



JOUR 207: Reporting and Writing I **3 Units**

Fall 2021 – Tuesday – 9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Section: 21093D

Location: ANN 307

Instructor: Alan Mittelstaedt

Office: Media Center

Office Hours: By appointment

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Pronouns: he, him, his

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 on and write about a diverse world on deadline.

This course covers the basics of writing and reporting hard news stories, including courts and local government. Next semester you'll take JOUR 307, Reporting and Writing II, which will cover writing features, profiles and other formats, pitching and developing stories, and the basics of broadcast journalism.

By the end of this course, you will understand what makes an event newsworthy — worth covering — and know how to produce accurate, well-written, well-sourced news stories on deadline.

We'll also discuss the journalism industry's code of ethics, its role in a democratic society, and its current and past strengths and failings.

This introductory newswriting and reporting course takes on a special urgency given the fragile state of our democracy. A poll in June by Monmouth University found nearly one-third of Republican do not believe President Joe Biden legitimately won the election. The man he defeated incited a deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 in a plot to overturn the election. Voting rights remain under attack around the country, with key decisions looming at the U.S. Supreme Court. Such monumental challenges to our democracy make our role as journalists more crucial than ever.

To help set the stage for your journalism education in these uncharted times, you'll be asked to watch a [40-minute video](#) produced this summer by the New York Times that documents the Jan. 6 insurrection and events leading up to it. The assignment, emailed to you over the summer, will be reviewed during our first class.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Write a hard news story on deadline with multiple sources, effective quotes, and a compelling lead, using clear, active, and concise language and correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and AP Style.
- Identify newsworthy elements for tweets, leads and news stories.
- Conduct research and verify information using diverse primary and secondary sources.

- Create complete, relevant news stories that reflect our diverse society and prioritize accuracy, truth, transparency, context and inclusivity.
- Use language around race, ethnicity, ability, gender, age, sexuality and gender identity, and socioeconomic status with precision and in accordance with AP style in news stories.
- Evaluate current conflicts, controversies and issues in journalism.

Concurrent Enrollment: JOUR 206, Media Center Practicum. JOUR 207 students are also enrolled in JOUR 206, a weekly three-hour, 50-minute shift in the Annenberg Media newsroom based out of the Media Center. Every journalism undergraduate takes two semesters of JOUR 206, one in Live Production and one in Community Reporting, concurrent with JOUR 207 and JOUR 307. These can be taken in either sequence.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Your assignments are designed to help you develop as a writer, reporter and emerging journalist. They include tweets, news leads, news briefs and news stories as assigned by your instructor. They get more complex as the semester progresses, and are worth more as a percentage of your grade.

There's a midterm, which covers grammar, spelling, punctuation, AP style and writing. You'll complete self-paced modules before the midterm to help you master these skills.

For the final, you will report and write a 750-word story on deadline.

There will also be student-led ethics discussions. You'll work with a group on a presentation that explores a current controversy or issue in journalism, using assigned readings and additional research, and facilitate a class discussion about the topic. All students will respond to the discussion with in-class prompts that draw on assigned readings.

There is a participation grade in this class, which will reflect in-class assignments and your constructive feedback during classroom discussions, peer presentations and guest speakers.

You'll file your assignments in Quip, a file management program. You'll have your own Quip folder, which will be created by the first day of class. Assignments will be returned with feedback within a week. Review the comments and incorporate recommendations in future assignments.

Because this course is about developing your skills as a professional journalist, we're expecting you to interview sources outside of your friends and family. If there are good reasons to include them in your story, you should first review this with your instructor. Be careful not to misrepresent yourself when seeking an interview (i.e., telling a source you are writing for the Daily Trojan or the Annenberg Media Center if you are not actually doing so). Don't submit single source stories unless specified in an assignment.

Rubrics will be provided in advance for all stories.

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

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 helps you learn how to write in a manner

that includes diverse viewpoints. That means socioeconomic/class, race/ethnicity, religion, gender/sexual orientation, geography and generations in the context of current events and journalism.

Course Notes and Policies

Come to class on time, prepared (i.e. having done your readings and homework assignments), and ready to discuss various news-related topics.

We will use class time to learn actively, and ask that you make every effort to stay focused and attentive during class. There will be breaks when you can check your texts or email, so don't do so while class is active.

This class involves robust discussion, in-class assignments and peer review and editing. We can all learn from each other. It's Annenberg's intention to foster a culture of respect, which includes pronouncing your name correctly and using your chosen pronouns. Speak up if that's not happening. We will discuss class norms in more detail during the first class session. If you feel the classroom norms are not being followed by your instructors or classmates, you can use this [form](#) to provide anonymous feedback.

Feel free to reach out with questions about the assignments or general feedback about the class. The best way to reach me is on Slack, email or texting, and we can set up a meeting.

Be sure to turn your assignments in on time. We'll deduct points for missing deadlines, so reach out early and often if you're having trouble meeting those deadlines.

Required Readings, hardware/software, laptops and supplementary materials

Weekly reading assignments will be posted to Blackboard. These readings will be essential to group presentations, classroom discussions and exercises.

We'll expect you to use AP style in all of your assignments. All USC students have access to the AP stylebook via the USC library. (https://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=http://www.apstylebook.com/usc_edu/.)

Students will be graded on adherence to AP style in assignments, including when writing about race and ethnicity. The updated AP style guidelines include capitalizing Black and deleting the hyphen in terms such as Asian American.

The following style guides will be available on BB:

NLGJA Stylebook on LGBTQ Terminology: <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/>

Native American Journalists Association: <https://najanewsroom.com/reporting-guides/>

National Association of Black Journalists: <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>

Asian American Journalists Association: <https://aaja.org/2020/11/30/covering-asia-and-asian-americans/>

The Diversity Style Guide: <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com>

The NAHJ Cultural Competence Handbook: <https://nahj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NAHJ-Cultural-Competence-Handbook.pdf>

Transjournalist Style Guide: <https://transjournalists.org/style-guide/>

SPJ Diversity Toolbox: <https://www.spj.org/diversity.asp>

Annenberg also has its own style guide that students can access through the app Amy the Stylebot on the Annenberg Media Center's Slack workspace. Annenberg's style guide is being developed with input from students, and whether or not students use our guide, they can provide valuable input here: <http://bit.ly/annenbergediting>

In addition, Annenberg Media’s Guide for Equitable Reporting Strategies and Newsroom Style (<https://bit.ly/AnnMediaEquitableReportingGuide>) created by students, has detailed guidelines on thoughtful language and best practices for creating journalism respectful and reflective of a diverse world. Along with other useful resources, it can be found on Blackboard and is incorporated into Amy the Stylebot.

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Refer to the Annenberg Digital Lounge for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, visit USC’s Information Technology Services website.

Annenberg is committed to every student’s success. There are multiple resources available to assist students with issues that limit their ability to participate fully in class. Reach out to a professor and/or advisor if you need help connecting with these resources. They include the Annenberg Student Success Fund, 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, and other scholarships and awards.

News Consumption and Knowledge of Current Events

As journalists, you should keep up with what is happening on campus, in the Los Angeles area, in the United States and around the world. USC provides subscriptions for students, staff and faculty to The New York Times (<http://nytimesaccess.com/usc/>) and the Los Angeles Times (<https://my.usc.edu/los-angeles-times/>), as well as the Wall Street Journal (wsj.com/usc).

Through the USC library, you have access to many regional news outlets and a variety of publications that cover specific communities. You should be familiar with publications covering the many communities of Los Angeles such as The Los Angeles Sentinel, The Los Angeles Blade, The Los Angeles Wave, La Opinión, L.A.Taco, The Eastsider, The Armenian Weekly, High Country News, the Asian Journal and others.

You should keep up with the Daily Trojan and uscannenbergmedia.com, including USC student-led verticals Dímelo and Black., listen to NPR and news radio, watch local and national television news, subscribe to newsletters and push alerts from news organizations and follow them on social networks, including Twitter, Instagram and TikTok. You’re encouraged to sign up for Nieman Lab’s newsletter, which publishes brief, readable articles on important issues in the media. Following the news will sharpen your judgment and provide good (and bad) examples of the state of mainstream journalism.

Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
AP style and GSP: self-paced modules with reviews, including guide/discussion on using language around race with precision, the AP pre-test and GSP final.	5%
Participation (Includes in-class assignments, quiz, journal prompts and peer review)	10%
Homework assignments (first six weeks of semester)	15%
Homework assignments (remainder of the semester)	35%
Group presentation on ethics	10%

Assignment	% of Grade
Midterm	10%
Final	15%
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

Journalism

Our curriculum is structured to prepare students to be successful in a professional news organization with the highest standards. Students will be evaluated first on accuracy and completeness in their stories. Good journalism prioritizes transparency, context and inclusivity. All stories should be written in AP style unless Annenberg style conflicts, in which case students can follow Annenberg style as outlined in the Annenberg Guide to Equitable Reporting Strategies and Newsroom Style (<https://bit.ly/AnnMediaEquitableReportingGuide>).

The following standards apply to news assignments.

“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. Sources are varied, diverse and offer a complete perspective of the topic.

“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. Sources are mostly varied, diverse and offer a complete perspective of the topic.

“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. Sources are repetitive or incomplete.

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

“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.

For assignments other than conventional news reporting, quality of research and clarity of expression are the most important criteria. In research papers, good research should be presented through good writing, and good writing should be backed up by good research. Clarity of expression includes thoughtful organization of the material, insight into the subject matter and writing free from factual, grammatical and spelling errors. Research should draw on a diverse range of sources.

Students are encouraged to submit their work for consideration to Annenberg Media or the Daily Trojan, or pitch it to mainstream media outlets. Visit <http://bit.ly/SubmitAnnenbergMedia> for more information about that submission and review process and email Daily Trojan news editors at dt.city@gmail.com for more on how to pitch work to the campus newspaper.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/23/21 – 12/3/21)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20213/calendar/>

Friday, September 10: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 10: Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, September 10: Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

Tuesday, September 14: Last day to add or drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, October 8: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. Mark of “W” will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. [Drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, October 8: 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 12: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: *Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.*

Week 1

8/24

Introductions

- Review summer assignment on the Jan. 6 deadly attack on U.S. Capitol
- 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?
- 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. Some 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/Google doc, and 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, then upload the entire doc to Bb. Due Week 2.

Readings

Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*.

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

ONA Code of Ethics: <https://journalists.org/tools/social-newsgathering>

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

[Annenberg's guide to social media for instructors](#)

Week 2

8/31

Due: Tweets and push alert homework.

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:

Harrower, Chapter 3, pp 36 – 47 (on BB)

Alan Rusbridger, “Breaking News,” Intro (on BB)

Week 3

9/7

Due: Leads homework.

News briefs and verification

What comes after your lead? Supporting/additional paragraphs with information that supports your lead with facts, quotes, and attribution from sources.

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 5.

There will be two student-led presentations next week, one on objectivity and one on bias. All students will write an in-class response to these presentations that draws on the readings assigned for next week.

Readings

AP Style for Numbers

AP style rules to know now

AP Stylebook, A, B, C, D, E

Journalism as a discipline of verification.

Harrower, p 59 (checklist) and p 84 – 85 (attribution) on BB

Week 4

9/14

Objectivity and bias

As reporters you also must be mindful of being inclusive when it comes to coverage of your community and include a wide range of voices in your stories. We’ll discuss ways to approach the issue, including the Maynard Institute’s Fault Lines approach, to think about issues of generation, gender and sexual identity, class, race/ethnicity, geography and access to technology.

We’ll talk about fairness. What’s the difference between “all sides” and complete and contextual?

We also will discuss objectivity and how that idea has evolved over the years.

We'll discuss implicit bias and how that may impact journalism and newsrooms and the student-led Annenberg Media Guide to Equitable Reporting Strategies and Newsroom Style.

In class

There will be two student-led presentations this week, one on objectivity and one on bias and accuracy. All students will write an in-class response to these presentations that draws on the assigned readings.

Readings

[A Reckoning Over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists](#)

[Twitter response from Tom Rosenstiel](#)

[Annenberg Media's Guide for Equitable Reporting Strategies and Newsroom Style](#)

[How Implicit Bias Works in Journalism](#)

[White Audiences Who Will Pay is Still Metro Newspapers Survival Strategy](#)

[DIEA checklist for reporting.](#)

[Tools to Manage Bias](#)

Week 5

9/21

Due: News briefs.

Reporting basics and interviewing, from the initial "ask" to the follow-up

Review homework in class.

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.

Research possible subjects and 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:

Read [tips for requesting an interview](#) and send an email to a working journalist requesting a brief (15-minute) interview. Have a backup as well in case you do not get a response. The topic: What do young journalists need to master to succeed in the world of journalism today? What are the biggest challenges facing the industry? Write a story/Q&A of no more than 500 words. It should include a brief background on the reporter. Include a tweet. Due week 6. **Yes, this is a single source story. Don't get used to it.**

Be sure to review all of the readings assigned for next class. There will be a quiz on the law/ethics chapter.

Readings

AP Stylebook, F, G, H, I, J

[Good tips on interviewing](#)

Week 6

9/28

Due: Interview with a reporter

Reminder: Homework after this point is worth more.

Briefs to Short Stories, covering protests, media and the law

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.

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, (pp 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 is it 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.

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?

We'll also talk about your rights and responsibilities as a reporter, and First Amendment basics for reporters.

In-Class:

There will be a quiz on the law and ethics readings posted on Blackboard.

We'll review the answers from the quiz about media and law

Watch: [Think Like A Journalist](#)

We'll write a short news story on deadline together.

Homework:

You will write a short (300 - 500 words) news story about a protest, news 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 7.

Readings

AP Stylebook, K, L, M, N, O

[It's Time to Change the Way the Media Reports on Protests. Here are some Ideas.](#)

[Fact-checking yourself and organizing your reporting material](#)

Harrower, p. 81, on and off the record and anonymous sources, and law and ethics, p 140 – 156 (on BB)

LAT's Steve Padilla (USC alum and one-time Daily Trojan editor) thread on [quotes](#)

Week 7

10/5

Due: Event/protest story

Review for Midterm

For the midterm, we'll review the basics of writing a lede, a hard news story, writing conventions, AP Style and editing tips.

In-class:

Peer reviewed writing assignment
Group editing assignment

Homework

Complete all AP style modules and tests/quizzes on BB

Readings

AP stylebook P-Z

Week 8

10/12

Midterm

The midterm will include an editing assignment and writing assignments (ledes, a brief and a story from factsheets). You may use the AP Stylebook, Amy the Stylebot, and the dictionary for both.

Homework:

Schedule a one-on-one meeting with your instructor.

Week 9

10/19

One on one meetings with your instructor.

Week 10

10/26

Writing on deadline

Accuracy and verification

Writing on deadline is a necessary element for any reporter, whether you're writing for a newspaper, online or just about anywhere else. Increasingly, news needs to be immediate. Writing it quickly – and also accurately and informatively – is expected of you. Often, even what you write will be overcome by events and you will need to rewrite it – again and again – and quickly. There are some simple tricks to master this, and we'll go over them in class – planning ahead, writing b-matter, and topping the story when news requires it.

We will learn how to compile b-matter for your story and how to top it with a-matter on deadline.

In-class:

We talk more on how to find sources, especially in a hurry,
You will work with your instructor to identify an upcoming news event. In a group, you will work on writing b-matter and editing it together.

Homework

Your homework is to add your own coverage from the event you've identified to the b-matter your group wrote together for a 500 – 700 word story. Due Week 11.

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Readings

Guide to writing B matter from Annenberg adjunct professor Saba Hamedy (a CNN editor.)

The Hierarchy of Accuracy

LAT's Steve Padilla (USC alum and one-time Daily Trojan editor) thread on strong writing and writing advice

Optional

Padilla's writing tips seminar – one-hour audio

Week 11

11/2

Due: News event story

Accountability journalism -- covering local governments

Journalists keep government 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? Reporters 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. These are all things paid for by taxpayer dollars, and it is in the public interest to report on them.

In-Class:

Review the structure of local agencies in Los Angeles or other local cities. Who's who and why does it matter? What's in a city budget and how do you find it? Who are the council members and how did they get to power?

Discuss covering government meetings and government budgets, a key to understanding how a local government or agency conducts its business. It is the job of the reporter to use his/her critical thinking and news judgment skills to choose the most noteworthy information to feature in the lede and story. We'll review how to read an agenda and how to prepare for a meeting.

In class, we'll research and review how to find a local off-campus meeting you can attend to complete your homework.

Homework

Attend a community board, city council, county Board of Supervisors, Board of Education or other similar meeting and cover the proceedings. The instructor must approve your choice in advance. You should obtain the agenda beforehand. You can go in pairs or teams, but each student will write a 500-word story and include a tweet. You should strive to make the reader understand what was newsworthy and important from the meeting — not just summarize what happened. Due week 12.

Group #3 will present next week on the topic of media and crime coverage. All students will write an in-class response to the presentation drawing upon readings assigned for next week. Be sure to complete readings assigned for the next class.

Readings

[Tips for developing a beat](#)

Examples of coverage

<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/local/des-moines/2021/04/19/des-moines-city-council-public-comments-25-seconds-mayor-frank-cownie/7245495002/>

<https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2021/04/19/prattville-meetings-change-venue/7292007002/>

Week 12

11/9

Due: Meeting story

Covering law enforcement

Crime and public safety are top concerns, but media has often sensationalized these topics and covered them in a way that perpetuates stereotypes.

In class

Student group presentation #3: How should media cover crime? All students will write an in-class response to the presentation drawing on readings assigned for this week.

Reading law enforcement press releases

Possible guest speaker(s)

Readings

Newsrooms begin to reflect on their roles in systemic racism

AP decides not to name minor crime suspects

The Mug Shot, a Crime Story Staple, is Dropped by Some Newsrooms and Police

The Dart Center – Working with Victims and Survivors

Letters to the Editor: Why the L.A. Times should not have named the Saugus High shooter

How the first statement from Minneapolis police made George Floyd's murder seem like George Floyd's fault

Homework

Write a 500-700-word story using either material provided by the instructor OR using the DPS crime logs. Due Week 14.

Group #4 will present next week on the topic of media and responsibility. All students will write an in-class response to the presentation drawing upon readings assigned for next week. Be sure to complete readings assigned for the next class.

Week 13

11/16

Covering courts

We'll go over 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

Review articles on criminal case

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?

In class

Group presentation #4: What responsibilities do current news organization have to correct for flaws in previous coverage? All students will write an in-class response to the presentation that references readings assigned for this week.

Readings

How Local Media Fueled the Tulsa Massacre

An examination of The Times' failures on race, our apology and a path forward

Homework

Use a case provided by the instructor, one you've found in Pacer or the LA Superior Court system (have it approved by the instructor first,) or a trial you've observed in person. (This is a fascinating and useful experience.) Write a 750-word story about the case, including information from the documents, direct observation if applicable, and at least one outside interview. The interview should be with someone directly involved in the case as a defendant, plaintiff, witness or lawyer, or someone who has clear expertise or insight related to the case. Due Week 15.

Week 14

11/23

Due: Crime story

Discuss final and prep for final

The final exam will be a 750-word story written on deadline during the exam period. It will involve research into the topic ahead of time. You will then listen to a live presentation by a speaker during the final exam period and write the story. Your final story must include research and sources you contacted and quoted ahead of time as well as a lede and quotes from the speaker.

Week 15

11/30

Due: Court story

In class

Review final, class evaluations, hear from young alumni and/or instructor about life as a working journalist.

Final exam

11 a.m.-1 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 9

The final exam will be a 750-word story written on deadline during the exam period. It will involve research into the topic ahead of time. You will then listen to a live presentation by a speaker during the final exam period and write the story. Your final story must include research and sources you contacted and quoted ahead of time as well as a lede and quotes from the speaker.

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

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. Familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” 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, 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

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, 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

uscса.usc.edu

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/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

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.

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 produced Neon Tommy, the forerunner of uscannenbergmedia.com, where he now is a faculty advisor. For much of the previous decade, he was news editor at Los Angeles' alt-weeklies, including seven years at the L.A. Weekly, where he wrote a political column and oversaw a staff of six hard-nosed reporters. 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 an editor at the San Bernardino County Sun, where he was surprised to be named Employee of the Year despite questioning 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.