/tag/social-media/>

Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [Annenberg Digital Lounge](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

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X. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/26/19 – 12/6/19)

Friday, September 13: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 13: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, September 17: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, October 11: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, October 11: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, November 15: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

XI. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1: Aug. 26 – Journalism – The Most Interesting Job in the World

Readings to be done before class starts:

Harrower Chapters 1, 7 and 8

Alan Rusbridger "Breaking News," Intro (on BB)

Introductions and more

- Why do you want to be a journalist?
- Review *syllabus*
- *AP and GSP Modules* – What are they? How do they work? Must be completed BEFORE the midterm
- What is *AP Style*? Why do we care?
- What about *journalism ethics*? Why ethics are more important today than ever.
- Students are assigned dates for ethics discussions. What are ethics discussions? How do they work? What's expected?
- Media critiques. Individual students *sign up* critiques. How do they work? What's expected?
- Plagiarism and other deadly sins

State of the news media. An industry in flux – what basics still hold?

Twitter - its many uses, from news gathering to disseminating news. They let your personality shine through, and some are for straight news reporting.

Newsworthiness

- What makes an event or a person *newsworthy*? How do you develop news judgment? There's a universal framework that still works for most publications, although media outlets vary in what they emphasize.

In-Class:

Students will watch a press conference and "live tweet" it (write all Tweets on a Word doc, then upload the entire doc to Bb). What's the most important information? Do we agree? Discuss the possibility of sending a "push alert" on the story.

Homework:

Watch another news event that has been uploaded to BB. Write at least five tweets about the event, and a push alert. Write all Tweets on a Word doc, then upload the entire doc to Bb. Due Sept. 2.

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Chapters 1, 7 and 8.

On Bb:

SPJ Code of Ethics at <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

ONA Code of Ethics at <http://journalists.org/?page=onamission>

<https://www.poynter.org/news/what-every-young-journalist-should-know-about-using-twitter>

<https://www.nyguild.org/front-page-details/basic-best-practices-for-journalists-on-twitter>

<https://www.poynter.org/news/twitter-dustups-are-reminder-journalists-you-are-what-you-tweet>

Week 2: Sept. 2 Labor Day – University Holiday – No Class

Week 3: Sept. 9 (From a Tweet to a Lead)

Ethics Discussion

Critique

Homework Review: Tweets

Tweets to Leads

Moving from tweets to *news leads* is different. Not difficult. Just different. Tweets let your personality shine through. Hard news leads are more formulaic, at least at first. But the formula works, especially on deadline for breaking and hard news. Once you understand news worthiness, or news judgment, writing leads and stories gets much easier.

News Judgment:

Review news judgment. How did you decide what facts to pull out of the press conference? What's most important?

News Leads: The 5 Ws and H - Who, what, when, where, why and how

As a new journalist, try to write basic news leads that are one sentence long and 35 words or shorter. Yes, news leads can be much longer and much more complex. But it's best to start with a clean, accurate and easy-to-read one-sentence lead.

At the very least, make sure your lead has emphasized the correct news element – it includes the what, who, when and where--and a source. If you can fit in the why and how, great. If not, save it for later.

In-Class:

Write several leads. The class will peer review and review together. What was the important part of each story?

Homework:

Write five leads. Due Week 3.

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Chapter 3, pp 36 – 47

Week 4: Sept. 16 – Supporting Your Lead, News Briefs, Quotes

Ethics Discussion - student-led

Critique session- student-led

Review leads

What comes after your lead? Supporting/additional paragraphs with information that supports your lead with facts, quotes, and attribution from sources. For longer stories, there's also the "nut graf," but we'll get to that later.

Don't forget the "why" and "how." Even if you mentioned it in the lead, these two items usually require more explanation.

News Briefs. While hard news updates come in many other formats (push alerts, live updates, tweets, etc.), you should understand how to write a news brief.

- News briefs can be roughly three paragraphs or more.
- Each paragraph can have more than one sentence, and there's no exact formula. Use your critical thinking skills to determine what your audience needs to know.
- Story structure is based on the traditional inverted pyramid, where the most pressing information goes at the top.

Copy editing and self-editing.

You must learn to review your own and others' material for AP style, grammar and spelling. You will often be publishing (including to social media and digital platforms) without the benefit of an editor. Your credibility depends on getting the basics correct.

In-class:

News Briefs. We'll write news briefs, then peer review and review together for style, grammar and spelling.

Homework:

News Briefs and tweets. Due Week 4.

Readings:

Text:

Harrower, Chapter 3, Pg. 41-50.

John Russial. "By dismantling its copy desk The New York Times is making a mistake that's been made before."
Wei Tchou, "The Revolution Will Not Be Proof Read."

Week 5: Sept. 23 – Diversity,

Ethics Discussion – student-led

Critique session – student-led

Review briefs

Fairness, Accuracy and Bias

Review SPJ code of ethics. What makes a story fair? What's the difference between "all sides" and complete and contextual?

Diversity

As reporters, you must be mindful to be inclusive when it comes to covering your community. You want to include a wide range of voices in your stories. We will use the Maynard Institute's Fault Lines approach – a method that analyzes the diversity of sources by generation, gender, class, race/ethnicity, geography and access to technology.

In-Class:

Diversity and Fault Lines

Analyze stories in class. What picture does the story paint about the subject, the community, the event? Who is the 'expert'?

Readings: Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

Elyssa Pachico, "The top three ethical challenges journalists will face in 2017," <https://ijnet.org/en/story/top-3-ethical-challenges-journalists-will-face-2017>

Michael Calderone, "Black Journalists push media to cover "hyper-racial" moment in politics," Politico.

Homework:

Using the "Fault Lines" guidelines, analyze a mainstream news story for its sources. Who is included? Is the information complete? Was it fair? Was it biased? Instructors: you can choose a story or let the students choose

You will be given a raw story to copy edit. You must correct all AP Style, grammar, spelling and punctuation errors. And you must point out any flaws in logic or reporting holes. Due Week 5.

Readings:

From Text:

CJR, "Decades of Failure." https://www.cjr.org/special_report/race-ethnicity-newsrooms-data.php

On Bb:

Self-Editing Tips for Journalists

<https://ijnet.org/en/resource/self-editing-tips-journalists>

Copyediting for Reporters: How to Get the Basics Right

<https://journalistsresource.org/tip-sheets/style/copyediting-for-reporters>

Diversity Toolbox – Fault Lines
<https://www.spj.org/dtb2.asp>

Week 6: Sept. 30 – Reporting Basics and Interviewing, from the initial “ask” to the follow-up

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review homework

Interviewing Basics

- Be prepared by researching the web for published reports, any relevant studies/reports, websites/blogs that dive into the subject.
- Different interviewing techniques
- Taking notes
- Quotes – when and where to put them
- Open/closed questions
- Observation and listening

In-Class:

Review stories with excellent interviews.

Role-play in pairs an “ask” for an interview.

Write an e-mail request for an interview to fulfill your homework this week. How can you find someone to interview? How can you persuade them to say yes, on your timeframe?

Homework:

Send an email to a local reporter from any news outlet, asking for a brief (15-minute) interview for this class. The topic – what do young journalists need to master to succeed in the world of journalism today? Write a story or a Q&A of no more than 500 words. It should include a brief background on the reporter. Include a tweet. Due Week 7. **Yes, this is a single source story. Don’t get used to it.**

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Chapter 2 and Pgs. 68-85.

Farei Chideya, “One question that turns courageous journalists into cowards,”

<https://www.cjr.org/watchdog/political-coverage-diversity.php>

Week 7: Oct. 7 – Writing short news stories

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review homework

Briefs to Short Stories

Moving from a three-paragraph news brief to a 300- to 500-word story is not that much of a leap. The key is organization. It involves expanding on and supporting the 5 W’s and H with data and quotes.

We will review updates to stories, and how they are done in real time.

Sources

Where does news come from? A variety of sources - events, press conferences, newsmakers and breaking news, those unexpected events that you must cover.

To produce a fully reported story, journalists must:

- Find sources. You must spend whatever time you have to find sources, primary and secondary; as well as real people who are affected by the news.
- You can find sources when you research the web for published reports, any relevant studies/reports, websites/blogs that dive into the subject.
- When do you need to include the “other side” and when is it “false frequency” or “all-sides-ism.”

Attribution

- Use attribution – in this age of fake news, transparency is even more essential for journalists. You must let your reader/audience know where you got your information.
- On/Off the Record pg. 81 Harrower
- Anonymous Sources
- Go beyond a name; give more information.

Covering scheduled events. Reporters need to conduct background research on the speech or event, and know why it is happening at this time. Reporters also must convey what happened accurately, fairly and in an interesting manner and use their powers of direct observation. Learn to observe. Instructors: feel free to assign an observational exercise where students go out and observe an event/something and return with written observations.

Story structure. How do you start? How do you include your sources? How do you find the “killer quote?” How do you include other details, such as what you observed?

In-Class:

You will write a short news story on deadline.

Homework:

You will write a short (300-500 words) news story about an event and/or speech happening on campus or elsewhere. It must include direct observation of the event, reaction from participants, and contain a minimum of three distinct sources. Think about a compelling lead, good quotes and clarity. Include a tweet. Due Week 8.

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Pgs. 50-64.

Week 8: Oct. 14 – Midterm Review

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review news stories

Review for midterm – AP Style, GSP, Ethics, Fault Lines, basics of reporting, interviewing and writing.

Homework:

Review your edited work so far; review AP and GSP, review ethics notes. **You must meet with your instructor BEFORE the end of week 9**

Week 9: Oct. 21 – Midterm

Week 10: Oct. 28

Accountability journalism

Review midterm

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

A journalist's job is to keep public officials accountable by reporting to the public.

But how do you know where to start? In Los Angeles, there are a dizzying array of municipalities, officials and agencies. You need to know how to distinguish who's who and how to get information from them. What does local government do (cops, fire, roads), and where does it get the money to do it? Reports cover the actions of municipal agencies and departments and the interplay of citizens, interest groups and local governments in making policy. Some of these stories include budgets, taxes, bond issues, politics, zoning and planning, and education. Reporters are watchdogs, making sure city agencies and departments are carrying out their responsibilities efficiently, effectively and economically.

In class: Review structures of local agencies in Los Angeles. Who's who and why does it matter? What's in a city budget and how do you find it?

Discuss covering government meetings. Covering meetings and news conferences are similar to covering speeches. The major differences are that meetings and news conferences often have *several* speakers instead of *one* speaker, which adds to the level of complexity. In addition, several different, but related, topics may be covered. It is the job of the reporter to use his/her critical thinking and news judgment skills to choose the most noteworthy to feature in the lead and story.

In-class: Find a local off-campus meeting you can attend to complete your homework

Homework: Attend a community board, city council, education meeting, zoning board – and cover the proceedings. The instructor must approve in advance. You must obtain the agenda beforehand. You may go in pairs or teams, but you must each separately write a 500-word story and include a tweet. You need to make the reader understand what was newsworthy and important from the meeting– not just summarize what happened. Due in two weeks.

Week 11: Nov. 4 – Covering Crime

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review meeting stories

Crime and public safety are top concerns. Covering them accurately and not sensationalizing stories is key, however. So is avoiding stereotypes, keeping victims safe, treating suspects and minors fairly, and learning how to interview victims and witnesses of trauma in a sensitive manner. How do you report crimes in context?

In class:

Where do you get crime news?

Police reports- review actual police documents of arrests, the day log, etc.

Press releases

Review CNS log of stories - most are crimes, accidents or court cases

Review accurate, fair and non-biased language. Don't convict people or perpetuate stereotypes

In-Class

Find a crime-related press release, incident report and write a crime story. Instructors: You can use Harrower, check DPS or other logs.

Homework:

You should have contacted a local police, sheriff's or CHP station and requested a ride-along with an officer weeks ago. USC's DPS does not count. If you obtain one, your job is to talk to the officers during the ride-along about their job and how they see the press helping/hindering their job. If you do not obtain a ride-along, request an

interview with a press officer (the PIO) for the police, sheriff and CHP about the same topic. Find out how these offices generally work with the press. Write no more than 500 words and include a tweet. Due in two weeks.

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Pgs. 102-103

Elizabeth Sun, "The Dangerous Racialization of Crime in the U.S. News Media."

Week 12: Nov. 11 – Covering Courts

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review ride-along/interview exercise

After a suspect is charged, the court reporter takes over from the cop reporter. Learning about how civil and criminal courts work is imperative no matter what beat you cover, be it sports or celebrities or business. You also find stories about social justice gone wrong or inspiring stories of redemption. There are heartbreaking murder trials, important legal rulings and incredible human-interest stories.

How courts work, from misdemeanor to federal courts.

- Who are the key players
- Finding court documents
- What makes a court case worth covering
- Using accurate language

In-Class:

Searching for court cases. How do you find a case that is newsworthy? How do you find and interpret documents in a court case? How do you report them?

Homework:

You will sit in on a trial and write what you can. If it's an actual story, great. Otherwise, write about the experience – how you find out about the trial, where it was, who the judge was, who the prosecutors were, who the defendant was, what it was about. You may also do this in pairs but must write separate assignments. Include a tweet. Due Week 14.

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Pgs. 104-105. Tony Rodgers, "Reporting on the Courts," <https://www.thoughtco.com/reporting-on-the-courts-2073859>

From BB:

About California Courts

<http://www.courts.ca.gov/2113.htm>

Week 13: Nov. 18 – Law and the media

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review court story

Your rights and responsibilities as a reporter, First Amendment, basics for reporters. Possible guest speakers

Review final exam

The final exam will be a 500- to 750-word story written on deadline during the exam period. It will involve research into the topic ahead of time. You will then attend a live presentation by a speaker during the final exam period.

Your final story must include research and sources you contacted ahead of time as well as a lead and quotes from the speaker.

In-class: Exercises in various legal situations

Homework:

Last week's assignment is due next week. You will sit in on a trial and write what you can. If it's an actual story, great. Otherwise, write about the experience – how you find out about the trial, where it was, who the judge was, who the prosecutors were, who the defendant was, what it was about. You may also do this in pairs but must write separate assignments. Include a tweet. Due Week 14.

Homework: You should begin to research information for your final exam. The topic will be assigned by your instructor. You should identify potential interview subjects for the assigned topic and bring in at least four possible interviews as well as questions. Due week 15

Readings:

From Text:

Harrower, Pgs. 86-88; 110-111

Week 15: Nov. 25

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review court story

Breaking News. How to cover fire, earthquakes, accidents, and other breaking news stories. Where do you find information? Who do you reach out to? How do let the public know accurate, timely and sensitive information in chaotic or unclear situations? How can you use social media without getting inaccurate or bad information?

IN CLASS: Breaking news exercises.

Homework: Write a news story about the presidential debates. You must turn it in within four hours of the debate's end. You must attend and watch the debate in a public setting – a watch party, bar or other venue – with at least ten participants. These should not be your friends. Write a 300 – 500 word story summarizing the key points of the debate and reaction including quotes from at least three people you interviewed after the debate ended. You may include reaction from social media as well; you should also write a series of three tweets.

Week 15: Dec. 2 – Review, Rewrites, and Prepping for the Final

Ethics Discussion

Critique session

Review breaking news story

Course evaluations Discuss final exam. What sources will you interview ahead of time? Review sources you have already contacted. What additional research is needed?

Final Exam Period:

Class Final: Fri., Dec. 13, 2-4 p.m.

XII. Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

Please review the policies laid out above.

Communication

Communication is key. We only meet as a class once a week. Questions and concerns will arise during the week. Email, call or text me as issues come up. I'll usually respond to your emails within an hour or two. If I contact you, please get back to me within four hours.

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (<http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>).

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

"Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an 'F' on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators."

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenbergsuccessfund.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

XIII. About Your Instructor

Alan Mittelstaedt started as an adjunct instructor in 2003 and joined the full-time faculty in fall 2009 to help manage Annenberg Digital News, which produces Neon Tommy. For much of the previous decade, he was news editor at Los Angeles' alt-weeklies, including seven years at the L.A. Weekly, handling everything from 800-word stories exposing politician's screwups to 4,000-word investigative pieces. He's worked at mainstream newspapers. He was city editor at the Portland (Maine) Press Herald and at the Pasadena Star-News and was an investigative reporter and later an assistant city editor at the San Bernardino County Sun, where he was surprised to be named Employee of the Year even though he was outspoken and questioned many decisions of his Gannett bosses. When he was 15, he published his first article called "Deschooling Society: The Evils of Compulsory Education," and handed out 1,000 copies at his rural Virginia high school over the protests of his principal, who threatened to suspend him.