



Syllabus MCOM 2140 - News Writing & Reporting Spring 2006

Tues. / Thurs. 3:00 - 4:50 p.m.
Mass Communications Building, Rm. 113

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Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 1:15 p.m.-2:30 p.m. and by appointment

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Class Web Site: We will be using Blackboard. Also, one or two issues of a class online newspaper called *The MCOM Reporter* will be published at <http://llc.du.edu/cheinrich/reporter06/>.

Required Texts:



News Reporting and Writing, The Missouri Group, 8th edition.
Web site: <http://bedfordstmartins.com/newsreporting/>

2005 Associated Press (AP) Stylebook, The Associated Press

Both books are available at the DU bookstore and from various online sources (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Associated Press, etc.)

Suggested Materials:

Reporters' notebooks

Small tape recorder

Material from additional sources will be posted to the class web site and/or handed out as needed.

Course Objectives

In today's new media age, news reporters and writers need two basic things: Practical, on-the-job skills *and* critical thinking skills. You will learn and develop hands-on skills by reporting and writing stories on national issues of importance, by covering local DU speeches and meetings, athletics and entertainment events and by interviewing people and professionals at DU and beyond. You will be pushed to develop and expand your reporting and writing skills for a variety of traditional and new media formats, including print, broadcast, online and public relations media by writing a lot, in and out of class. You will also be encouraged to expand your reporting and writing skills by reading as much good reporting and writing as possible. The best reporters and writers write a lot. They also voraciously consume others' writing.

The best reporters and writers also get published. Your best stories will be published in a class online newspaper. The online publication, *The MCOM Reporter*, will showcase the best writing and reporting that you, as a class, have produced. The online paper will give you the experience -- and satisfaction -- of seeing your name in print. It will also give you a chance to be read by a potential worldwide audience. You are also strongly encouraged to submit your work to *The Clarion*. There is no better way to break into the news industry than by getting on-the-job experience and generating formally published news clips!

I will push you to build and hone your critical thinking skills by posing provocative and important questions in lecture, in in-class writing prompts, on the class bulletin board and in homework and formal story assignments.

In addition to lectures, discussion and short in-class group activities and presentations, this class will include videos as well as guest speakers with direct experience in a variety of media industries from television to public relations.

Teaching Philosophy

- **Journalists and history.** Journalists are crucial players in society. As a group, they choose and write the stories that the rest of us read and watch. They decide how the stories that we read will be told, or not told. In sum, they mediate reality for the rest of us and write history as it will be read decades and centuries from now. Theirs--and yours--is a privileged and important role. It ought to be taken seriously by all journalists, from print and broadcast journalists to public relations professionals.
- **Journalists and context.** One of the tenets of this class is that it is not enough simply to report "the facts" and what "people say." Good news reporting and writing goes beyond simply providing information to synthesizing and contextualizing this information in useful, interesting, accessible and meaningful ways. In 1947, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press concluded that a free society and a healthy democracy needs journalists that produce "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning." That advice still holds today.
- **Journalists and accuracy, fairness, and multiple points of view.** Good journalists must be committed to accuracy, fairness and to including multiple alternative points of view in their stories. In this class, you will be pushed to say goodbye to the adage, "there are always two points of view on an issue." There are always *more than two points of view on an issue* even if some of these may not be obvious or may not be held by large numbers of "the mainstream."
- **Journalists and "objectivity."** Journalists are often told they must be "objective" and often claim to be "objective." I prefer the term *fair, accurate, multiple-points-of-view* reporting. "Objectivity" is not only impossible--the news reporter cannot step completely outside of human society and *then* write about it--in many cases, it is undesirable. Media scholars have argued that "objectivity" frequently leads to a sort of "he said/she said" journalism that robs news of larger context. Leaning too heavily on "objectivity" can also lead to a societal status quo in which power brokers are able to remake society in their own image without facing hard questions and public accountability.

- **Journalists and Critical Questions.** This class holds that the single most important duty of the efficient, confident, critical and thoughtful news media professional is to **ask informed and critical questions of everyone and everything, including themselves and their own profession.**
- **Journalists and Current Events.** Journalists are expected to keep abreast of current events--local, regional and international. You will be expected to keep on top of current events by way of television, radio, print and Internet news sources. You may read and watch as many different sources of news as you wish. The more the better. However, in order that we can have informed discussion and debate based on the same basic news foundation, you **must** consume the following news sources:
 - ✓ *The Denver Post* (online and/or print version)--at LEAST every other day
 - ✓ The University of Denver *Clarion*--every week!
 - ✓ A local Denver TV newscast--at least once a week
 - ✓ A national TV newscast (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, MSNBC, etc.)--at least once a week
 - ✓ Online news publication (NYT online, MSNBC.com, etc.)--at least once a week

Sources of news, both formal and informal, are virtually limitless. Depending on what media industry you wish to work in you might want to also read/watch the following:

- ✓ For feature/in-depth writing: *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone Magazine*
- ✓ In-depth broadcast news: *20/20*, *60 Minutes*
- ✓ In-depth print news: *Time*, *Newsweek*
- ✓ Mainstream specialty press: *Sports Illustrated*, *Forbes*, *Business Week*, *People Magazine*, etc.

Assignments, Homework, Quizzes, Participation & Attendance

Story Assignments: There are six formal story assignments. Assignment sheets for these are posted on Blackboard.

Deadlines: Deadlines are a fact of life in *all* media industries. Media professionals cannot file stories late. Period. Barring extreme circumstances, you will be expected to file your stories by deadline, or you will receive a zero (F) on that assignment.

AP Style:

You will be expected to adhere to AP style in your six formal stories. Failure to do so will indicate to me basic carelessness and laziness -- definitely NOT attributes an editor wants in his or her writers and reporters -- and will reflect itself in the individual grade you receive for a story assignment.

Story revision. Editors frequently ask reporters to revise their stories. You may revise four of the six formal story assignments. Due dates for revisions are listed in the tentative day-by-day schedule. You are strongly urged to come in and talk to me before revising. *I will average the first grade you with the second grade you earned for your final grade. If you received an 75 on the first story and a 90 on the second, your final story grade would be a an 83.*

Anonymous critique: Expect to occasionally see your work in class. If you do see your work on screen or in photocopied form, do NOT take it as a form of negative or personal criticism. We will be critiquing each another's writing in order to learn from each other and to become better reporters and writers.

Pop Quizzes: There will be five pop quizzes. Your best four quiz grades will count. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class. I will not re-administer quizzes for those who arrive to class late! The questions on these quizzes will relate to the readings, lecture, AP style and grammar and current events. I reserve the right to increase the number of quizzes -- and the total percentage of your quarter grade that they are worth -- if it becomes apparent to me that many students are not keeping up with the class readings. Current events will be considered possible testing material for in-class pop-quizzes.

Short in- and out-of-class writing assignments: The best way to become a better writer and reporter is to write--a lot. The second best way to improve your writing and reporting skills is to read and critique other journalists' work. I will use in- and out-of-class writing prompts and require that you do some short written homework assignments in order to keep you writing and thinking about a variety of important professional and critical social and cultural issues and considerations relevant to those who work in the media and communication industries. Most of these prompts and homework assignments will be posted to the class electronic bulletin board. This will allow other members of the class to benefit from your insights. Hopefully, this bulletin board will also facilitate exchange of ideas, information and knowledge among students.

Participation & Attendance: In-class participation and discussion is vital to a healthy and effective learning environment. You may be periodically called upon to ask/answer questions. You will also be called upon to participate in short in-class group activities and subsequent group presentations. Student names must be affixed to any group work (overheads, etc.) and will be used as a partial basis upon which to determine individual participation grades.

Grading & Attendance

Grading Breakdown:

- Six story assignments 70%
 - obituary = 5%
 - localizing national issue/person-on-street = 10%
 - meeting, speech, lecture = 10%
 - sports, entertainment, business = 10%
 - career and individual profile = 15%
 - in-depth issue story = 20%
- Participation, attendance 10%
- In- and out-of-class assignments 10%
- Pop quizzes (best 4 of 5) 10%

Grading Scale:

93%+	A
90%-92%	A-
87%-89%	B+
83%-86%	B

80%-82%	B-
77%-79%	C+
73-76%	C
70-72%	C-
67%-69%	D+
63%-66%	D
60%-62%	D-
59% -	F

If you attend class, do the required work and have a reasonable grasp of the information, you should have no trouble earning at least a "C," which indicates satisfactory work.

With the exception of documented absences [official doctor's note, etc.] you will NOT be allowed to make up a pop quiz, exam, etc. if you miss class. If you have a legitimate, documented reason for missing an upcoming class [official CU athletic/extracurricular event, etc.], it is your responsibility to inform the instructor beforehand. Some lecture notes will be posted to the class web site. However, not all will be. It is your responsibility to contact other class members for in-class notes, assignment sheets, etc. if you miss class.

Policies

1. Every absence will hurt you -- and the class, which benefits from the full and regular participation of all students. Upon the third absence, the *starting* point from which I compute your quarter grade will be dropped a full letter grade to a 'B' (85). Upon the fourth absence, the starting point will drop to a 'C' (75), the fifth to a 'C-' (70), and so on.
2. Rude or abusive behavior such as talking excessively while the instructor or fellow students are addressing the class and/or personal verbal attacks on another student, groups of students, or the instructor will not be tolerated. This type of behavior will have an extremely negative impact on your participation grade!
3. PLEASE turn off all cell phones/pagers, etc. before coming to class. Thank you :-).
4. Cheating or plagiarizing the work of another will result in an automatic "F" for that assignment. Additionally, university policy permits harsher actions. If you have any questions about what constitutes (or does not constitute) plagiarism, ask me before you turn something in.
5. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please let me know as soon as possible.
6. If you are involved in DU athletics or some other form of extra-curricular activity that will interfere with your attendance, you are required to let me know far ahead of time so that we can make any accommodations that are allowed according to official DU policies.
7. If you have any questions or concerns during the course of the quarter about anything, please feel free to contact me. E-mail (cdemonth@du.edu) is far and away the best way to reach me!