Public Affairs Reporting
Journalism 4346 | Spring 2017

Tues./Thurs., 12:30-1:50 p.m.   ARCH 324

Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith
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Note: Because of other department and university duties, office hours occasionally will be cancelled. Cancellations will be posted on the office door and, when possible, announced in class and/or via email.

Prerequisites: Completion of JOUR 3345 and MATH 1308, both with a grade of C or higher.

Course Description: Students will develop and extensively practice the reporting and writing skills required for covering civic issues in a technologically rich media environment, including use of public records and databases; interviewing a balanced set of sources for information, impact, and interest; writing breaking news, soft news, and enterprise stories for print; delivering and sharing news content via social media.

Learning Goals and Objectives:

The following learning goals and objectives have been set for students in this class and all classes in the journalism sequence:
- Discuss the concepts, ideas and foundation of freedom of speech and press, including the role media play in today's society.
- Conduct research while using ethical and legal principles to produce quality work.
- Identify the theories and principles of reporting for the media, including the presentation of information via images, graphics, visual communication and the written word.
- Discuss today's news and information disseminated through various local and national media.
- Demonstrate creative, critical and independent thinking to interview sources, conduct research and write unbiased media stories.
- Discuss fundamental numerical and statistical concepts and demonstrate them in the writing and reporting of articles.
- Operate basic communication technology and software.
- Demonstrate correct Associated Press style and grammar when reporting and writing articles, and edit stories utilizing journalistic style, ethics and principles.
- Write quality journalistic stories, specifically news and feature stories, while working under deadlines.
- Critique their own work and the works of others according to the principles of accuracy, fairness, clarity, style and grammatical correctness.

Textbook and Materials:
- *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (latest edition)
- Readings distributed in class/on Blackboard

Blackboard:
All course assignments will be submitted on Blackboard (http://elearn.uta.edu). Because the instructor uses Blackboard rubrics, **assignments not posted to the proper portal by the deadline will not be graded**.

The instructor also will post course Power Points to Blackboard in advance of each class, but students are encouraged to take notes in class as well. All course documents are posted to Blackboard for your reference.

All grades for individual course assignments, including in-class work, will be posted to Blackboard, and course averages will be posted there periodically. Please log in regularly to check grades and announcements. No grade information will be emailed. Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester on Blackboard and seek guidance if their grade drops below satisfactory levels.

Course Policies

Grade Calculation:

Assignment	% of grade	Grading scale
Out-of-class story assignments	45	A – 90-100 percent
In-class activities/attendance	40	B – 80-89 percent
News tweets	15	C – 70-79 percent
		D – 60-69 percent
		F – below 60 percent

Out-of-class assignments. Students will have four story assignments to complete outside of class: a profile (10 percent), an issue story (12 percent), a community event story (10 percent), and an enterprise story (13 percent). The enterprise story will be completed in groups of 3-4 students.

The instructor will post on Blackboard assignment sheets and rubrics detailing the specific requirements and assessment structure for each assignment. We will go over them thoroughly in class.

In-class activities/attendance. Throughout the course, students will engage in team and individual discussion exercises and in-class writing assignments designed to prepare them for their outside assignments and to practice skills discussed in class. The instructor will distribute assignment sheets detailing the requirements for each assignment.

News Tweets. Beat reporters remain aware of what is going on in the communities they cover through a variety of means, including other media. Social media is a vital tool for communicating with citizens, including as an important avenue for posting and sharing news. Therefore, students will use Twitter to see how news organizations use social media to post news as well as to keep up with news that affects their beat communities.

Each student will share a public affairs story that affects his/her beat community on his/her own Twitter account with the hashtag #JOUR4346. [Make sure you use the hashtag symbol (#) and that there are no spaces between any of the characters.] Tweets must be posted by 5 p.m. each Friday.

The story may be one of the following:
1) A story directly from the beat community (preferred)
2) A story from a neighboring community that has some effect on the beat community
3) A county-wide story from the county the beat is in
4) A regional story (affecting all of North Texas)
5) A statewide story (affecting all of Texas)

ALL stories must be public affairs stories, dealing with issues that directly affect a large portion of citizens in the student's beat community, and they must be no older than two weeks old at the time of sharing.

Remember, public affairs stories cover issues of public concern that affect the quality of life of citizens in your community, such as the economy, education, governance, infrastructure, public health and safety, recreation, and transportation. Crime stories do not count as public affairs unless it is a widespread issue.

County-wide, regional, and statewide stories must truly cover the entire area, either affecting a large number of citizens in the county/region/state including the student's beat community OR discussing specific debates or decisions that directly affect the student's beat community. They should NOT merely be news stories that occurred somewhere else in the state or county.

Regardless of the type of story that is posted, the student should express in the Tweet sharing the story what the impact is on the community he/she covers. Following is an example:

New Texas deal could make voting easier for Coppell citizens https://communityimpact.com/austin/at-the-capitol/2016/08/04/texas-strikes-deal-make-easier-voters-cast-ballots/ #JOUR4346

In order to find news stories, students should consume professional news outlets that cover their communities, counties, and the state of Texas. Following those entities on Twitter is a good start, but because news entities don't share every story they publish, students shouldn't rely solely on Twitter to find stories. Actively seek out media coverage of your beat. (NOTE: Press releases do not count as news stories.)

A third purpose of the Twitter news sharing assignment is identifying fresh examples of public affairs stories to examine. The instructor will re-tweet stories from students and occasionally will share stories that students have not posted as well. Students are to keep up with reading the stories posted/re-tweeted at @UTAReporting and be prepared to discuss them. Students also should be prepared to talk about the community events and issues covered in the stories they share, even if the instructor does not re-tweet them. (In other words, don't just mindlessly tweet stories; READ THEM to be sure you understand what's going on in your beat community.)

Shares/retweets of beat stories will comprise 10 percent of the students' final grade.

Students also will be expected to live tweet from a municipal meeting on their beats during the term. Students will receive details on the live tweet assignment, worth 5 percent of the final grade, on a separate assignment sheet.

Attendance: At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required, but attendance is a critical indicator in student success. Each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance (see below). While UT Arlington does not require instructors to take attendance in their courses, the U.S. Department of Education requires that the University have a mechanism in place to mark when Federal Student Aid recipients "begin attendance in a course." UT Arlington instructors also will report when students stopped attending a course as part of the final grading process. Specifically, when assigning a student a grade of F, faculty report the last date a student attended their class based on evidence such as a test, participation in a class project or presentation, or an engagement online via Blackboard. This date is reported to the Department of Education for federal financial aid recipients.

As the instructor of this section, my philosophy is that students are to treat the class like a job; they are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. I treat my students like professionals. Employees who miss work do not get paid; students who miss class receive 0s for work completed in their absence.

Absences from class are neither excused nor unexcused. Students are given two personal/sick days to use at their discretion over the course of the semester for which their absences will not be penalized.

As with a job, excessive tardiness will not be tolerated. The instructor will keep track of tardiness and charge a student with an absence for every 50 minutes accumulated and remove participation points accordingly.

Late work: Working journalists must adhere to deadlines. Journalists who miss deadlines find their jobs in jeopardy. Therefore, students are expected to adhere to deadlines as posted on the course syllabus, assignment sheets, and Blackboard. **Late work will not be accepted**. Blackboard assignment portals will close at the appointed deadline. Students who have not submitted their assignments to the proper assignment portal on Blackboard by the assigned deadline will receive a 0.

If **extreme circumstances** prevent a student from completing an assignment on time, the student must request an extension AHEAD OF TIME if at all possible and present documentation proving that an **unexpected emergency (such as a death, grave illness or debilitating injury)** occurred.

Because of the length of time students are given to complete assignments, they should plan accordingly for religious, personal or professional obligations that may arise around the time that an assignment is due.

Computer and Internet malfunctions will NOT be given consideration for late assignments. Students should give themselves plenty of time to complete assignments so that they may regroup in the wake of a technological snafu. Media professionals have to produce a product when it is expected, no matter what.

Grading procedures: Effective media writing requires objectivity, credible sources, and careful attention to spelling, grammar, AP style, and factual accuracy. On writing assignments, the instructor will assign a content

grade based on requirements spelled out in advance. Each writing assignment handout will include a rubric that explains exactly how the instructor will grade that assignment.

A note on sources: Although they may be used for background in stories, the following do NOT count as official sources: information that has been printed in books, newsletters, magazines, newspapers, or the Internet, or information that has been broadcast on television or the radio. (These sources still must be attributed properly.)

Expectations for out-of-class study: This course is intensive. Students often will be working on several projects and/or homework assignments at the same time in addition to keeping up with readings for class. University standard is to allow three hours of out-of-class work for every credit hour. This class will not exceed that, but expect to fully utilize your nine out-of-class hours per week to complete assignments for this class.

Effective communication requires practice, so students can expect to write every week (if not every day) and to complete both out-of-class and in-class assignments. Students will need to begin their projects in advance and not start working on them the night before they are due. If students are struggling with the material or the workload, they should see the instructor during office hours to discuss it.

Students will be provided some class time to work on reporting and writing their out-of-class stories, but students also should expect to spend some out-of-class time working on these assignments. Being that this is a three-hour course, a good rule of thumb is to allot nine hours of time each week to out-of-class preparations for this course. This includes but is not limited to keeping up with news tweets and blogging, completing homework and reading assignments, and reporting and writing stories.

Workshop days: Students will be afforded workshop time during class time to work on out-of-class assignments and, occasionally, practice assignments that require legwork. Reporting workshops in the syllabus indicate that we will not meet as a group. Students should use that time for fieldwork toward their assignments. Writing workshops will be conducted IN CLASS; students should come to class on those days prepared with their assignment notes. Unless otherwise noted, practice assignments always are completed in class.

Behavior expectations: Students are expected to remain focused on the task at hand for the duration of class each day.

Students will be asked to leave the class if they are engaging in any of the following activities:

- Using cellphones or Smartphones for ANY reason. Keep it silenced and in your pocket/bag for the duration of class.
- Speaking out of turn.
- Studying or working on assignments for other classes.
- Reading any sort of print media (unless required to do so for a lab activity).
- Utilizing the computer for any reason other than in-class assignments.
  - When the class is not working on an assignment, keep the monitor off.
  - When the class IS working on an assignment, do not use the computer to check email or social media, surf the Web, IM, or anything else unrelated to the assignment.

Students who are asked to leave will be counted as absent for that day and will not be given an opportunity to make up missed work.

Department, College, and University Policies

Drop Policy: Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session, as noted in the syllabus schedule. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. ***Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance***. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (http://wweb.uta.edu/ses/fao).

Disability Accommodations: UT Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA),* and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.* All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of ***a letter certified by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD).*** Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored.

Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting OSD. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling OSD at 817-272-3364.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is also available to all students to help increase their understanding of personal issues, address mental and behavioral health problems, and make positive changes in their lives. (www.uta.edu/caps/; 817-272-3671)

Non-Discrimination Policy: *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit uta.edu/eos.*

Title IX Policy: The University of Texas at Arlington ("University") is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. *For information regarding Title IX, visit* www.uta.edu/titleIX or contact Ms. Jean Hood, Vice President and Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091 or jmhood@uta.edu.

Student Support Services: UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at the University College website.

The IDEAS Center (2nd Floor of Central Library) offers **free** tutoring to all students with a focus on transfer students, sophomores, veterans and others undergoing a transition to UT Arlington. To schedule an appointment with a peer tutor or mentor, email IDEAS@uta.edu or call (817) 272-6593.

Electronic Communication: UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php.

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory shall be directed to complete a Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit http://www.uta.edu/sfs.

Campus Carry: Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/

Final Review Week: A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus.* During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

Emergency Exit Procedures: Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located at the end of the hallway in either direction from the classroom. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

Instructors may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

Furthermore, students are expected to model the honest and ethical behavior in this course that they would be expected to follow as professional communicators. In addition to examples of cheating, plagiarism and collusion described in the student handbook, the following behaviors in this class also constitute academic dishonesty:
- Making up sources, information or quotes except as explicitly specified for certain class assignments
- Failing to properly attribute quotes and ideas to their sources
- Asking someone to lie about a student interviewing him or her
- Getting other people to write class assignments
- Lying to a source to get information
  Copying a published story or using information from a published news account, Web page, database, research paper or press release without proper attribution

Course Schedule & Due Dates

As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course. –Erika J. Pribanic-Smith

** **Remember to post your news tweet by 5 p.m. EVERY FRIDAY, and keep up with reading the stories that are posted/retweeted at @UTAReporting for class discussion.**

Week	Dates	Topics/Assignments
1	Jan. 17	Course Overview and Introduction Twitter Setup
	Jan. 19	Developing a Beat/Finding Story Ideas **Beat Homework assigned**
2	Jan. 24	Reporting Workshop (Practice): Getting to Know Your Beat **DUE (11:59 P.M.): BEAT HOMEWORK**
	Jan. 26	Finding, cultivating and interviewing sources **Impact Profile assigned**
3 *Feb. 1: CENSUS DATE*	Jan. 31	Civic journalism and social media **Live tweet & UTA issue homework assigned**
	Feb. 2	Reporting Workshop: Impact Profile
4	Feb. 7	Citizen journalism and crowdsourcing **DUE (IN CLASS): UTA ISSUE HOMEWORK** **Crowdsourcing homework assigned**
	Feb. 9	Practice: Crowdsourcing a story **DUE (IN CLASS): CROWDSOURCING HOMEWORK**
5	Feb. 14	Writing Workshop: Impact Profile **DUE (11:59 P.M.): IMPACT PROFILE**
	Feb. 16	Covering government from a civic perspective Issue story assigned
6	Feb. 21	Using public records and documents
	Feb. 23	Practice: Public records scavenger hunt
7	Feb. 28	Reporting Workshop: Issue Story
	March 2	Computer-assisted reporting and data-driven journalism
8	March 7	Practice: Writing by numbers
	March 9	Writing Workshop: Issue Story **DUE (11:59 P.M.): ISSUE STORY**
	March 14 & 16	**NO CLASS**
9	March 21	Covering civic groups **Civic Group Story Assigned**
	March 23	A civic perspective on politics **Election Homework given**
10 *March 31: LAST DAY TO DROP*	March 28	Practice: Civic election coverage **DUE (IN CLASS): ELECTION HOMEWORK**
	March 30	Reporting Workshop: Civic Group Story DUE (11:59 P.M.): LIVE TWEET

11	April 4	Public opinion polls
	April 6	Practice: Writing from Poll Data
12	April 11	Writing Workshop: Civic Group Story **DUE (11:59 P.M.): CIVIC GROUP STORY**
	April 13	Dividing and conquering big stories Enterprise story assigned
13	April 18	Reporting Workshop: Enterprise Reporting
	April 20	Team Meetings (in Dr. P-S's office)
14	April 25-27	Reporting Workshop: Enterprise Reporting
15	May 2	Team Meetings (in Dr. P-S's office)
	May 4	Reporting Workshop: Enterprise Reporting
FINAL	May 11	**DUE (11:59 P.M.): ENTERPRISE STORY**