

Stony Brook University

Journalism Program

JRN 210 – Advanced News Reporting and Writing Spring 2011

Instructor: Charles Haddad, haddad210@gmail.com, 631-632-1094

Office hours by appointment

I. Purpose of the Course:

In 1792, trying to explain the French Revolution, William Godwin penned a line that still guides writers today. The Englishman wrote: "He that knows only what day the Bastille was taken and on what spot Louis XIV perished, knows nothing." What Godwin meant is that facts, in and of themselves, aren't understanding, let alone truth. It's how you arrange them - in what order, against what backdrop and within what context -that imbues facts with meaning. "All historians know that facts never speak for themselves," says contemporary American historian Mary Beth Norton.

This course, then, is about how to write with meaning. You can't write with meaning unless you have something worthy to write about. Good material makes for a good story. It's the grist your intellect needs to mill insight. Reporting, then, is the craft of gathering that grist. At its heart, reporting turns on a simple maxim: Asking the right question of the right person at the right moment. Developing that instinct requires years of practice.

Like writing, reporting is more an attitude, a way of being, than an occupation. Good reporters are knowledgeable, resourceful, probing and skeptical. They've learned how to find out what they need to know, when they need to know it.

How the best gather information may surprise you. It's rarely accurately portrayed in books. Good reporters are people of many hats. They'll play amateur therapists or anthropologists; historians, or talk show hosts. While reporters never behave unethically (at least, the good ones), they're masters at doing the unexpected and the unconventional.

This course will look at the techniques used by the best reporters. It's primarily about the craft of reporting but pushes students to write bigger, more meaningful stories than in 110. The class will be run as a writing workshop. Students will write and rewrite their stories, sometimes more than twice. All work will be displayed in class and critiqued by professor and students. Every student is required to participate in class discussions and critiques.

Succeeding in this class will require:

- The ability to work hard and work effectively
- The ability to weather and learn from tough criticism
The ability to raise to a challenge
- The ability to attend class and participate in all discussions

This class is not for the faint of heart or weak-kneed. Most students find it the greatest challenge of their academic life. But those who stick it out also find the class among the most rewarding, too. This class is the place to be if you really want to learn what it takes to report and write well.

In addition to JRN 210, students must attend JRN 211, a skills lab focusing on finding story ideas, interviewing and the use and misuse of numbers in journalism. Students who receive a lab grade of Unsatisfactory must repeat and pass 211 to continue in journalism skills classes.

II. Intended Outcomes

- An ability to develop and pitch original story ideas
- An ability to prepare for and conduct in-depth interviews.
- An ability to write a story that has at least five credible sources; that uses numbers effectively; that uses advanced writing techniques beyond basic wire-service style
- A fluency with current events that informs discussion, pitches, reporting and writing

III. Reading:

- Pity The Poor Reader
- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.
- New York Times subscription (student subscriptions available Monday-Friday; students responsible for weekends on their own)

Recommended text:

Brooks, Brian S., James L. Pinson and Jean Gaddy Wilson. *Working With Words*. This will be used for reference.

V. Assessments

- Pitches, which will be graded on originality, depth of preparation, clarity and timeliness.
- Stories, which will be graded on depth of reporting, quality of sources, clarity of language and effective use of techniques introduced in the course.
- Class participation, effort and overall improvement

- A weekly quiz on current events and AP style. The quiz will probe beneath the headlines of major stories, requiring students to demonstrate that they understand underlying issues driving major events. There will be a quiz to assess mastery of research techniques.

VI. Grading

This is first and foremost a reporting and writing workshop. What will count most is how you fare on stories written for class. Effort will count a great deal. Those who improve the most - no matter how weak at the outset - will be viewed with great favor.

Stories - 75%

Story pitches - 10%

Homework/Class participation - 5%

Weekly quizzes - 10%

VII. Course Requirements and Policies:

Prerequisite: JRN 287 or JRN 110 **AP Stylebook:** Bring the stylebook to every class. Style mistakes will lower your grades. **New York Times:** Sign up immediately for a weekday subscription to the New York Times. There will be weekly quizzes on the paper's coverage of local, national and international events. Students who live in residence halls must arrange for a subscription at the bookstore and take delivery of the Times there daily. The subscription covers all days school is in session, Monday through Friday. Off-campus residents should subscribe online at www.nytimes.com/student for home delivery or call 888-NYT-COLL.

- Students are responsible for reading the weekend papers as well. • Quiz questions will be drawn from stories appearing on the front page Monday-Sunday.
- Weekly quizzes will also cover AP style, handouts and class discussions.
- A missed quiz, for any reason other than an excused absence, will count as a zero. • Lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

Attendance: If circumstances prevent your attending class, the instructor must be informed by phone or email on the day of class or within 24 hours. The policy of the School of Journalism is as follows: For classes that meet more than once a week, two unexcused absences and/or tardies are permitted. Every additional absence or late attendance will earn a 10 point demerit from your final grade score.

Newsroom etiquette: Sit in the front of the room. Leave your monitor dark during class discussion. Turn on the monitor only when instructed to do so.

Food and drink: None permitted.

News sources: Unless the instructor specifies otherwise, sources for news stories must be individuals unknown to the reporter. JRN 210 reporters must not use friends, family members, roommates, or business associates – anyone they know – as subjects.

Important: When reporting, students must make clear they are working on stories that may be published. Students should not say anything like this: “Don’t worry, this is just for a class.” A reporter’s sources must understand that information provided – quotes included – is apt to appear in a publication or on a website.

Assignments: Depending on the news and class discussions, assignments may vary from those stated in the syllabus. This is a deadline-oriented business. You may run into some challenges or obstacles in an assignment. So do all reporters--and they learn to work around them. Keep your instructor informed if problems arise. Late work will be accepted only with advance approval from the professor. Be aware that you’ll likely lose points for being late. Work is due at the start of class.

Format: All work must be emailed to instructor at haddad210@gmail.com. Each must be double-spaced and each page numbered. Name, date, assignment must be place in the upper left hand corner. The professor reserves the right to reject any assignment that doesn’t follow this format.

Grammar: Grammar will not be taught separately but will be considered in grading all written work. We will have occasional in-class lessons. If you are struggling with a particular area, see your instructor for suggestions or to arrange a tutorial.

Blackboard: There is a Blackboard account for this course. Check daily for announcements at <http://blackboard.sunysb.edu>. If you have not done so already, you must set up a Blackboard account. Please note that your NetID expires every six months and must be renewed in order to use Blackboard. In addition, please verify your email address on Blackboard. For help, call 631-632-9602, or see: <http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/helpdesk/docs/blackboard/bbstudent.php>.

E-mail: Verify your e-mail address on Blackboard (in the “Personal Information” section under “Tools” on the “Welcome” page). It is essential that JRN 210 students check e-mail daily for updates. Failure to check e-mail is no excuse for missing announcements or assignment changes.

Special considerations: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, 128 ECC Building (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and

information go to the following web site: <http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu> and search Fire safety and Evacuation and Disabilities.

Personal integrity: Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at <http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/>

Plagiarism and cheating: Any form of plagiarism or cheating will result in a failing grade. Here is the University's statement on academic dishonesty: "Plagiarism is the use of others' words and/or ideas without clearly acknowledging their source. As students, you are learning about other people's ideas in your course texts, your instructors' lectures, in-class discussions, and when doing your own research. When you incorporate those words and ideas into your own work, it is of the utmost importance that you give credit where it is due. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is considered academic dishonesty and all instances will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. To avoid plagiarism, you must give the original author credit whenever you use another person's ideas, opinions, drawings, or theories as well as any facts or any other pieces of information that are not common knowledge. Additionally quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or a close paraphrasing of another person's spoken or written words must also be referenced. Accurately citing all sources and putting direct quotations – of even a few key words – in quotation marks are required."

For further information on academic integrity and the policies regarding academic dishonesty, go to the Academic Judiciary Web site <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/CAS/ajc.nsf>.

Disruptive behavior: "The University at Stony Brook expects students to maintain standards of personal integrity that are in harmony with the educational goals of the institution; to observe national, state, and local laws and University regulations; and to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty is required to report disruptive behavior that interrupts faculty's ability to teach, the safety of the learning environment, and/or students' ability to learn to Judicial Affairs."