

JIMC 201
Reporting and Writing for the Mass Media
Spring 2008
T/R 8 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

Instructor:

Richard Doak

204C Hamilton Hall

Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. or by appointment

Contact: rdoak@iastate.edu. 294-4847 or (515) 276-3702 (home)

Course Objectives:

This course is intended to introduce students to the fundamentals of information gathering and writing for the mass media. It is a foundation course for those intending a career in any aspect of communications. For those intending careers in other fields, it should provide insights into how the media function and how to prepare information for publication.

A successful student in this course will learn how to develop story ideas, research topics, interview sources, write, edit and rewrite news articles under deadline pressure. The student will become familiar with the standards of professionalism, ethics and integrity demanded of journalists.

Course Materials:

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, 2007 edition.

Soft lead pencils for editing

A folder in which to save stories and handouts

Access to a daily newspaper, radio and television newscasts

It is important that you **bring the AP Stylebook to every class period**, because you will be writing in most sessions, and there will be open-book quizzes on style questions

Class Requirements:

1. Attendance is required. Students should regard JIMC 201 as if it were a real-life job at a newspaper, magazine or television newsroom. You must show up. If you are unable to make a class due to illness or serious indisposition, please contact the instructor before class to ensure makeup privileges.

2. Deadlines are sacrosanct in the news business. Don't miss them. Late assignments will be accepted only under exceptional circumstances.
3. Students are expected to conduct themselves as professionals. That means giving fellow students and the instructor the respect due to colleagues, participating in class, interviewing sources in a manner that reflects well on the Greenlee School and being committed to accuracy, fairness and ethical conduct.
4. Become a news junkie. Students are expected to read the Des Moines Register and Iowa State Daily. It is suggested that you also follow the online editions of the New York Times (nytimes.com) and Washington Post (washingtonpost.com) and read a weekly news magazine. Tune your clock and car radios to National Public Radio. News quizzes and open-book tests on AP style will be given from time to time.
5. This course requires you to submit story ideas during the semester. Each story proposal is to include the topic, the "angle" the writer intends to pursue, sources of background information and contact information for any persons to be interviewed.
6. Nearly every class period will include a writing assignment that will be due at the end of class or the beginning of the next class.
7. Instead of a final examination, students will be required to write a multi-source story utilizing all of the reporting, writing and organizing skills learned in class. You must complete the assignment to pass the course. Your story might be submitted to the Iowa State Daily for publication.

Grading:

Do not be discouraged if your grades on written assignments are low at the beginning of the semester. If your work consistently improves over the semester, your final grade will reflect this growth.

Grading criteria for stories are:

A — This story could be published with virtually no editing. It has a compelling lead, it flows naturally and logically, its facts are organized readably and it is mechanically flawless.

B — This story is almost ready for publication, but it might have a weak lead, occasional awkward phrasing or some mechanical flaws. Some editing is needed.

C — This story would be minimally acceptable in a real-world newsroom. The essential ingredients are present, but the piece could be substantially improved with a stronger lead, more logical organization and better selection or placement of facts and quotes.

D — This story is barely salvageable. The lead is weak, facts may be missing or garbled, the writer may have somewhat misperceived the situation, mechanics are sloppy.

F — This story is unpublishable. It has the weaknesses of the “D” story in extreme. It might contain serious factual errors or substantial reporter bias.

Any story that contains a misspelled proper name or major factual error will receive a failing grade. Other errors of fact, spelling or style will result in lowered grades. Assignments not turned in will count as an “F”.

For the final course grade, this is the general weight that will be given to aspects of your work:

Reporting/writing assignments: 60 percent

Story ideas: 10 percent

Class participation: 10 percent

Multi-source story: 20 percent

As a measure of progress, grades earned late in the semester will weigh more heavily toward the final grade than those received early in the semester.

Integrity:

Any act of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism, falsifying interviews or lying to the instructor, will result in a failing grade for the course and referral to university authorities for disciplinary action, as described in the ISU Information Handbook.

Other points:

Anonymous sources may not be used in stories. Sources you interview should understand they are being interviewed on the record and their comments could end up in print. You should not misrepresent yourself to any source.

You may not interview anyone with whom you have a personal relationship for any story, including family members, roommates or significant others.

Your grades are confidential, but your work in class will not be private. Your instructor may look over your shoulder and comment. Students' stories or excerpts may be shared and discussed in class. The open environment of the lab will be much like that of a working newsroom.

Always assume that you are writing for actual publication. Some of your work might be submitted to the Iowa State Daily or other publications.

Feel free to contact your instructor outside class. I want every student to succeed.

Iowa State University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Any student who may require an accommodation under such provisions should contact the instructor no later than the end of the first week of class or as soon as you become aware. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Resources (DR) office, located on the main floor of the Student Services Building, Room 1076, (515) 294-6624.

Some dates to remember:

Jan. 22: Class will meet in Parks Library for instruction on using online background sources.

March 18 & 20: No class, spring break.

Have fun in this course. Your initiation into the world of news should be an exhilarating experience.