 **JOUR 432: Sports Commentary**

**4 Units**

**Spring 2022– Wednesdays – 6:30-9:50 p.m.**

**Section:** 21292R

**Location:**

**Amber Theoharis**

**Office:** Wallis Annenberg Lobby

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 5:30-6:30 p.m. or by appointment.

**Contact Info:** abuchler@usc.edu

**I. Course Description**

This course will teach the practical skills necessary to become a multi-media sports commentator. Gone are the days of sports personalities staying in one lane. A student’s future in today’s media industry begins with versatility. They must be able to formulate a sports opinion while persuasively contextualizing and tailoring that opinion to fit multiple media platforms.

This class is for students who want to learn how to create compelling, disruptive sports content and distribute it effectively to consumers. The class is structured as a working, sports-media department, and emulates the competitive, fast-paced atmosphere of such newsrooms.

Students will explore four media genres: social, column writing, television and radio/podcasts - all gearing up for the final exam (project) which asks students to take one sports story and create content that can be distributed across the four, learned media-genres. Students will learn the skills to complete this final project such as: researching a story, pitching it, taking a stance and backing it up with statistics, facts, quotes and trends.

In addition to assignments, students will be encouraged to remain current on national sports storylines from week to week. They are expected to have at least one active social media account that will be used for class assignments. Office hours will be provided for those in need of assistance. Weekly homework should take an estimated 2 hours. If it takes longer, please let instructor know.

This class will be hands on, interactive and fun! Star guest speakers will introduce students to the people who are moving the needle in 2022.

**II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

Students will create sports commentary for multiple platforms that meets, or is close to, professional standards and reflects their unique voices and perspectives as diverse individuals.

By the end of this course, students will be able to…

1. Pitch sports story ideas for different formats
2. Develop a 1-minute sports commentary and post it on a social media platform
3. Write a sports media column
4. Produce and debate topics on a live sports show for television
5. Produce a mini, sports podcast or radio segment
6. Prep for covering a live sporting event

**III. Course Notes**

This course also takes a close look how sports commentators are adapting to the uncertain climate surrounding COVID 19, which has affected all sports leagues in the US and globally. It also introduces students to the thought-provoking sports personalities whose commentaries go beyond sport and into the intersection of race, culture and politics.

**IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments**

1. Pitch sports stories – students will pitch stories to their peers for consideration for three different projects: athlete-driven project, midterm and final.
2. 1-minute social media commentary – student will produce and front a 60-second social media post giving their “take” on a current sports topic
3. March Madness – students will debate their peers in a single elimination, survive-and-advance style tournament as if they were appearing on a real TV debate show.
4. Game Prep – students will prepare for a live NFL game as if they were a real reporter/commentator by creating their own game notes
5. Midterm –
	1. Pick a sports story or game, produce and front a 30-second social media post giving your “take” on the story.
	2. Also, write an 800- 1,000k word sports column on the story
6. Final – The final project: Can you be a multi-media sports commentator? The exam will be a multi-week project that asks students to:
	1. Target current media outlets for their story and ‘pitch’ their content to the executive producers of that company (a.k.a. their peers)
	2. Choose a sports story or opinion and articulate that one opinion across four different platforms including a column, TV sports debate show, podcast and social media platform of their choosing.
7. In class work –
	1. Oral presentation (identifying a multi-media sports personality)
	2. Question formation/interviewing (prep & interaction with guest speakers)
	3. Weekly quizzes on sports current events/news judgment
	4. Homework reading/viewing observations and reactions to the works of: Jemele Hill, Steve Wyche, Lebron James, Mike Silver, Mark Sanchez, Dwayne Johnson, Jim Trotter

**V. Grading**

**a. Breakdown of Grade**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **% of Grade** |
| Story Pitches (athlete driven, midterm, final) | 10% |
| 30 Second Social Media Commentary | 5% |
| Game Prep Document  | 5% |
| March Madness Debate Tournament | 10% |
| In Class Work/Participation-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Mid Term--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Final | 20%---------------------20%---------------------30% |
| **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 completeness 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 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.

**d. Grading Timeline**

All quizzes and assignments will be graded and returned by the ensuing week’s class (approximately 7 days)

**VI. Assignment Rubrics**

Individual assignment rubrics will be handed out prior to each assignment.

**VII. Assignment Submission Policy**

A. All assignments are due on the dates and times specified (typically by the start of class 6:29pm PST). Late assignments (late meaning past the date **AND/OR** time specified) will automatically be given a grade of F (59%). Assignments not submitted at all will be given a (0%)

B. Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard.

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 your work to the campus newspaper.

**VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials (NOTE:** all downloaded viewing and reading assignments are free**)**

See week by week required reading and viewing assignments below.

**IX. 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**](http://www.annenbergdl.org/) for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s [Information Technology Services](http://itservices.usc.edu/wireless/support/) website. If a student is not Annenberg major or minor and needs a laptop for the course please see instructor.

**X. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001** (15 weeks: 1/10/2022 – 4/29/2022; Final Exam Period: 5/4-11/2022)

Link: https://classes.usc.edu/term-20221/calendar/

Last day to add: Friday, January 28, 2022

Last day to drop without a mark of "W" and receive a refund: Friday, January 28, 2022

Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, January 28, 2022 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Audit: Tuesday, February 1

Last day to withdraw without a “W” on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, February 25, 2022 [Mark of “W” will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply.

\*Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, April 1, 2022

**XI. 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.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Topics/Daily Activities | Readings and Homework | Deliverable/Due Dates (Prior to start of class 6:29pm PST) |
| Week 1 Date: 1/12 | Welcome! Lecture 1: What is a multi-media personality? Set end of semester goals. Syllabus review. About your professor. Why are you here? | Homework- Identify a sports personality who uses multiple media platforms. Prepare a 1 min oral presentation in class on what you like about their brand. |  |
| Week 2Date: 1/19 | Social Media Guest Speaker Akbar BajabiamilaThe Talk (CBS)Ninja WarriorLecture 2: Social Media Commentary | Examples of Professional and student social media commentary | [Homework – Assignment 2: 30 sec social media commentary links turned into blackboard AND posted on a social media account …due 1/26 |
| Week 3Date: 1/26 | Lecture 3: Game Prep “The Formula” How to prepare a Master Document for a live game broadcast. Game Prep Guest Speaker: Jon “J.P.” Morosi MLB on Fox, NHL Network, MLB Network  | Viewing Assignment – CBS Tracy Wolfson/Tom Brady Super Bowl 53<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dc5a3fOS3s8>Jon morosi video | Homework- Assignment 3: Game prep document for Lakers Game TBD \*DUE 2/2 |
| Week 4 Date: 2/2 | Game Prep Document DueFull Lecture 5: Socially Conscious Commentary Discuss Trotter/Wyche reading assignmentsWhat is a commentator’s role at the intersection of sports/politics/race etc. Socially conscious commentary Guest Speaker: Aisha Chaney Sr. Coordinating Producer ESPN SportsCenter | In Class ReadingReading/viewing assignment Jim Trotter…. (2 observations/reactions)<https://www.nfl.com/news/owners-to-vote-on-resolution-to-incentivize-minority-hc-gm-hires>In Class ReadingAssignment 4 – Steve Wyche NFL.com (submit 2 observations/reactions)http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthemIn Class viewing: Muhammed Ali (Vietnam) LeBron James/Laura Ingraham “Shut up and dribble”View Gabrielle Union/Dwayne Wade and daughter Zaya’s post  |  |
| Week 5 Date: 2/9 | Game Prep Document DueLecture 4: Pitching stories Guest Speaker via skype: TBDLecture 6: Athlete Driven Content  | Watch Cam Newton YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIGAECpWNSA>Watch Season 3 Episode 2 of Lebron James’ “The Shop” on HBO, also can be found on YouTube. Write 2 observations about how LeBron drives his own content.View Antonio Brown IGTV post on Raiders drama <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCH_NCZ7Ejs>View JuJu TV on YouTube Lebron James “player driven” platform Uninterrupted.com | Homework – Assignment 6: Athlete Driven content pitch due 2/16 Best story will be voted on by student audience  |
| Week 6Date: 2/16 | Mock Production Meeting/Present Athlete Driven Pitches (Guest judge NBC Showrunners, Joe Braswell and Steve Barry co-founders Kelchris Media) |  Read Example Midterm project pitch.(APSE Columnist reads) | Homework - Assignment Due 3/3: Homework - Reading Assignment (give two reactions/observations from Silver’s articles“Rodman Unchained” -S*ports Illustrated -*Michael Silver <https://www.si.com/vault/1995/05/29/203509/rodman-unchained-the-spurs-no-holds-barred-forward-gives-new-meaning-to-the-running-game>Reading assignment Give 2 reactions/observations – Bill Plaschke LA Times “How can Kobe Bryant be gone? “(2 observations/reactions)<https://www.latimes.com/sports/lakers/story/2020-01-26/bill-plaschke-column-on-kobe-bryant> |
| Week 7Date: 2/23 | Lecture 7: Sports Column Writing. (APSE Columnist reads)Guest Speaker Bill Plaschke columnist LA TimesBegin working on column (group brainstorm)How to pitch to Daily Trojan | (APSE Columnist reads) | Assignment 7: Midterm project pitches (2 each) due 3/2 Pick a story, tailor it to Social Media Commentary and Written Sports Column |
| Week 8Date: 3/2 | Mid Term Project: present story Pitches to the student audience. They vote on pitch. Guest judgeTBD (surprise)Intro Lecture 8: TV Debate Shows Part 1 (Using “The Formula”)  “Tell me the WHY” TV presentation  |  View Undisputed<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQtpFvtmrjM&t=309s> 10:30 inView TNT Inside the NBA<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWlFqWoD_3c> 1:03 in | Assignment: Homework - Midterm project: (part 1) social media commentary and (part 2) column due 3/9  |
| Week 9Date: 3/9 | **MID TERM DUE:** Turn in column andSocial media presentations. Lecture 8: TV debate shows Part 2 Guest Speaker ESPN Analyst Dan Orlovsky  |  | Homework – pay attention to sports storylines across all media platforms this week that are highly debatable. Submit two topics for Mouth Madness Debates to be voted on by the class. Due 3/16 |
| Spring BreakNo Class3/16 | NO CLASS | NO CLASS | NO CLASS |
| Week 10Date: 3/23 | Distribute March Madness Debate TopicGroup Brainstorm according to brackets |  | Assignment – write an email to one guest speaker you met in class. Cc Professor Theoharis (Due 3/30)Homework- Watch Sports/Research. Prep for Mouth Madness Debates (In class 3/30) |
| Week 11Date: 3/30 | Mouth Madness TV Debate TournamentGuest speaker/judge TBD |  | Homework – Download and Listen to Mark Sanchez’s “4th and Forever Podcast” *Youtube.com* (submit 2 observations/reactions)Listen to Oprah’s “Super Soul Podcast” Episode #113 Dwayne Johnson\_-*iTunes* (submit 2 observations/reactions) |
| Week 124/6 | Review Podcast ObservationsLecture 10: Developing a Podcast that’s “on brand”Guest Speaker Eric Spitz, VP sports Programing Sirius XM creator of Let’s Go podcast with Tom BradyBrainstorm Podcast ideas |  | Homework – bring 2 ideas to ‘sell’ for final exam project pitch Due 4/13 |
| Week 13Date: 4/13 | Final Exam Pitch meeting – student audience decides their peer’s projects |   | Homework- Final exam: (part 1) 5 min podcast due 4/20Prep for Final Exam: (part 2) TV Debates (in class on 4/20) |
| Week 14Date: 4/20 | Turn in Final Exam Part 1 : 5 min podcastFinal Exam (part 2) Live Debates (peer audience votes on winner) Special Guest Judge |  | Homework- Final Exam: (part 3) 1-min social media commentary AND (part 4) 800-1000k word sports column due 5/5 |
| Week 15Date: 4/27 | Turn in Final Exam parts 3 and 4 (social media commentary AND sports column) |  |  |
| Final Exam Week Date: 5/4, 7-9 p.m. | USC Course EvaluationsFinal Lecture (10)-How to use what you’ve learned to get an internship/job. “Be Kind, Work Hard.” Mental Health. | Reading assignment- “Advice for Interns” Amber Theoharis*Fortune.com*[*https://fortune.com/2016/09/14/nfl-network-career-advice-women-business/*](https://fortune.com/2016/09/14/nfl-network-career-advice-women-business/)Phil Jackson’s Reading Packet…you will read it someday.  | Homework – Take over the world with what you learned.  |

**XII. Policies and Procedures**

**Additional Policies**

Dress policy: If a student is scheduled to stage a TV debate in class or if they are going to Fox Sports to observe their debate shows, business attire is required. Business attire means: no jeans, ripped clothing, open toed shoes, hats, t-shirts or sneakers. Further instruction on what is considered business attire will be given in class.

Discrimination, bullying and harassment policy: Students should be aware - the art of ‘listening to’ and ‘considering the opinions of’ those whom are different from themselves will be emphasized. Discriminatory language or actions will not be tolerated, nor will any form of bullying or harassment. This classroom is an open, safe space for students of all genders, races, cultures, disabilities, and sexual orientations.

**Communication**

This class has an open-door policy. I will make myself available from 5-6pm every Wednesday night for student meetings and will also take scheduled meetings at the student’s request. However, please email abuchler@usc.edu

 if there is an urgent matter and I will respond before the end of the business day. Open communication is encouraged and welcomed!

**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 by 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. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](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, [policy.usc.edu/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**

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

[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://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](http://www.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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu/), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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](https://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](http://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*

[uscsa.usc.edu](https://uscsa.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](https://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](http://dps.usc.edu/), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://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.

*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**

**AMBER THEOHARIS** is an Emmy award-winning sportscaster recently appearing on *Sirius XM NFL Radio,* *NFL Network, Fox Sports, FS1 and the NFL on Westwood One.*

In addition to her 20-year award-winning television career, Amber is a writer and producer. Her documentary *The Weight of Gold* co-produced by Michael Phelps was released on HBO in July 2020. Amber also acts as CCO of Clickstream Corp, a gaming and tech company.

She has become a prominent voice for women’s empowerment with her articles published in *TIME, Fortune, Sports Illustrated and Thrive Global*. She has also had reoccurring TV appearances on CBS’s *The Talk* discussing various issues.

Prior to joining NFL Network in 2012, Amber spent nine years in the Baltimore/Washington market as an anchor/reporter for Mid Atlantic Sports Network (MASN), WRC-TV, and WBFF-TV. You could also catch Amber on MLB Network. Prior to the D.C. market, Amber was weekend sports anchor at WSYX-TV in Columbus, OH.

The multi-media personality is a proud graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park where she earned a B.A. in journalism and political science.