

UC BERKELEY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

(this syllabus was approved by COCI 4-30-15)

# J100 Principles of Journalistic Reporting & Writing

Instructor: TBA

GSI: TBA

Location: TBD

Instructor and GSI Office Hours: TBD

3 units

## Course Objective

This is a fast-paced, intensive introductory course that lays out basic journalistic techniques and principles, introduces students to classic examples of journalistic writing, gives them exposure to professional practitioners and newsmakers, instills ethical behavior, and provides practice in writing various types of news stories. Designed both for those who are new to journalism and those with some journalistic experience, this course will boost the skills of students no matter their level of expertise. There are no prerequisites for this course.

This course will use lectures, readings, and class discussions to familiarize students with key issues that journalists face. Students will also receive hands-on instruction in journalistic methods including interviewing skills, reporting, writing leads, story structure, and working

with speed and accuracy. Students will apply their learning by writing spot news pieces, profiles, and longer form articles.

The course is modular, so you will build basic skills one at a time while working towards more ambitious projects. Each class will focus on a key journalism concept or type of story structure, and will include readings, in-class discussions and some kind of writing or reporting challenge related to the day's theme. Guest speakers may include editors from the San Francisco *Chronicle* and the *Daily Cal*. In addition to the lectures, this is a lively seminar-style class, so your participation is vital for class discussions.

You will be edited much more closely than you may have experienced in other courses. Writing (and rewriting) is the way reporters learn.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

We'll start with the nuts and bolts of reporting: interviewing, quoting and note-taking skills. Then we'll build on that with units on some of the finer skills used in by professional reporters: observing detail, drawing character, and scene-setting.

We'll take a look at some very specialized kinds of reporting -- including an introduction to courts and crime reporting, technology and environment reporting, public records, and culture reporting and arts reviewing.

And finally, we'll take a close look at story structures frequently used by journalists: the spot news story, the hard news feature, the profile, the tick-tock, the essay.

By the end of the course, you should feel comfortable using all of these story structures and deciding which works best for the kind of

story you want to tell. You will be able to produce polished reporting and writing for a blog, an online daily, or a traditional daily or weekly news publication. You should also have the basics of pitching a story, finding sources, conducting interviews, organizing your story, writing (and rewriting) your draft. You should also have a good basic knowledge of at least one content area, properly preparing you to carry out in-depth reporting if you so choose.

## READINGS

- Readings and excerpts from the following books:
- *News Reporting & Writing*, by Melvin Mencher
- *The Interviewer's Handbook* by John Brady, The Writer Books
- “*Digital Journalism*” edited by Kevin Kawamoto, Rowman & Littlefield
- “*Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News*” by Sarah Cohen, IRE
- others to be named

Students who are currently working at the *Daily Cal* or who intend to continue journalism-related work while completing this course are urged to buy a copy of the *Associated Press Style Guide* as a desk reference. It can be purchased on Amazon.com or and as a book or a mobile app at: <http://www.apstylebook.com/>

You should expect to read 3 or 6 feature-length newspaper or magazine stories per week for this course and to read at least one major newspaper daily (online versions are fine). All longer texts will be provided to you by the instructor in advance of the discussion date, often as links so that you can read the original stories online.

## PRIMARY WORK ASSIGNMENTS

Students should expect to complete approximately one writing or reporting assignment per class. These assignments will become more complex by the end of the session. At the start of the session, these assignments will largely consist of short writing exercises. By mid-session, they will mostly consist of reported stories. There will also be at least one in-class group reporting assignment.

Towards the end of the session, students will begin work on their final group project, a news package suitable for publication in the *Daily Cal* or another local publication. (There are no guarantees of publication.) Each student will contribute a feature-length story to a news package that is united by a common theme, issue or locale, and together tells a broader story. The group will decide on the theme together, but could, for example, choose to work on a project addressing a certain issue — such as public education or immigration — or focus on a certain geographic area or group of people.

All writing assignments should be completed as Word documents and emailed to the instructor as attachments. The deadline for all assignments is 9 am of the due date unless otherwise specified.

## **STANDARDS AND EVALUATION**

Expect your assignments to be rigorously edited by your instructor and GSR. We give the kind of editing you could expect from a professional workplace (as well as from graduate school), and it's designed to give you detailed feedback on what's working and what isn't, as well as give you some ideas about how to improve in the future.

Instead, your grade will be based on your effort, improvement over time, in-class participation and timely, thorough completion of the coursework.

The grading breaks down roughly like this:

Homework assignments — complete, on time, full effort (50 percent);  
In-class attendance and participation — (30 percent);  
Final project — (20 percent).

Late assignments lose 15 percent of their credit for each day they are late; after 4 days you can no longer receive a passing score for that late assignment.

There will be at least one (optional) extra credit assignment available during the course of the semester. Successfully completing the extra credit can help make up for one missing, late or incomplete homework assignment, but not for any portion of the final project.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

Class starts on the hour

Learning to meet deadlines is an important part of becoming a journalist, so we do not grant extensions for any reason other than illness or family emergencies.

If you must be absent because of an illness, travel or unavoidable personal appointment, please give the instructor notice as far in advance as possible, and make sure you turn in any assignments ahead of time. You should also check in with the instructor about picking up readings or assignments for the next class, and see if a classmate can share notes with you.

Please don't schedule interviews or reporting trips during class time. Laptops and iPads are permitted for taking notes and following along with course materials online, but should not be used for chatting, texting, email or using social media during class time. Phones should be turned off.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

**Weeks 1 Introduction and the Anatomy of a News Story** How do you begin a news story? Learning the art of the lede, the parts of a story, basic reporting terminology, basic reporting equipment, and the difference between a day story and a feature. **Interviewing & Note Taking** Use of quotation marks, developing interview questions, interviewing techniques, using “on/off the record” and “on background.”

**Week 2 Covering a Public Event & Hard News** The basic how-to’s of events coverage including setting up interviews, researching ahead, your access rights as a reporter and their limitations, basic skills and protocols for being a reporter on the job. **The Hard News Feature** We'll discuss integrating background research with a narrative story, and how to structure the hard news feature.

**Week 3. Observe & Report** Observing a scene, scene setting, some techniques for vibrant descriptive writing and finding the telling detail. **Developing Character** Revealing character through dialogue and actions, character development and change.

**Week 4. Covering Culture and the Arts** Different ways of covering culture and the arts, from criticism to participatory journalism. Guest lecturers **A Day in the Life** Learning to write a chronology, or the “tick tock” story. **Cops and Courts** The basics of covering crime stories. Essential legal terminology, processes, rules and rights that reporters need to know, as well as a simulated trial to get familiar with court reporting.

**Week 5. The Profile** Getting up close and personal with people whose life stories reveal a greater truth. Guest lecturers **The Unusual Suspects** How do we find sources who aren’t just PR experts and government officials? Learning to source from the ground up, how to cultivate sources before news breaks.

## **Week 6: Journalism Ethics and Professionalism**

Overview of key issues and terms including libel and slander; plagiarism, copyright and best practices for citing others' material; notorious case studies in falsification or fabrication of information, is there such a thing as "objectivity?" **Final Projects Due**

### **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

Students will abide by the Student Code of Conduct <http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/conduct.asp>. There is a zero-tolerance policy for work that is submitted without proper attribution and that constitutes plagiarism. If students are unsure about the expectations regarding the Student Code of Conduct, please seek advice from the instructors.