GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

MPJO-501-01: REPORTING & NEWS WRITING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Tuesdays, 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. | Fall 2014

Instructor: Ryan Beckwith
Downtown campus, room C229

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Journalism begins with basic reporting. This class focuses on the basics of beat reporting, one of the building blocks of any newsroom and journalism career. The class will also take a closer look at the reporting and writing process, from finding an idea to researching it, pitching it and executing it into a publishable article. Students will strive to become experts on the neighborhood they cover through old-school shoe leather reporting and will keep abreast of spot news while learning how to identify and pursue longer-form enterprise stories.

The class will also have a Twitter handle and Facebook page — DChoods — where students will publish routinely and practice writing for social media and cultivating sources and finding story ideas using these new tools. The updates on Twitter and Facebook will not just be news stories, but also tidbits collected during visits to the neighborhood, which should be visited weekly at minimum.

This is a core course of the MPS Journalism program, and students must earn a "B" (83) or higher to pass the course. Please see the Graduate Student Handbook for more details.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will:

- Know the basics of news reporting, including finding story ideas and angles
- Have experience managing, monitoring and mapping out a geographic beat
- Know the basics of pre-reporting and pitching story ideas
- Practice writing quickly and concisely, and translating for a general-interest audience
- Understand the differences between writing for print, online and broadcast
- Be familiar with commonly used AP style rules and common grammar mistakes
- Know the basic structure of news and feature stories and be able to recognize the difference
- Know how to identify and develop sources on a beat

REQUIRED READING

Extensive reading is a prerequisite for good writing. There are three required texts for this course, but students should be reading regularly about their beat on local blogs, social networks and on other media outlets to get ideas to identify sources. Examples include but are not limited to DCist.com, City Paper, Hill Rag, PoPville, Bethesda or Arlington or Reston Now

(these are all owned by the same people and are entrepreneurial ventures in the area) and the Current newspapers.

Required Reading

Title: News Reporting and Writing
Author: Melvin Mencher
ISBN: 0073511994
Edition: 12th
Publisher: The McGraw-Hill Companies
Year: 2010
Price: $81.99 (Amazon)

Title: On Writing Well
Author: William Zinsser
ISBN: 0060891548
Publisher: Harper Paperbacks
Year: 2006
Price: $9.45 (Amazon)

Title: The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law
Author: Associated Press
ISBN: 0917360567
Publisher: Basic Books
Year: 2012
Price: $22.95 (Amazon)

Other readings will be made available on the class Blackboard site.

EQUIPMENT

If you do not already have a digital audio recorder, it is strongly recommended that you purchase one for use on class assignments. You will also need a laptop to complete in-class deadline drills and other assignments.

ATTENDANCE

As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Absences for classes beyond the initial two will result in further reduction of the final grade. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

This class relies heavily on attendance and participation. Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let

the instructor know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions.

In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

The class assignments consist of a beat memo, an enterprise reporting plan, eight stories (including written pitches for all but one) and regular social media posts.

The eight stories will each follow the same process: pitch, write and optional rewrite. Each of the steps has a corresponding deadline. Late work will not be accepted because in the working world of journalism deadlines are non-negotiable. All late work will receive an initial grade of a zero.

You will also have to submit a list of three tweets and one Facebook post that could potentially go along with your story (they don't have to be actually posted).

Each story will be emailed to the instructor by the assigned deadline with the title of the assignment in the subject line, for example, "Crime Story" or "Crime Story Rewrite."

Each story must include:

- A headline and graphic suggestions
- A word count
- Photo or Creative Commons-licensed Flickr pic (and proper caption/credit information)
- A list of primary and secondary sources and phone numbers for all primary sources. These sources will on occasion be spot-checked by the instructor, so please inform all subjects that they may receive a call from your instructor.
- Multiple sources (You must quote or paraphrase at least two people in each story. Saying you talked to more people and quoting only one is still a one-source story. One-source stories will receive a zero.)

Stories handed in that exceed the word count by more than 100 words — or are below the word count by 100 words or more — will automatically be given a grade reduction of one level (for example, from A to A-).

For every story, students can choose to do a rewrite for a higher grade. The higher grade will replace the grade earned on the first draft of the story.

One exception to this rule is the reporting plan for the enterprise piece. It will be updated with an outline and additional questions and sources. The grades for the first version and the updated version will be averaged.

Deadlines separate journalism from mere writing. You must meet them. All late work will receive a grade of a zero, unless you have asked for an extension of the deadline **prior** to the piece being due. Students will only be excused from deadlines due to genuine emergencies, but all reasonable effort must be made to notify the instructor ahead of time.

All formal, written pitches for stories will be due at 10 a.m. on the Friday after class. All first drafts of stories will be due a week later, on the subsequent Friday at 5 p.m. and rewrites one week after that. Note that the deadlines for the enterprise story and its corresponding parts are exceptions, due to the Thanksgiving holiday. See details below:

1. A beat memo about the area you cover. Due Sept. 16. No rewrite.
2. A 500-word event or spot news story. Pitch due: Sept. 19. Story due: Sept. 26. Rewrite due: Sept. Oct. 3.
3. A 500-word story on a topic of your choice from your selected beat. Pitch due: Sept. 26. Story due: Oct. 3. Rewrite due: Oct. 10.
4. A 550-word follow-up story on one of your previous stories OR a follow-up story on another news article from the competition. Pitch due: Oct. 3. Story due: Oct. 10. Rewrite due: Oct. 17.
5. A 500-word story on local politics/government (Students will be required to attend a city council meeting pertinent to their beat or other government meeting for this assignment). Pitch due: Oct. 10. Story due: Oct. 17. Rewrite due: Oct. 24. (Note: Students may arrange for alternate deadline in order to attend a meeting.)
6. A 500-word story on crime. (Students will be required to do a cop ride as part of this assignment). Pitch due Oct. 24. Story due: Oct. 31. Rewrite due: Nov. 7.
7. A 600-word story on business. Pitch due Oct. 31. Story due: Nov. 7. Rewrite due: Nov. 14.
8. A 700-word feature OR profile story. Pitch due: Nov. 21. Story due Nov. 28. Rewrite: Dec. 5.
9. A 1,000-word enterprise story. This story cannot come from a press release and must reflect a major issue that is unique to your beat. Ideas due: Oct. 24. Final pitch due: Oct. 31. Reporting plan due: Nov. 7. Reporting plan update and outline due: Nov. 14. First draft due: Dec. 1 (5 p.m.). Optional second draft due: Dec. 10 (5 p.m.). Final version due: Dec. 18 (5 p.m.).

Non-writing assignments:
* Three original tweets, three RTs each week on @DCHoods

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Class participation (including on Twitter/Facebook accounts):	15 points
Beat memo:	5 points
Reporting plan/outline for enterprise piece:	15 points
Various stories off beat:	35 points (5 points each)
Final enterprise story:	30 points
Total:	**100 points**

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program
  202-687-4246
  http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/

- Academic Resource Center
  202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
  http://ldss.georgetown.edu/

- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
  202-687-6985
  http://caps.georgetown.edu/

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm) before the start of classes to allow time to review the

documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out http://www.plagiarism.org.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of our agenda. The instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.

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CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2) WHAT IS NEWS?

- Discussion: How does a reporter find news? What makes a piece of information newsworthy? How do you rank different stories within a publication? Also, we will go over the syllabus.
- Workshop: Students will look at a sample budget of stories, discuss what makes each of the stories on it a story and choose which ones they would run for different types of publications.
- Workshop: The class will take a short walk around Chinatown in search of story ideas.

Homework due September 9: Come to class next week with your top three selections for a neighborhood beat in the D.C. metropolitan area. Write up three story ideas from your top choice for the beat.

Students must select a neighborhood in D.C., or a city/town in Maryland or Northern Virginia that is incorporated (or has its own government) and is convenient to their home or workplace. Students should spend some time in each of the neighborhoods before selecting them, walking around and getting a feel for the place. They should also pick a neighborhood with issues that interest them. In general, predominantly residential areas in nicer neighborhoods are not recommended as it is harder to find news in them.

Reading for September 9:

- Components of the Story in Mencher
- What Is News in Mencher
- Digging for Information in Mencher
- Selection from “News is a Verb” on Blackboard
- Selection from “The Kingdom and the Power” on Blackboard

WEEK 2 (TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9) BEAT ASSIGNMENTS, BRAINSTORMING AND PITCHING

- Discussion: What is a beat? How does a reporter find news off a beat? How do you develop official and unofficial sources? How do you decide what are the best stories off a beat? How do you go from idea to pitch?
- Presentation: A guest from the Georgetown University library will show how to use Nexis, ProQuest and other professional tools to do research on your beat and other topics. We will also discuss how to find local sources through social media.
- Workshop: Students will make pitches for their chosen beat and decide as a group who covers what. (Instructor has the final say.) We will hold a news meeting to select story ideas from your beat.

Assignments due September 16: Write a beat memo for your new neighborhood to hand in by

the beginning of class. The beat memo should include a list of possible story ideas for the semester. Bring in a recent news release from your beat or come ready to pitch an event.

Reading for September 16:

- Speeches, Meetings and News Conferences in Mencher
- Selection from "The Image," Daniel J. Boorstin, Chapter 1: From News Gathering to News Making, pp. 7-44, available on Blackboard.

WEEK 3 (TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16) EXECUTING AND IDEA/THE EVENT OR SPOT STORY

- Discussion: The difference between spot news and enterprise news. How do reporters prepare for speeches, rallies and other planned events? Where do you look for angles that set your story apart? What about breaking news? What makes a good story idea and how do you get from idea to reporting?
- Workshop: Students will write a short event story based on a news release in class.
- Workshop: We will conduct a news meeting where students will pitch their ideas for spot news stories.

Assignment: Write an event or spot story. Students will need to pre-clear the event with the instructor. Do as much reporting as you can before the next class on your spot/event piece. Bring in your reporting notes.

- Final event/spot story pitch due: 10 a.m. Friday, Sept. 19
- Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 26
- Rewrite due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 3

Reading for September 23:

- Story Structure in Mencher
- The Lead in Mencher
- George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," on Blackboard

WEEK 4 (TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23) STRUCTURING A NEWS STORY

- Discussion: Now that you have all your reporting done, how do you begin to organize it into a news story? In this class we will go over the basics of story structure working with published pieces of journalism. We will discuss types of ledes, nut grafs, lede quotes and how to sift through your notes to find the nuggets to put into a story.
- Workshop: Outline a piece of journalism from a prominent publication and dissect its structure.
- Workshop: Bring reporting notes in for your spot/event story and work with other students to begin to outline the piece and find holes.

Assignment: Write a 500-word piece on a topic of your choosing, related to the beat memo story ideas.

- Final pitch for first open-ended piece: 10 a.m. Friday, Sept. 26

- Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 3
- Rewrite due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10

Reading for September 30:

- Interviewing Principles and Interviewing Practices in Mencher
- Reading from "Conducting Interviews" on Blackboard

WEEK 5 (TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30) THE INTERVIEW/THE FOLLOW-UP STORY

- Discussion: How does a reporter get a source to open up? What are some common tricks of the trade? What is the difference between friendly and hostile interviews? How do you find an angle?
- Discussion: How do you identify ideas for follow-up stories?
- Deadline drill: Students will go onto the streets of Chinatown and do a 15-minute interview with a subject and come back, discuss it and write a short story based on it.
- Workshop: Backgrounding an individual. Drafting questions for an interview.
- Workshop: Students will be given stories in class that have generated follow-up stories and try to identify where to go next.

Assignment:

- For the next class, students will need to find recent examples of government and politics stories on their beat and have an idea for a government story to pitch.
- Final pitch due for follow-up story: 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 3
- Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10
- Rewrite due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 17

Reading for October 7:

- Local Government in Mencher
- The Writer's Art in Mencher

WEEK 6 (TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7) LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

- Discussion: How do you cover a government meeting? Where do you look in an agenda to find the potential story or stories? How can you prepare before a meeting to file a better story quickly afterward? Discussion of recent government/politics stories off your beat and potential follows.
- Workshop: Transcript of recent city council hearing or watch archived video of city council meeting and practice spotting the news in the thicket of bureaucracy.
- Workshop: Students will be given a series of bureaucratic terms and sentences and translate those into plain English.

Assignments:

1. Arrange for your cop ride in your neighborhood during the week of Oct. 21.

- Final pitch due for government/politics story: 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 10
- Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 17 unless other arrangements are made
- Rewrite due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 24 unless other arrangements are made

Reading for October 14:

- How a Digital First approach guides a journalist's work by Steve Buttry: http://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2011/12/19/how-a-digital-first-approach-guides-a-journalists-work/
- 7 steps to relevance in digital journalism by Nathan Bernier: http://editorial.digitalservices.npr.org/post/7-steps-relevance-digital-journalism
- The transition to digital journalism: Facebook and social networks by Paul Grabowicz: http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/digital-transform/social-networks/

WEEK 7 (TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14) WRITING FOR ONLINE/SOCIAL MEDIA

- Discussion: How do you write for online/social media? What are the tips and techniques that draw and sustain an audience? How do tone, length and content differ from other news media?
- Workshop: Students will be given a real-world blog and told to find potential items from other news media for it. After a class discussion about their suggestions, they will write three brief items in the style of the blog.
- Workshop: Review some tweets and Facebook posts from the class to date. What worked? What didn't?

Reading for October 21:

- Police Reporting in Mencher
- Reading from "The Good Times" on Blackboard

WEEK 8 (TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21) CRIME REPORTING

- Discussion**:** How do you cover crime? What makes some crimes newsworthy and others not? What are the legal and ethical concerns when reporting on crime? How do you talk to victims and suspects?
- Workshop: Students will write a crime story on deadline based on information from a charging document.

Assignments:

- Please file to the instructor three ideas for your enterprise piece in pitch form by 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 24
- Crime pitch due: 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 24
- Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 31
- Rewrite due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7

Reading for October 28:

- Business Reporting in Mencher

WEEK 9 (TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28) BUSINESS REPORTING

- Discussion: How do you write about business at the local level? What are some common types of stories about local business? How do you get business sources to open up?
- Workshop: Practicing translation. How to get beyond process/jargon in news writing and specialized reporting.

Assignments:

1. Final pitch for enterprise piece, in pitch format, due 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 31
2. Business story off your beat:
   - Final pitch due for business story: 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 31
   - Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7
   - Rewrite due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 14

Reading for November 4:

- Broadcast Newswriting in Mencher
- "Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production," Jonathan Kern, 2008. Chapter 3: Writing for Broadcast, pp. 25-38.
- TBD on TV reporting/producing

WEEK 10 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4) WRITING FOR BROADCAST

- Discussion: What are the elements of a radio story or TV story? How do you capture ambient sound, write a voice-over and prepare for a live interview?
- Workshop: Students will rewrite a newspaper article into a one-minute radio spot, including an introduction from the host.
- Workshop: Students will rewrite the top of the same story for a TV report.

Assignments:

1. Continue working on enterprise story: Compose a reporting plan for your enterprise piece. The plan should include list of sources to be interviewed/should be interviewed. It should list critical questions that need to be answered and critical pieces of evidence that are needed. It should also include the central question that the piece is trying to answer. Due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7. Rewrite of reporting plan with additional questions and preliminary outline of piece**.** Due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 14. (The grades for the initial reporting plan and the update will be averaged.)

WEEK 11 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11) MEET THE EDITOR SESSION

One-on-one sessions with the instructor this week to discuss past assignments, rewrites, ideas for future stories, etc. Prior to this class, I will pass a sign-up sheet around so each student will get an assigned time.

Assignments:

- Rewrite of enterprise reporting plan with additional questions and preliminary outline of piece**.** Due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 14. (The grades for the initial reporting plan and the update will be averaged.)

Reading for November 18:

- "The Art and Craft of Feature Writing," William Blundell, Chapter 4: Planning and Execution, pp. 69-93.
- "Writing for Story," Jon Franklin, Chapter 4: Stalking the True Short Story, pp. 70-90
- Features, Long Stories and Series in Mencher
- Making Sound Observations in Mencher

WEEK 12 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18) THE PROFILE/FEATURE

- Discussion: How do you structure a profile? How do you make your readers care about a profile subject? Which parts of their life story do you include? What are the telling details that sell the story?
- Discussion: What makes a good feature story? Where do you find ideas for features? How can you use the power of description and observation to make your feature writing stand out?
- Workshop: Students will pair up to interview each other and write the introduction to a short profile of their classmate.
- Workshop (time permitting): Students will have 20 to 30 minutes in Chinatown to capture some telling detail and write up a short story.

Assignments:

- Final feature/profile pitch due: 10 a.m. Friday, Nov. 21
- Story due: 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 28
- Rewrite: 5 p.m. Friday, Dec. 5

Reading for November 25:

- Hunches, Feelings and Stereotypes in Mencher
- Finding, Cultivating and Using Sources in Mencher

WEEK 13 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25) ENTERPRISE REPORTING

- Discussion: How to go deep on a story. Weaving in statistics, data. Introduction to investigative tools. How to find real people to help tell your story. Interview techniques that result in more than just sound bites.
- Workshop: Students will analyze some examples of excellent enterprise pieces and dissect the different elements in them.
- Workshop: Present progress on enterprise stories in class and critique.

Assignment: Finish first draft of enterprise story, due at 5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 1

WEEK 14 (TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2) PEER REVIEW

- Students will be paired together to critique each other's enterprise piece.

Assignment: Continue working on enterprise stories and any outstanding rewrites. Can hand in optional second draft of enterprise story at 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 10. Final enterprise story due at 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 18. No exceptions.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9 – NO CLASS DURING STUDY DAYS

WEEK 15 (TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16) MEET THE JOURNALISTS ROUNDTABLE

A group of reporters and editors working in Washington will come to class for a roundtable discussion on how to break into the business, how they write and edit stories and where they think the industry is headed. If you have a particular publication or type of reporter that you'd like to hear from, let me know early in the semester.