

# Newsreporting – JOU 301

## Spring 2008

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Office Hours: T & R – 9:30 -11:30 a.m.  
& by appointment

Class Location: 1078 Weimer Hall Class Time: M, W, F – 9:35-10:25 a.m.

**Objectives and Course Description:** This course is designed to give you the foundational skills and knowledge to be a successful news reporter. This is a “hands-on” course, which means you will be actively interviewing sources and writing stories on deadline to give you the experience of a working journalist. This course will also introduce you to the fundamental elements of a news story, strategies for gathering information, story structure, and writing in AP style.

The format for class periods will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and editorial meetings. All readings should be completed by the time you come to class. Assignments will be given for you to complete both in and out of class. Each student will be assigned a news beat to cover. You will choose the beat you want to cover, but it should be related to university life in some way. I will approve your beat.

Because reporters in a newsroom often have to “rework” their stories, you will be allowed to rewrite 5 of your stories one time for a better grade. You can also increase your grade for up to two stories by one letter grade if your stories are published outside of class. The student newspaper is one example of a good place to try to get your story published. Self-publication (e.g. your own Website or blog) will not count for extra credit. **Only stories turned in on time will be eligible for extra credit or grade improvement.**

### Required Texts and Materials

- *Associated Press Stylebook*. (2007, 2006, or 2005). Norm Goldstein (Ed.). New York: Associated Press.
- *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (2007). Carole Rich. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- *The Gainesville Sun* – Students must bring one current news article to class each week

### Recommended Materials

- Audio recorder – Helpful for interviews. I recommend a digital recorder that has a USB connection to pull sound files onto your computer for editing.
- Reporter’s notebook

### Prerequisites:

1. You must have completed the required General Education English requirement (ENC 101 & 102), as well as Mass Communication and Society (MMC 251).
2. You must have a strong command of written English. You will be expected to use correct grammar and spelling.
3. You must be able to type a minimum of 20 words per minute.

**Academic Honesty:** You are responsible to abide by the University of Florida's policy of Academic Honesty. You are expected to do your own work and properly cite the research or ideas of others. Cheating or plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. Misrepresentation or fabrication of any information will likewise not be tolerated. If you fail to abide by these policies, you will automatically receive a zero on the assignment. In addition, I will follow the Judicial Process for Honor Code Violations to handle the situation according to university policy. If you have any questions about whether or not something is a violation of academic honesty, **ask me!** You can also find more information about the university's academic honesty policy at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.php>.

**Accommodation for Students With Disabilities:** Students needing classroom accommodation for a disability must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student, who will then bring a copy of this documentation to me. If you do have a disability that requires accommodation, please do not hesitate to request it, even if you don't believe you'll need it during the course of the class. You can contact the Dean of Students Office by calling (352) 392-1261, or going to their Web site at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu>.

**Classroom Policies:**

- Turn off your cell phone and put it away
- No food. You may bring a drink if it has a lid, but please no spills and make sure you throw your garbage away at the end of class.
- Laptops are not allowed to be used during lecture or class discussions. There may be times when we break off to work independently or in groups that you will be allowed to use your laptop. I'll let you know. Otherwise, please keep your laptop turned off and put away.
- You will be expected to participate in discussions. All students are expected to maintain a respectful attitude toward their fellow classmates and to me. Insults, rudeness and any other behavior unfit for the classroom will not be tolerated.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two unexcused absences throughout the semester without penalty. Absences such as weddings, vacations, conflicts with other classes, etc. are considered unexcused. You must arrange with me to make up any missed assignments ahead of time. You must provide documentation for any additional, unforeseeable absences (i.e. illness, death in the family, etc.). Any unexcused absence after two absences will result in your final class grade reduced by one letter grade.

**Tardiness:** Please be courteous to your fellow students and me – arrive for class on time. If you arrive to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be considered tardy. I'll let you slide once. After that, any tardy will result in your final class grade reduced by 2 percent. I will also probably call attention to your lack of timeliness in class when you come in.

**Deadlines:** Newsrooms operate on deadlines. You might as well start getting used to it now. All assignments must be turned in by the beginning of class on the day they are due. If you find you are having trouble with an assignment, come to me **ahead of time**. In some cases, with my permission in advance, you may be allowed to turn in an assignment up to 24 hours late for a reduction of one letter grade on the assignment. In all other cases, any deadline not met will result in a zero for the assignment.

**Covering Your Beat:** Each student will be assigned a news beat to cover for this class. We will discuss possible beats in class. I must approve your beat before you start working on stories.

You will be required to complete 10 news stories throughout the semester. You must turn in a budget item for each story before you start to work on it. Each story must include at least two sources. You must turn in a source sheet with each story listing the names and contact information of your sources.

This is your beat! In most cases, unless there is something important I think you really need to cover, I will not tell you what stories to write. You must come up with story ideas on your own. So, it's very important you get to know your beat. Talk to everyone you can who may know what's happening on your beat. It's your job to report the news!

**Errors and Penalties:** You are expected to have a strong command of written English. Errors in spelling, grammar, AP style, etc. will result in a 5 percent penalty off your grade for that story. A fact error will result in a **50** percent penalty off your grade for the assignment. So, make sure you edit your work carefully and get your facts right! Stories with only one human source will also result in a 50 percent penalty. Stories with no human source will automatically result in a **0** for the assignment. You may interview sources by e-mail only if this is your last resort, and you must come see me beforehand. An e-mail interview cannot be your only source for a story.

**Current Events:** The best way to learn how to write a news story is by reading other news stories. You will be expected to come to class every Monday with one story from the previous week that you have read and found interesting. We will be using these stories for in-class assignments, so make sure you bring a copy to class with you. These exercises will be factored in to your class participation grade. **Note: These stories should be from a professional newspaper – local or national. Please do not bring stories from the student newspaper, magazines, or other non-newspaper publications.**

**AP Style Quizzes:** AP style is the standard in the newspaper business. Therefore, you will be expected to know it well. There will be 12 quizzes over the semester and you will be allowed to drop the lowest two grades. These are open-book, open-note quizzes, but there is no sharing of answers. You will have approximately 15 minutes to complete each quiz. So, make sure you come to class prepared on the day of the quiz. Make-up quizzes will only be given if you notify me in advance that you will be unable to attend class on the day of a quiz.

**Final Exam:** There will be one exam at the end of the course. The exam will test material covered in the reading and material covered in class. I will hold a review session during the class period before the day of the exam. It is your responsibility to be in class for the review, or to get the notes from a classmate. I will not go over the review again for any student who misses it the first time.

Except in extremely rare and unforeseeable circumstances (i.e. death in the family, tragic accidents, etc.), I will not allow a student to make up the exam. In such cases, you must provide documentation.

**Grading:** Grades will be determined as follows –

News stories	40 points X 10 Stories	=	400 points
AP Style Quizzes	20 points X 10 Quizzes	=	200 points
Final Exam		=	200 points
Class Participation		=	200 points

**Total points possible** **1,000 points**

Final grades will be assigned on the standard break-points: 90%-plus = A, 87%-89% = B+, 80%-86% = B, 77%-79% = C+, 70%-76% = C, 67%-69% = D+, 60%-66% = D, less than 60% = E. It is unlikely that the grades will be curved.

## Schedule of Topics and Assignments

### Week 1

M – Jan. 7

Introduction to the course

W – Jan. 9

Discussion of news beats, pitching a news story and understanding a budget item

F – Jan. 11

Assignment of news beats

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 1**

### Week 2

M – Jan. 14

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapters 1&2

The Basic News Story

W – Jan. 16

#### **AP Style Quiz 1**

Rich – Chapters 1&2 (continued)

The Basic News Story

F – Jan. 18

#### **Story 1 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 2**

### Week 3

M – Jan. 21

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (No class)**

W – Jan. 23

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 3

Curiosity and Story Ideas

F – Jan. 25

#### **Story 2 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 3**

Rich – Chapter 3 (continued)

Curiosity and Story Ideas

### Week 4

M – Jan. 28

Current events discussion

Chapter 7

Leads and Nut Graphs

W – Jan. 30

#### **AP Style Quiz 2**

Rich – Chapter 7 (continued)

Leads and Nut Graphs

F – Feb. 1

#### **Story 3 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 4**

### Week 5

M – Feb. 4

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 8

Story Structure

W – Feb. 6

#### **AP Style Quiz 3**

Rich – Chapter 8 (continued)

Story Structure

F – Feb. 8

#### **Story 4 due**

Discussion of challenges in covering the news

### Week 6

M – Feb. 11

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 4

Sources and Online Research

W – Feb. 13

#### **AP Style Quiz 4**

Rich – Chapter 4 (continued)

Sources and Online Research

F – Feb. 15

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 5**

**Week 7**

M – Feb. 18

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 5

Interviewing Techniques

W – Feb. 20

**AP Style Quiz 5**

Rich – Chapter 5 (continued)

Interviewing Techniques

F – Feb. 22

**Story 5 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 6**

**Week 8**

M – Feb. 25

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 6

Grammar and Usage

W – Feb. 27

**AP Style Quiz 6**

Rich – Chapter 6 (continued)

Grammar and Usage

F – Feb. 29

**Story 6 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 7**

**Week 9**

M – March 3

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 17

Beat Reporting

W – March 5

**AP Style Quiz 7**

Rich – Chapter 17 (continued)

Beat Reporting

F – March 7

**Story 7 due**

**Spring Break: March 10 – March 14 (No Classes)**

**Week 10**

M – March 17

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 18

Speeches, New Conferences and Meetings

W – March 19

**AP Style Quiz 8**

Rich – Chapter 18

Speeches, New Conferences and Meetings

F – March 21

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 8**

**Week 11**

M – March 24

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 19

Government and Statistical Stories

W – March 26

**AP Style Quiz 9**

Rich – Chapter 19

Government and Statistical Stories

F – March 28

**Story 8 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 9**

**Week 12**

M – March 31

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 20

Crime and Punishment

W – April 2

**AP Style Quiz 10**

Rich – Chapter 20 (continued)

Crime and Punishment

F – April 4

**Story 9 due**

Turn in budget item/pitching **Story 10**

**Week 13**

M – April 7

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 21

Disasters, Weather and Tragedies

W – April 9

**AP Style Quiz 11**

Rich – Chapter 21 (continued)

Disasters, Weather and Tragedies

F – April 11

**Story 10 due**

**Week 14**

M – April 14

Current events discussion

Rich – Chapter 22

Profiles and Obituaries

W – April 16

**AP Style Quiz 12**

Rich – Chapter 22 (continued)

Profiles and Obituaries

F – April 18

**Final edits due for all stories**

Open Discussion

**Week 15**

M – April 21

Test Review

W – April 23

**Final Exam**