

# Public Affairs Reporting

Journalism 4346 | Spring 2018

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

FAB 412

**Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith**

**Office:** 2114 Fine Arts Building

**Hours:** Tues./Thurs., 11 a.m. to noon or by appt.

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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.**

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	
Out-of-class story assignments	50	A – 90-100 percent
In-class activities/attendance	50	B – 80-89 percent
		C – 70-79 percent
		D – 60-69 percent
		F – below 60 percent

### Grading scale

**Out-of-class assignments.** Students will have three traditional written story assignments to complete outside of class: a profile, a short-form investigative story, and a long-form investigative story. The long-form story will be completed in groups of 3-4 students.

Students also will complete a live-tweet assignment (covering a community meeting or event live on Twitter).

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.

**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.**