



**JOUR 510: Special Assignment Reporting:
Urban Affairs
2 Units**

Fall 2019 – Fridays – 10-11:50 a.m.

Section: 21695D

Location: ANN 408

Instructor: Alan Mittelstaedt

Office: Media center

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Info: alan.mittelstaedt@neontommy.com

(626) 372 2453

I. Course Description

This 15-week Specialized Reporting class in Urban Affairs allows students to spend the fall semester developing stories and sources in a particular topic area of their interest. You will complete a series of pieces in different media while working with your beat team and a dedicated faculty instructor.

The urban affairs beat offers nearly boundless journalistic opportunities to explore issues pertaining to life in Los Angeles. You can choose education, social ills, politics, crime, elections, misbehaving public officials, to name a few. You can focus on neighborhood issues or profile people who are triumphing over hard times or trying to solve problems in their community.

We anticipate that you will have to edit and rewrite your stories and that they will go through several drafts and multiple revisions. You may also have to go back and do more reporting. The goal will be for you to do professional work in a topic area in which you have gained expertise. You will also have the experience of working closely with editors and producers. Much of journalism involves teamwork, a back-and-forth process in the newsroom that results in accurate, authoritative and timely stories.

Throughout the semester, we will emphasize the basics of good journalism: ethics, interview techniques, point of view, critical practice, diversity of thought. We will also discuss how to find a story – and how to write that story.

For this course, your classroom will be much of Southern California. This class has an established meeting time, but your instructor will be in the media center throughout the week, Monday through Friday. Staying in touch as interviews and research develops is a key task of good reporting.

NOTE: Do not schedule work, internships or other classes during the designated time of the class meeting.

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

While engaged in this class and covering your chosen beat, it is expected that you will spend weeks, if not a whole semester, on your assignments. The point is for you to delve deeply into a subject area of your choice while honing story development, writing, and reporting skills. You will have the time and opportunity to educate yourself about the context and controversies of your topic area – as well as to gain an awareness of the history, public actors and uncertainties surrounding the key issues.

Familiarity with a beat’s subject matter will empower students to find archived information and reliable sources quickly. You will learn how to conduct knowledgeable interviews and discern who can be trusted to provide truthful, helpful information.

You will also gain the ability to stay current on your beat – how to manage your time and stay focused in a 24/7 news environment. Managing a beat well means journalists can produce specialized news on tight deadlines, as well as being able to plan and generate long-form projects efficiently. Working a beat enables reporters to dig out exclusive stories. It gives you the confidence to pitch innovative story ideas to editors and producers who may be generalists – and not likely to be as well grounded in a topic as you are. After completing this course, you will be able to use critical thinking and technical skills to tell compelling stories on multimedia platforms and will be capable of engaging interactively with the public through social media related to your beat.

This course does not have a final exam. Your performance will be assessed on the basis of your accumulated semester work. We do not expect you to produce professional stories from Day One. We are looking for rapid improvement, which you can achieve by working closely with your instructor and the relevant MC editors/producers who will be helping you to bring your journalism up to professional standards. Our expectation is that by the end of the semester, you will be contributing stories that require few changes.

The goal: professionalism. You can *do* the job. And put your own enviable and high-standard twist on it.

III. Description and Assessment of Assignments

The exact length and nature of the pieces for this course will be decided with your instructor. **You may do all your semester assignments on the same topic or area within your beat or you may do stories on a variety of subjects across the spectrum of your beat.**

NO FIRST DRAFTS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION, POSTING, OR BROADCAST. YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO DO MULTIPLE DRAFT, EDITS, CUTS, ETC., FOR THIS COURSE.

With that in mind, when it comes to video and audio pieces, no actual editing is allowed until you have script approval from your instructor.

It is possible that your instructor may not be 100 percent conversant in some forms of media (video, audio or digital for example). If that is the case, there are faculty coaches in the MC who are on call to help as you with your assignments.

A WORD ON FALL PROJECTS AND THE CAPSTONE PROJECT: Please bear in mind that a good beat story (or set of stories) can be the germ of your Fall Midterm or Final Project and could be the basis for your Spring Graduate Capstone Project. Consult your Fall Digital News Immersion instructor about your fall projects and, in the spring, talk to your Capstone instructors about stories you would like to build on.

IV. Grading

- a. **Students will complete one in-depth piece and three shorter stories as they work their chosen beat. All of these pieces still involve revisions and multiple drafts, but obviously the in-depth piece will require more reporting, more drafts and extensive rewriting sessions.**

| Assignment | % of Grade |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Class Participation, Research, Beat & Story Development | 5 |
| Pitches | 10 |
| Piece#1 (in-depth piece, digital platform using text, video, audio) | 40 |
| Piece#2, 3, 4 (one text, one video, one audio) | 45 (15% each) |
| 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 |

c. Grading Standards

All assignments will be edited on a professional basis and you will be judged first on the accuracy, fairness and objectivity of your stories. You will then be evaluated for broadcast style, editing, production value, originality and the ability to meet deadlines.

“A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor copyediting (i.e., they would be aired or published). Video work must also be shot and edited creatively, be well paced and include good sound bites and natural sound that add flavor, color or emotion to the story.

“B” stories require more than minor editing and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission. For video, there may be minor flaws in the composition of some shots or in the editing. Good use of available sound bites is required.

“C” stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors. Camera work and editing techniques in video stories are mediocre or unimaginative, but passable. Sound bites add little or no color - only information that could be better told in the reporter’s narration.

“D” stories require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted. Camera work is unsatisfactory or fails to show important elements.

“F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both. Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. Any misspelled or mispronounced proper noun will result in an automatic “F” on that assignment. Any factual error 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.

ATTENDANCE AT REQUIRED COURSE MEETINGS IN THE CLASSROOM OR THE MC IS MANDATORY. If illness or serious circumstances do prevent attendance, you must contact your instructor to discuss your absence.

d. Grading Timeline

Your story drafts will be edited and graded in a timely manner and returned to you no later than the following class meeting. In most cases, you'll receive edited drafts with comments within 24 hours since our goal is to see your work published.

V. 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 via Quip.

VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Numerous readings will be assigned as the class progresses. Current articles and commentary will be assigned throughout the 15 weeks of the course. We will work together to make this course, as much as possible, a paperless experience. Each student must have a USC Internet account for this class to facilitate the distribution of class materials and for communication between the instructors, students, and the MC.

VII. 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 Virtual Commons](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

VIII. 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

IX. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

This syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

| | Topics/Daily Activities | Readings and Homework | Deliverable/Due Dates |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Week 1 Date: 8/30 | What is beat reporting? The semester ahead: Review of syllabus and key assignments | Please read the syllabus before the first class. It will be posted on Blackboard. | |

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | How to find and pitch your first beat story | | |
| Week 2 Date: 9/6 | <p>Discuss student story ideas in class. BE PREPARED TO PITCH your favorite story to group</p> <p>Students “map the beat” and decide their approach to it. What does beat include (issues, players, coverage)? When did students pick it? What stories do they want to tell?</p> | <p>Readings will be posted on BB.</p> <p>Bring five general beat story ideas. Be prepared to pitch one of them to the class.</p> | <p>Begin researching first story pitch (following class reaction, etc.). Email draft pitch to instructor at least one day before next class.</p> |
| Week 3 Date: 9/13 | <p>REFINE submitted pitches in class.</p> <p>How to research the beat (online, social media, old-fashioned, in-person visits)</p> <p>How to work your beat with a multimedia mindset.</p> <p>How to decide what is the best way to tell a story: text, video, audio, digital</p> | <p>Readings will be posted on BB</p> <p>Draft pitches due to the instructors (cc both of us) at least one day before this class meeting!</p> | <p>Revise pitch, decide which medium you will use to report your story, and prepare to offer the pitch to MC editors, producers and faculty</p> |
| Week 4 Date: 9/20 | <p>The history of your beat and how it has changed in this election</p> <p>The growth of fact-checking sites</p> | <p>Readings will be posted on BB</p> <p>GROUP and one-on-one review of STORY DRAFTS begins this week</p> | |
| Week 5 Date: 9/27 | <p>Organizing and managing your time for beat reporting over long periods and day-of-air stories</p> <p>Time and resource management</p> | <p>Readings posted on BB</p> <p>Group and one-on-one review of story drafts</p> | |

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| | (plotting narrative structure in advance) | | |
| Week 6 Date: 10/4 | Various angles to your beat and how your stories should relate to your audience's concerns and everyday life | Readings posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 7 Date: 10/11 | Cultivating sources, protecting sources, how not to get "used" by sources. Navigating beat stories that prompt angry reactions – how not to be shut out when beat sources don't like your coverage INTERVIEW SKILLS | Readings posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 8 Date: 10/18 | | | Fall recess: Thursday, Oct. 17 and Friday, October 18 |
| Week 9 Date: 10/25 | Generating PROFILES on your beat | Readings posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 10 Date: 11/1 | Generating analysis and opinion (commentary) pieces through your beat | Readings posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 11 Date: 11/8 | Data journalism and your beat | Readings posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 12 Date: 11/15 | Developing your own beat or sub-beat: How to find ORIGINAL stories | Readings posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 13 Date: 11/22 | Getting community engaged in your beat coverage and story search process | Readings will be posted on BB | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Crowdsourcing beat stories | Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | |
| Week 14 Date: 11/29 | No class | | [Thanksgiving Break: Wednesday – Sunday, November 27-December 1 |
| Week 15 Date: 12/6 | The never-ending beat: from blogging/columns to social media to podcast/broadcast. The shift from “breaking news” to “owning the news 24/7” | Readings will be posted on BB Group and one-on-one review of story drafts | [Instructor: Please be sure to set aside time at the beginning of your final class meeting for students to submit their USC Course Evaluations.] |
| Final Exam Period Dec. 11, 9 a.m. | Summative Experience | | |

X. Policies and Procedures

Communication

You will have questions about your stories and reporting throughout the week. Don't wait until we meet in class to get them resolved. Send an email, a Quip notification and/or call me to get an answer or to set up a time to meet during the week. You'll hear back from me within six hours. You should also respond as fast to my queries.

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 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

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://annenberg.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.

XI. 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 politicians' screw-ups 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 this rural Virginia high school over the protests of his principal, who threatened to suspend him.