

JOMC 253.003, Fall 2007

Schedule of Assignments

Reminder: Registration for this course included Monday sessions. They are noted in boldface and italics below. Attendance is mandatory and students are responsible for signing attendance sheet.

August 21 & 23 -- Tuesday: Course introduction. Choose beats. Discuss beat report. Review syllabus and course requirements. Thursday: Discuss development of beat. Read, TEXT: chapter one

Aug. 27 Police reporting: Capt. Chris Blue, Chapel Hill Police Department.

August 28 & 30 -- Tuesday: Discuss coverage of police beat and appropriate assignments. TEXT: Chapter 10. Thursday: Beat reports are due. Discuss accuracy, fairness, balance and objectivity, elements of a complete news story and how stories are graded. TEXT: chapter two & your beat's chapter.

Sept. 3 No Monday session. Labor Day holiday.

Sept. 4 & 6 -- Tuesday: First news presentation. Discuss nature and importance of local news. Thursday: How to cover a meeting or press conference. First beat story is due.

Sept. 10 Online public records searching: Genie Tyburski.

Sept. 11 & 13 -- Tuesday: Schmoozing, interviewing and note taking. TEXT: Chapter 3. Thursday: Workings of municipal, county and special district governments, and school boards. TEXT: Chapter 6. Second beat story due.

Sept. 17 Open meetings and records in North Carolina.

Sept. 18 & 20 -- Tuesday: Workings of municipal, county and special district governments, and school boards. (Part two.) TEXT: Chapter 6. Thursday: Writing tips, Read "Tips for writing well," p. 95, and "50 Common Writing Errors, p. 101, in course pack. First police story is due.

Sept. 24 Online news writing and reporting: Asst. Professor Ryan Thornburg.

Sept. 25 & 27 --Tuesday: Sources: Who they are, how to find and deal with them. Read: "Not all sources are equal," p. 109 in course pack and "Sources: Time for

reporters to say..." p. 115. TEXT: Chapter Four. Thursday: "Complete Story" Exercise. Second police story due.

Oct. 1 Covering news beyond the local beat: Jim Drinkard, Associated Press, Washington, D.C.

Oct. 2 & 4 -- Tuesday: State government reporting. Thursday: Covering elections. TEXT: Chapter 13. Third beat story is due.

Oct. 8 Twenty-somethings on the beat. Paul O'Connor, coordinator.

Oct. 9 & 11 -- Tuesday: Local government finance. TEXT: Chapter seven. Thursday: Covering courts and the judicial process. TEXT: Chapter 11. Fourth beat story is due.

Oct. 15 Alternative Story Forms: Assistant Professor Andy Bechtel.

Oct. 16 & 18 -- Tuesday: TBA. Thursday: Fall Break.

Oct. 23 & 25 -- Tuesday: Alternative story formats. Also, read "The demise of the foreign correspondent," p. 112 in course pack. Thursday: Embedded and war reporting. Read from course pack, "The war up close and very personal," p. 80, and "What I've learned," p. 92. Fifth beat story is due. For police beat students, first meeting story due.

Oct. 30 & Nov. 1 -- Tuesday: Personal involvement in the news and in one's stories, or Red Wing One. Thursday: Gathering information in Red Wing Two. TEXT: Chap. 4. Sixth beat is story due. For police reporters, second meeting story due.

Nov. 6 & 8 -- Tuesday: Discuss final projects. Thursday: Blogging and reporting. Reading Assignment TBA. Seventh beat story due.

Nov. 13 & 15 -- Tuesday: Case Study Topic #1, incremental reporting. Students must have read all four of the case studies (pp. 1-79 in course pack) by this point. Failure to be prepared for class will result in a course grade markdown. Thursday: Case Study Topic #2, relationships with sources. Eighth beat story due.

Nov. 20 & 22 -- Tuesday: TBA/catch-up. Thursday is Thanksgiving.

Nov. 27 & 29 -- Tuesday: Case Study Topic #3, purity of our purpose. Thursday: Case Study Topic #4, controlling our product. From course pack (p. 88) read, "Answering Back to the News Media, Using the Internet." Final project is due.

Dec. 4 -- Tuesday: Loyal To Whom?

Course General Syllabus and Policies

JOMC 253: Public Affairs Reporting Fall 2007
Tu-Th. 3:30-4:45 p.m. 283 Carroll

Paul T. O'Connor (919) 510-8777 at home. No phone in Carroll.
Office Hours: Tu.Th. 2:45-3:15, in Carroll 379. Email: ocolumn@mindspring.com

Public affairs reporting can include almost anything that deals with the appropriation, distribution, handling or expenditure of public funds. It includes reports on all public and quasi-public agencies, organizations and institutions. It also includes reports on the community organizations affected by public institutions. Under the umbrella of public-affairs reporting are city, county and state governments; local authority districts (e.g. OWASA, Triangle Transit Authority, Airport Authority, etc.); politics; elections; the courts; schools; urban affairs, the environment; and social areas such as minority and women's affairs, consumer affairs, public health, etc.

Prerequisite: JOMC 153.

Course Description: Exercise in news gathering, interviewing and writing news for print media.

Required Textbooks:

An Introduction To News Reporting, Jan J. Yopp & Beth A. Haller, 2004 and JOMC 253 course pack at Student Stores.

The Associated Press Stylebook
JOMC School Stylebook
The News & Observer or The New York Times.

Internet: Students must secure an email address and post that address on every paper they submit.

Course Structure

Classes will be used to discuss beat reporting, student work and any issues that arise on the beats. Students are also required to attend Monday afternoon seminars required of all sections. The tentative schedule for Monday sessions will soon be

provided. Classes include lectures and discussions based on the required and reserve textbook readings and course pack; Monday seminars; periodic handouts; student papers; local, national and international events; and occasional guest speakers.

Students are required to complete:

- a beat report that outlines and evaluates the student's beat,
- 10 weekly news stories, two of which are in alternative news formats, a final reporting project, and a news presentation to the class.

Reporting Assignments

All stories will make use of a combination of sources, including public documents, interviews, library and Internet research, background and objective reportorial observation. All stories must use a minimum of three human sources, who will be identified at the end of each story by name and telephone number. Failure to identify sources at the bottom of a story results in a full-grade reduction. The more sources, the better the story usually is.

Students should strive to add different sources in follow-up stories or subsequent stories on their beats. Repeated sources should be used only when relevant or necessary. Be sure to read the School's policy on sources, off-the-record and attribution in your UNC Stylebook.

Beat Report

The Beat Report is a detailed, 3-page memo that outlines the student's beat. The assignment is designed to get students immediately familiar with their beats. To complete this assignment, students may rely on handouts, calendars, interviews, Internet sources, directories, etc. and may, to a limited degree, work with other students who share their beat. The beat report is due Thursday, August 30. That means you have to jump into your beat quickly. More follows on the beat report.

Story Assignments: Each story will be two-to-three pages in length, with at least three human sources. Stories should also include text sources when needed.

BEAT ASSIGNMENTS: Students will write eight stories from their beats and two police stories. Police beat reporters will write eight police stories and two meeting stories from another beat.

Beats for this section are:

Chapel Hill or Carrboro Town Government; Chapel Hill-Carrboro or Orange County Schools; Carrboro or Chapel Hill police; Courts, district and superior;

Orange County Commissioners; neighboring towns or counties; UNC Board of Governors; local elections.

Reporting assignments must 500-700 words, typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, except 2-inches atop page 1, and submitted on paper. The final project will be 1,500 to 2,000 words. Deadline is Thursday at the beginning of class. Students are 100 percent responsible for deadlines missed if stories submitted electronically or on paper someplace other than class do not get to the instructor.

Students are required to attend the Monday sessions.

Grading

The instructor will explain his grading policies early in the semester. The instructor will compute the final grade based on a combination of grades on papers submitted and quizzes, on class participation, attendance and the news presentation. The final grade will not rely on a strict average because repeated late papers, a failure to have all work completed by the end of the semester, spotty attendance and tardiness can have a disproportionately negative effect. At the same time, extra effort, the occasional brilliant story, enthusiasm and class participation can unexpectedly lift a grade.

The professor reserves the right to fail a student for the semester regardless of overall average if that student receives three failing grades on papers during the semester.

Honor Code: Students should type "honor pledge" with their names on the bottom of their stories. This acknowledges that they have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on the assignments. For complete information on the University's Honor Code, go to <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/> Students are reminded that their failure to do all of their own interviews, research, note taking, documentation, writing and reporting is a violation of the UNC-CH Honor Code and could result in disciplinary action.

Deadline Policy

Stories are due at the beginning of class on Thursdays. Late papers will be accepted until Tuesday at class time. But, late papers will be docked a full grade below that assigned on merit by the annoyed instructor. (He really hates late papers.) A student who submitted two or more late papers will probably be docked further at the end of the semester. A paper submitted later than one class period late (after the end of class Tuesday) enters AWOL status. It will get a D if it's good, an F otherwise. If a student fails to submit every assignment by the start of

class on the final class day, the instructor will either issue a grade of incomplete or fail the student, regardless of average.

Be aware that as long as a student owes the instructor a story, all subsequent stories are also considered late. For example: If story one is late, then the paper submitted on the due date for story two is considered story one and story two is then late. If you do not understand this, ask!

Having said that, the instructor recognizes that problems arise. Papers will be accepted late, without a grade reduction, if:

- 1.) You had to miss class to participate in a function sanctioned by the university. (Provide the necessary form.)
- 2.) If you exercise your late e-coupon. One time during the semester, subject to restrictions below, you may inform the professor by email that your paper will not be ready on Thursday. You then have until Tuesday at class time to submit the story and it will not be graded down.

Restrictions: You cannot use the e-coupon for your beat report, your first or second stories or for the final project. If you exercise your coupon and then fail to hit the Tuesday deadline, you have wasted your e-coupon. The story will be graded by the Draconian AWOL policy. You may not use an e-coupon if you are already late in submitting a story.

- 3.) If you become very ill, if there is a death in your family or a family emergency, or there is some other trauma in your life. But, you should contact the professor as soon as possible and you will be required to demonstrate the problem to some extent. The instructor hates to be hard-hearted, but a lot of grandmothers seem to die whenever he teaches.

Warning: Don't squander the e-coupon.

Beat Report

Due: Thursday, August 30.

Students who share a beat may work together in collecting the information for the first part of this report.

- 1.) Provide the names of the members of your board, their addresses, and telephone numbers, and which districts they represent. Provide the name of the head of the board, or the mayor. Note if any of these people are up for re-election

this year. For cops beat, name the police chief, the police commissioner (if there is one) and the heads of the departments. Provide office phone numbers. For courts, provide the names and office addresses, phone numbers, for the local judges and the same for the clerks of court and the district attorney.

2.) Provide basic meeting information about your board. When and where do they meet? When is an agenda available for reporters, and where can you find it? For courts: provide this information about court dockets and case files, and provide court session times, places. For cops, provide the information needed to find arrest reports and other public records.

3.) Provide the names of the directors (head honchos) of four major departments of the governmental unit you are covering -- for example, the head of the Department of Social Services for Orange County. Tell me where these departments are located and provide the telephone number. For cops and courts, this info is in part 1.

4.) List relevant internet sites for your beat.

Students must work alone to answer the following information. After reading through back copies of local papers and conducting interviews, list the three or four stories on this beat, over the last several months, that were most important, providing only a sentence or two on each. Also, provide a sentence or two on what follow-up stories you are likely to cover. In other words, give me some idea of the story ideas you got by catching up on your beat.

News Presentation

Each student will choose a day to give a news presentation. It is required of all students.

Find a story that your classmates will find interesting and of which some of us will be aware.

Open with a detailed summation of the story. (Five minutes.) It can be either a breaking news story, or one that has developed over time. It is important that you fully understand what has happened and that you be able to answer background questions. (Please, we don't want to hear you say, "I don't really know much about how this works.") (50 percent.)

After completing your summation, you should prompt a classroom discussion of this story with questions about the news story or event (25 percent), and about the coverage it received (25 percent.)

The instructor takes the news presentation seriously, and sees it as a chance for students to practice the very workworld-important task of making presentations.

The news presentations can be fun, or they can be pure drudgery. Put thought into the story you select, and into your presentation. Then, when others give their reports, please give them your attention and participate in the discussion.

The presentation will be graded on the basis of your knowledge of the topic, how well you summarize it, and the quality of your questions.

Class Start Time

The instructor locks the door to class at the start of class. Don't be late. If you know you will be late, you can make prior arrangements for the instructor to admit you. The instructor expects students to attend all classes.