

Spring 2008 Syllabus
Online Newswriting and Editing

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“Journalism is a conversation, not a lecture.”

“Information is alienated experience.”

About the Instructor

Before joining UNC this year, I was the managing editor at U.S. News & World Report in charge of USNews.com. I have also been the managing editor of CQ.com at Congressional Quarterly and was the editor of national and foreign news on washingtonpost.com during the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 2004 presidential election. During those jobs, I created and edited nationally recognized multimedia packages and led online coverage of presidential election and the war in Iraq. As an entrepreneur, I started the Carolina Political Report, a site that was dedicated to coverage of state politics and government in North Carolina. I’ve has written and edited online publications for UNC's Program on Public Life and The George Washington University's Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet. I’ve also appeared as a political analyst on CNN, MSNBC and several other local and national broadcast outlets.

About This Course

This course starts with the belief that American journalism is in turmoil, but that its greatest days lie ahead. In a world where media is consumed on demand and in which technology continues to change every aspect of community and communication, citizens in a democracy and a free market economy will need more than ever an efficient way to hold powerful people accountable and current and relevant explanations about the events and motivations of an ever changing world.

Students in this class will learn skills they can use to better serve readers and lead inevitable changes in reporting, editing and news delivery.

There are more opportunities than ever for journalists, but less security. Gone are the days where we can sit back, learn a time-honored set of skills and embark on a well-trod career path. These days call for new ideas, new skills to implement those ideas. And most of all, they call for leadership and integrity.

What You Will Learn

The course will have three objectives: understanding the online news audience, developing practical online reporting skills, and developing practical online editing skills.

The first few weeks of class will be dedicated to a quick introduction to the changing behaviors and preferences of the U.S. news audience through a study of contemporary research and anecdotes from professionals -- the who, what, when, where and why people read news online. Technology will change, but adapting to changing technology will be easier for journalists who have a firm grasp on the needs of the reader.

The bulk of the course will be spent on practical skills exercises through which students will get hands-on experience writing and editing for online audiences. Students will put concepts and skills in to practice in a reporting blog they will maintain as part of this class and while editing the online version of The Carrboro Commons, a publication created by students in the Community Journalism class and edited for print by the students in the Advanced Editing class.

The Goal of This Course

Students who successfully complete this course will have a conceptual understanding of the opportunities and challenges provided by online journalism as well as the skills needed to practice the craft in its current state.

Required Readings

The best way to learn about the changing journalism environment is to keep a close eye on professionals working in the industry. The bulk of our reading will be contemporary articles and research about online journalism. In order to give you the most current information in a dynamic environment, I will post on the readings on Blackboard a week ahead of the class in which we will discuss them. You will need to do the readings in advance of each class so you can participate in our discussions.

Students are also expected to read a good mix of online news sources every day and think critically about the content. A good mix should include local, national, print, broadcast, and online-only sources.

You will note that some readings have already been scheduled in the calendar section. Other readings will be assigned later in the semester.

Books you will need for this class:

- *Journalism 2.0*, Mark Briggs, available as a free download at http://www.jlab.org/Journalism_20.pdf
- *We the Media*, Dan Gillmor, available for purchase in the UNC Student Stores and it is also available as a free download at <http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/wemedia/book/index.csp> . I recommend buying it.
- *AP Stylebook*
- *UNC Stylebook*

You will also be responsible for reading periodic articles from cyberjournalist.net and ojr.org about current issues in online journalism.

Recommended Readings

During the course of the semester, we will be learning several technical skills and programs. For most, I will provide with sufficient, free, online tutorials that will teach you the basics. But for others, you may want or need to purchase instruction manuals or use subscription online tutorials that can be found at www.lynda.com.

In fact, a two or three month subscription to www.lynda.com, at \$25/month would be a wise investment to make right now, especially if you don't like to learn by reading tutorial books.

Grades

- BEAT BLOG ... 55 points
 - Blog Proposal, Jan. 29 ... 5 points
 - 10 weekly blog posts (2 points each) ... 20 points
 - Multimedia and Interactive Elements ... 30 points
- CARRBORO COMMONS EDITING ... 30 points
 - 5 edited stories, blurbs and headlines (4 points each) ... 25 points
 - Blurb and headline critique, Feb. 5 ... 5 points
- ANNOTATED LINK POSTS ... 26 points
 - 13 weekly posts to del.icio.us (2 points each)
- QUIZZES....30 points
 - Quiz 1: State of the News Media 2007, Jan 15 ... 10 points
 - Quiz 2: The Online Audience, Jan. 22 ... 10 points
 - Quiz 3: We the Media, March 20 ... 10 points
- RSS FEED SUBSCRIPTIONS ... 4 points
 - Jan. 25 ... 2 points
 - Feb. 15 ... 2 points

TOTAL ... 145 points

Your overall grade will be based on the following scale:

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

A = 131 - 145 points

B = 108 - 130 points

C = 82 – 107 points

D = 58 – 81 points

F = 57 and below

GRADUATE STUDENTS

H = 120 – 145

P = 95 – 119

L = 58 – 94

F = 57 and below

Assignment Details

Beat Blog:

Students will be responsible for keeping a blog of their reporting on a specific beat.

- First blog post: Week Four
- Last blog post: Week 14
- You must post at least once per week, for a total of 10 posts.
- Weekly Deadline: Thursday at 5 p.m.

Each post must have at least one source and must advance the story. Sources include: primary documents, interviews conducted by you during the course of this semester, first-hand experiential observations made by you during the course of the semester. (A “first-hand experiential observation” is something that you see, hear, touch, taste or smell.)

All blog posts must adhere to AP and UNC Style. Posts that do not adhere use correct spelling, grammar and style will be penalized.

You are free to propose your own beat. In fact, you will be required to write a memo to me pitching the idea for your blog. The pitch must describe:

- your audience
- your potential sources
- 20 story ideas/questions
- who else covering that topic
- One event can you live blog

We will talk more about what kinds of beats are appropriate.

Details on the multimedia and interactive elements of your blog are listed at the end of this syllabus.

Carrboro Commons

Carrboro Commons is the semi-weekly publication written by students in the Community Journalism class and edited by students in the Advanced Editing class. Students in this class will be responsible for the online presence of the Commons. Starting in Week Five, we will begin a regular schedule of writing headlines and blurbs for the Commons as well as posting the stories online. Each issue date is noted in the calendar section below.

Annotated Link Posts

Students in this class will use the site Del.ici.ous to keep a running commentary of current issues in online journalism as well as critiques of online news sites. You must post one link each week. Each post must be related to a topic discussed in class or the topic of your blog. Each post must have a comment by you and at least one tag.

- First Delicious post: Week 2, Jan. 25
- You must post at least once per week, for a total of 13 posts.
- Weekly Deadline: Tuesday at 5 p.m.

Quizzes

We will have three in-class quizzes. The quizzes will each have five questions. Each question will be worth two points. Details of quiz topics and dates are in the calendar section below.

RSS Feeds:

You must subscribe to cyberjournalist.net (due 1/25), OJR (due 1/25), and two feeds I will set up for class (both due 2/15).

Extra Credit and Point Penalties

During the course of the semester, I have picked 10 class dates at random on which I will assign 1 extra credit point for everyone in attendance. Students may earn up to a total of 10 bonus attendance points.

On occasion, I will invite guest speakers from the online news industry to the class. When they attend, you are expected to engage them with the curiosity expected of journalists. Failure to do so reflects poorly on you, reflects poorly on the School and makes it more difficult for you and your classmates to get hired. It will also cost you a 10-point penalty on your final grade. This includes any absence for any reason on days we have guest speakers.

One of the most fun things about online journalism is that the rules are yet to be written, and a good idea often counts for as much as years of experience in traditional reporting and editing. I strongly encourage students to look for opportunities to propose new ideas and get money to make them a reality. Therefore, students may earn up to 10 bonus points for submitting an application to one of the following:

- Knight News Challenge (www.newschallenge.org)
- Batten Awards for Innovation in Journalism (<http://www.j-lab.org/batten.shtml>)
- Sunlight Foundation Transparency Grant (<http://www.sunlightfoundation.com/grants>)
- Carolina Challenge (<http://www.carolinachallenge.org>)
- Social Justice Entrepreneurship Incubator at the Campus Y (<http://www.kenaninstitute.unc.edu/centers/cei/files/SJEIApplication.doc>)
- Knight J-Lab New Voices (<http://www.j-newvoices.org/site/story/2008rfp/>)

Absences and Late Assignments

My absence and deadline policy begins with the premise that we expect each other to behave like professionals. I will hold you to those standards and I expect you to hold me to the same. In the professional world, deadlines don't wait on anything. And when you're out, someone else has to pick up the slack. What that means for this class:

- You can miss deadlines during the course of the semester by a cumulative total of up to 72 hours without consequence. This includes quizzes, edits, blog posts – everything. After 72 hours, your final grade starts being reduced by one letter grade for each 24 hours of additional tardiness.
- Don't be late. It disrupts your classmates. If I've started class, you're late.
- If you are absent for a class in which we have a guest speaker, your final grade is docked 10 points. The only excuses I will consider will be accompanied by a doctor's note or an obituary.
- Missed quizzes. If you plan to miss a quiz, you must make arrangements with me before the quiz date to schedule another time for you to take the quiz. Missed quizzes for which prior arrangements are not made are an automatic score of zero. Even if you are allowed to reschedule the quiz, any delay is counted toward your total allowable missed deadline hours.

CALENDAR

Class 1: Jan. 10

Lecture Topic: Administrivia, Student Survey, The Three Pillars of Online Journalism, Threats and Opportunities

Reading Assignment:

State of the News Media 2007 (45 pgs);

Journalism 2.0, pp 8-10

Readings to be assigned on Dreamweaver, HTML and CSS

WEEK 1

Tech Skill: Dreamweaver, HTML, CSS

Concept: The Online Audience

Class 2: Jan. 15

QUIZ: State of the News Media 2007

GUEST: Jock Lauterer, Carrboro Commons

Lecture: Macro Online Audience

Class 3: Jan. 17

Lecture: Micro Online Audience

Questions about HTML, CSS, Dreamweaver

Reading Assignment:

Journalism 2.0, pp. 16-40 – RSS;

WEEK 2

Tech Skill: RSS and Tagging

Concept: Writing Online Headlines and Blurbs

Class 4: Jan. 22

QUIZ: The Online Audience

Lecture: The Online Stylebook; Critiquing headlines and blurbs

Class 5: Jan. 24

Lecture: The Web is Us(ing) Us video; Tagging and RSS feeds; Your Blog Ideas

DUE ON 1/25: RSS Feeds Set Up

DUE 1/25: Your First Delicious Post

Reading:

Wordpress FAQs

<http://poynterextra.org/eyetrack2004/main.htm>

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>

WEEK 3

Tech Skill: Wordpress

Concept: Building Links

Class 6: Jan. 29

DUE TODAY: YOUR BLOG PROPOSAL

Lecture: Setting Up Wordpress; Building Links

Class 7: Jan. 31

Lecture: Setting Up Wordpress; Building Links

Reading:

Journalism 2.0, pp 80-88

PHOTOSHOP TUTORIAL TBD

WEEK 4

Tech Skill: Photoshop

Concept: Search Engine Optimization

Class 8: Feb. 5

DUE TODAY: Homepage Headlines and Blurbs Critique

Lecture: SEO

Class 9: Feb. 7

In-Class Exercise: Editing an Image with Photoshop

DUE 2/8: YOUR FIRST BLOG POST

Readings:

Journalism 2.0, pp. 41-51 and pp. 62-79

Audacity Tutorial at

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/manual-1.2/tutorials.html>

NewsU: "Telling Stories With Sound"

WEEK 5

Tech Skill: Editing Audio with Audacity

Concept: Reporting for Online

Class 10: Feb. 12

Lecture: Reporting for Online

Class 11: Feb. 14

EDIT CARRBORO COMMONS IN CLASS

Working with Sound

Reading:

Journalism 2.0, pp. 52-61 – How to Blog

Soundslides Tutorial at:

mindymcadams.com/guest/diversity1/Priddy_Slideshows_v1dot2.pdf

WEEK 6

Tech Skill: Soundslides

Concept: Blogging

Class 12: Feb. 19

GUESTS: Panel Discussion with Bloggers

Class 13: Feb. 21

Working with Soundslides in class

Reading:

Journalism 2.0, pp. 89-99 – shooting video

WEEK 7

Tech Skill: Shooting Video

Concept: When to Use Multimedia

Class 14: Feb. 26

Looking at Video Projects Online

Class 15: Feb. 28

EDIT CARRBORO COMMONS IN CLASS

Working on Video Shooting

Reading:

Journalism 2.0, pp. 100-114 – editing video

WEEK 8

Tech Skill: Editing video

Class 16: March 4

Working on Editing Videos

Class 17: March 6

Working on Editing Videos

Reading:

We the Media. QUIZ on March 20

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9

Concept: Interactivity and Community

Class 18: March 18

Discuss *We the Media* in class.

Class 19: March 20

QUIZ: We the Media

Lecture: Review of online communities

Reading: TBA

WEEK 10

Concept: Corrections, Updates and Transparency

Class 20: March 25

DUE: Community Policy for Your Blog

Lecture: Corrections, Updates and Transparency

Class 21: March 27

EDIT CARRBORO COMMONS IN CLASS

Reading: TBA

WEEK 11

Skill: Fielded Data

Class 22: April 1

DUE: Corrections and Update Policy for Your Blog

Lecture: Conceptualizing a Data Story

Class 23: April 3

In-Class Exercise: Working With Data in Excel

Reading: TBA

WEEK 12

Skill: Introduction to Flash

Class 24: April 8

Class 25: April 10

EDIT CARRBORO COMMONS IN CLASS

Reading: TBA

WEEK 13

Class 26: April 15

Class 27: April 17

Reading: TBA

WEEK 14

Class 28: April 22

Class 29: April 24

EDIT CARRBORO COMMONS IN CLASS

Grading Scale for Beat Blog Multimedia & Interactive Elements

As part of the class, you are expected to make 10 posts to your beat blog. You will receive up to 2 points for each entry, but you also need to earn 30 points for the incorporation of multimedia and/or interactive elements to your blog.

You may earn those 30 points in a variety of ways. Each type of element in the menu below has a certain number of points associated with it. You can use any combination of the elements listed here to earn those 30 points.

Next to each element are two numbers. The first number is the maximum number of points you can earn each time you use the element. The second number is the maximum number of points you can earn for the use of that element over the course of the semester. (For example, if you post a link to a primary source document on your blog, you can earn one point. You can earn one point for each of your first 10 posts with a link to primary source documents. You are welcome to do 11 or more such posts, but you will only points on the first 10.)

Here is the menu:

- Post with links to primary source(s): 1 point per post / 10 points total per semester
- An FAQ on your beat: 5/10
- Evergreen “explainer”: 5/10
- Creation of an additional RSS feed beyond your site’s primary RSS feed: 1/2
- Adding metadata to your blog for Search Engine Optimization: 5/5
- Live blog a planned event for at least 2 hours: 5/5
- Email newsletter: 5/5
- Live blog an unplanned event for at least 2 hours: 10/10
- Data-driven post, using Excel: 5/10
- Blog post with at least three comments on it 1/10
- Corrections policy for your site: 4/4
- Community policy for your site: 4/4
- For each audience centric post: 2/6
- A distributed reporting assignment: 10/10
- Interactive discussion with newsmaker: 5/5
- Timeline using simile: 5/5
- Photo: 2/10
- Audio interview: 5/10
- Audio slideshow: 10/10
- Video report: 10/10
- Flash or AJAX package: 26
- A live, interactive database: 28

Ideas for Blog Beats: A Very Incomplete List

- Latinos in N.C.
- Franklin Street businesses
- Northern Chatham County – schools, development and politics
- Any local delegation of state legislators
- Chapel Hill music scene
- The drought
- Biotech in NC
- Agriculture in NC
- The N.C. congressional delegation
- Homelessness in Chapel Hill
- Income inequality in Orange County
- Environmental issues in the Triangle
- Health insurance
- Triangle real estate and development
- N.C. real estate and politics
- “ABCNews’s ‘The Blotter’”
- “ChronicleWatch on SFChron.com”
- John Edwards
- Free lunch students in N.C.
- Domestic violence in N.C.
- The N.C. governor’s race or another state political contest
- The search for a new chancellor
- Student Congress
- Religion on Campus
- A veteran returning from Iraq
- Online newsrooms in N.C.
- Youth sports in Chapel Hill, Carrboro or Hillsborough
- UNC Intramural sports
- Triangle restaurant scene
- 2 a.m to 6 a.m. in Chapel Hill
- minimum wage workers in Chapel Hill
- UNC housekeepers
- All UNC students from a certain county or city
- Any non-revenue sport at UNC
- Traditionally black colleges
- Public service at UNC
- Entrepreneurs at UNC
- Foreign students at UNC
- UNC students studying abroad
- N.C. and the Olympics
- Churches in Chapel Hill
- The immoral and illegal activities of Duke students