

Public Affairs Reporting

Journalism 4346 | Spring 2015

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

Fine Arts 411A

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; news blogging.

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>). Assignments not posted to the proper portal will not be graded, and late penalties will apply until submitted correctly.

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	40	A – 90-100 percent
In-class activities/attendance	30	B – 80-89 percent
News tweets	15	C – 70-79 percent
Current events quizzes	15	D – 60-69 percent
		F – below 60 percent

Out-of-class assignments. Students will have five story assignments to complete outside of class: an impact profile (worth 6 percent), two meeting stories (a city council meeting and a board/commission/department story; each worth 8 percent), a civic group story (worth 8 percent), and an enterprise story. The enterprise story, which will be completed in groups of three students, will constitute 10 percent of the student's grade.

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. Social media is an important avenue for posting and sharing news. Students will use Twitter to see how news organizations use social media to post news, and students will share news on their own Twitter accounts with the hashtag #JOUR4346. Make sure you use the hashtag symbol (#) and that there are no spaces between any of the characters.

Each week (Sunday through Saturday), students will be responsible for sharing on Twitter THREE public affairs stories from professional news outlets:

- 1) A statewide (Texas) story
- 2) Two local stories

The local stories may be any of the following:

- A story from your beat community.
- A story from another community in the same county as your beat.
- A county-wide story from the county your beat is in.

In order to find news stories, students should follow a variety of metroplex news organizations (see what the instructor follows from the @UTARreporting account for ideas). Make sure to follow any local NEWS organizations for your beat. NOTE: Press releases do not count as news stories.

Students may spread out their stories over the week or tweet them all at once, as long as all three tweets for the week are posted by 11:59 p.m. on Saturday. Students will receive no credit for stories that are not public affairs.

The instructor will re-tweet stories from students and may share stories that students have not posted as well. Students should keep up with all news stories posted (either by the instructor or re-tweeted from students) @UTARreporting; current events quiz questions will come exclusively from these posts, and some may be discussed in class.

Shares/retweets for current events will comprise 7 percent of the students' final grade.

Students also will be expected to live tweet from two meetings and/or events on their beats during the term. Students will receive details on the live tweet assignments, worth 4 percent of the final grade EACH (8 percent total) on a separate assignment sheet.

NOTE: A Scavenger Hunt Twitter assignment (to be given in class) will count toward in-class activities.

Current events quizzes. Students will have bi-weekly quizzes covering current events items from Twitter (see above). Quizzes are given at the start of class and take just a few minutes. Students who arrive after the quiz has been given will not have an opportunity to make up the quiz.

Attendance: At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, 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. 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. 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, **which will allow the student to make up work missed in class**. The student must consult with the instructor immediately upon returning to class to set a deadline for makeup work. Failure to complete the makeup work will result in a zero.

Tardiness will not be tolerated. Employees would be docked pay for arriving late to work. Students similarly will be docked points off the daily participation grade at a rate of 2 percent per minute late. In other words, students will lose a full letter grade off that day's participation exercise for every five minutes they are late.

Late work: Students are expected to adhere to deadlines as posted on the course syllabus, assignment sheets, and Blackboard. **Late work will not be accepted.**

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.

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 basic 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.

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.

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 field work 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.
 - o When the class is not working on an assignment, keep the monitor off and mouse upside down.
 - o 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://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at 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)*. 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 that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Title IX: The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to upholding U.S. Federal Law "Title IX" such that no member of the UT Arlington community shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. For more information, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.

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 www.uta.edu/resources.

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>.

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
- ☐ Turning in a story students already have published or written for another class

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

Week	Dates	Topics/Assignments
1	Jan. 20	Course Overview and Introduction Twitter Setup
	Jan. 22	Developing a Beat/Finding Story Ideas <u>Beat Homework assigned</u>
2	Jan. 27	Reporting Workshop (Practice): Getting to Know Your Beat DUE (11:59 P.M.): BEAT HOMEWORK
	Jan. 29	Finding, cultivating and interviewing sources <u>Impact Profile assigned</u>
3 <i>Feb. 4: CENSUS DATE</i>	Feb. 3	<i>Current events quiz</i> Civic journalism and social media <u>News tweets assigned</u>
	Feb. 5	Reporting Workshop: Impact Profile
4	Feb. 10	Citizen journalism and crowdsourcing
	Feb. 12	Twitter Reporting Scavenger Hunt
5	Feb. 17	<i>Current events quiz</i> Storify Workshop/Writing Workshop: Impact Profile DUE (11:59 P.M.): IMPACT PROFILE
	Feb. 19	Covering government from a civic perspective <u>Meeting stories assigned</u>
6	Feb. 24	Using public records and documents
	Feb. 26	Reporting Workshop: Meeting Story 1
7	March 3	<i>Current events quiz</i> Practice: Public records scavenger hunt
	March 5	Writing Workshop: Meeting Story 1 DUE (11:59 P.M.): MEETING STORY 1
	March 10	NO CLASS
	March 12	NO CLASS
8	March 17	Computer-assisted reporting and data-driven journalism
	March 19	Practice: Writing by numbers
9	March 24	<i>Current events quiz</i> A civic perspective on politics <u>Election Homework given</u>
	March 26	Reporting Workshop: Meeting Story 2
10 <i>April 3: LAST DAY TO DROP</i>	March 31	Practice: Civic election coverage DUE (IN CLASS): ELECTION HOMEWORK
	April 2	Writing Workshop: Meeting Story 2 DUE (11:59 P.M.): MEETING STORY 2

11	April 7	<i>Current events quiz</i> Covering civic groups <u>Civic group story assigned</u>
	April 9	Public opinion polls
12	April 14	Practice: Writing from Poll Data
	April 16	Reporting Workshop: Civic Group Story
13	April 21	<i>Current events quiz</i> Legal, moral, and ethical issues
	April 23	Writing Workshop: Civic Group Story DUE (11:59 P.M.): CIVIC GROUP STORY
14	April 28	Dividing and conquering big stories <u>Enterprise story assigned</u>
	April 30	Reporting workshop: Enterprise Reporting
15	May 5	Reporting workshop: Enterprise Reporting
	May 7	Writing Workshop: Enterprise Story
FINAL	May 14	DUE (11:59 P.M.): ENTERPRISE STORY