

Urban Journalism [URBS 252-301]*

University of Pennsylvania, Spring 2021

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3-4 PM, via Zoom, or by appointment

Required Texts

- Harrower, Tim. *Inside Reporting, A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism, 3rd Ed.* McGraw Hill, 2013 [ISBN: 978-0-07-325617-1]
- Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Non-Fiction.* Harper Collins, NY. 2016 [ISBN: 978-0060891541]
- Associated Press. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, 55th Edition.* New York 2020. Also available online. [ISBN: 978-0-917360-69-5]
- Daily Newspaper (Choose one)
 - The *Philadelphia Inquirer* has an offer of a 13-week digital subscription for .99 a week (\$12.87 total)
 - The *New York Times* academic rate is \$1 a week
 - The *Wall Street Journal* offers a \$4 a month student rate
 - The *Washington Post* is free for six months with an Amazon Prime membership or offers a \$5 a month student rate
 - *USA Today* does not have an academic rate but does offer a two-month digital subscription for \$2 plus \$5 a month thereafter.

Suggested Resources

- Strunk William, Jr. *The Elements of Style.* 2018. [ISBN: 0-205-30902-X]
- The Grammarly app will improve your writing. It is a free Chrome extension and there is a more expensive premium version. It can be invaluable in helping you self edit for grammar and style.

Course Description

This course examines urban journalism with special emphasis on how large newspapers are redefining themselves and the news in an era of dwindling readership and growing financial pressures. The course will look at digital journalism, social journalism, ethical issues, and alternative sources of news. It will explore the techniques journalists use in reporting and writing the news and will consider how social movements such as Black Lives Matter have changed journalism.

Course Mechanics

This is a seminar and our learning will be founded in discussion. We will meet Wednesdays from 5-8 pm every week virtually. Readings for the week should be completed before we meet, as well as any posts to class discussion boards. Each time we meet we will focus on a particular idea about the craft and practice of journalism, and our discussion will center on those ideas. Often we will have a professional journalist with a particular expertise as a guest lecturer. We will also have time each week to discuss what we are reading in the news. And we will spend time during our meetings discussing your ongoing reporting and writing work.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate proficiency in reporting and writing stories important to urban media outlets.
- Identify, analyze, and explain policy decisions that drive urban issues.
- Recognize and understand several approaches to journalism, including solutions and advocacy journalism.
- Understand the ethical codes and obligations of professional news reporting.
- Find and translate data that informs the issues important to an urban audience.

A note on learning in the time of COVID

We will meet via Zoom, which sucks, but we will make every effort to create an environment that allows us to discuss fully and productively journalism in an urban context. We will talk about how to make that happen during the first class meeting, including my absolute aversion to the mute buttons.

CLASS POLICIES

Attendance & Participation

I ask that everyone be in class and be present, which means refraining from multi-tasking or device-checking. Discussions are an essential component of the seminar and they are enlivened by the participation of the entire group, especially as active listeners.

Respect

A respectful environment is necessary for learning to take place. Participants in this course are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that respects the diversity of opinion, perspective, and multicultural diversity in our seminar and our society. Behavior that strays from that standard will not be tolerated.

Assessments

Grades for this course will reflect the time and effort you put into your work. Each of the four writing assignments accounts for 20% of your grade. Other work in the course, including participation asynchronously, will account cumulatively for 20% of your grade.

Assignments

The first three writing assignments are journalistic stories of at least 700 words (approximately three double-spaced printed pages) and will incorporate journalistic skills in interviewing, explaining policy and analyzing data. The fourth writing assignment is a longer form story of at least 1500 words (approximately six double-spaced printed pages) that incorporates all of the learned skills. These will be graded using the rubric below.

Students will be allowed to rewrite any of the first three writing assignments to increase their grade and demonstrate mastery of the concepts discussed in class. Rewrites require the permission of the instructor and are due before the next story deadline.

Students also will be responsible for weekly assignments described in the syllabus and/or posted on the Canvas course web site.

A few words about story assignments:

- All assignments should be written in 12-point type, either Arial or Times Roman, double-spaced and in black ink. No one will take you seriously if you use Comic Sans in purple ink.
- Do not use footnotes or any sort of citations. This is not an academic report. Journalists attribute information they use to sources in the body of the story.
- You will need to provide some sort of image to accompany your story, especially portraits of anyone you quote or build a story around. These can easily be taken with your smart phone. If this poses any sort of hardship, please see me.

Writing Rubric

All writing assignments will be assessed according to the following rubric:

20 POINTS	Mastery 7-8 Points	Adequate 5-6 Points	Developing 3-4 Points	Insufficient 0-2 Points
Reporting	Information is complete and accurate. Sources are identified and authoritative. Direct quotes deepen the story and add context. The visual component is exceptional	Information is accurate but might leave a question. Sources are authoritative but may be obscure. Direct quotes are good but don't enhance the story. The visual component is technically sound and interesting	Information is accurate but several questions are unanswered. Sources may lack credibility. Direct quotes are mundane. The visual component doesn't aid in understanding the story.	Information is missing entirely or inaccurate. The writer relies on too few sources. The story lacks compelling direct quotes. Lacks any sort of visual component.
Writing	The story is clear and delightful to read. The story is written in active voice, with a tone and rhythm appropriate to the subject.	The story is clear but may lack sparkle. The writing may be inconsistent in a few spots but otherwise up to snuff.	The story is confusing in places. The writing is difficult to parse. There are unintentional changes in tense or voice	The story lacks clarity and is difficult to read. The lead is off-target and the story is not clearly organized.
Grammar & Style	Copy is free of all errors in grammar and style.	The story has a few minor errors in grammar or style but nothing egregious.	The story has several errors in grammar or style, some glaring. A name is misspelled.	The story has many errors in grammar or style and is unpublishable.

* Syllabus is subject to change. Please rely on the updated version on the course Canvas site.

Class Calendar

Week 1 – Introductions

Jan. 20, 2021

- Syllabus & Class Outline
 - Discussion: Where do you get your news?
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Week 2 – The Fourth Estate

Jan. 27, 2021

- Readings:
 - Friedman, Introduction to “Letters to a Young Journalist.” (PDF)
 - Visit the [Humans of New York](#) web site and be prepared to discuss at least one particular profile you found compelling.
- Rants & Raves
- In class exercise: Ego Google
- Discuss ideas for Story 1 (Profile)

This assignment requires you to tell the story of one person. It must be somebody who is not related to you and someone you do not know personally, ie a roommate, fraternity brother, teammate, co-worker. While the basis for the story may be a single interview, it must include information beyond that single source. Please post a story pitch on the class Canvas web site by the beginning of class.

Week 3 – How to find a story

Feb. 3, 2021

- Reading
 - Inside Reporting, Harrower, Chapters 1-3, pp 1-64
 - Mother Jones, Nally, I called everyone in Jeffrey Epstein’s little black book (PDF)
 - Guest Lecture: Dan Rubin, senior investigative editor, Philadelphia Inquirer.
 - Rants & Raves
 - Workshop Story 1
 - We will discuss the reporting of your first story and any of the issues/problems/questions/logistics the have come up as you get to work.
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Week 4 – How to write a story

Feb. 10, 2021 – **Story 1 Deadline**

- Reading
 - Inside Reporting, Harrower, Chapters 4-6, pp 65-138
 - DCist, Kaplan, Thousands of DC renters are evicted every year (PDF)
 - New Yorker, Trillin, Covering the Cops (PDF)
- Rants & Raves
- Ideas for Story 2 (Policy Issue)
 - This assignment asks that you examine the effect of a policy decision or issue on a person or group. In addition, the story should examine how the policy was developed

and the reasons behind the policy. An example of such a story might be what happens to families when the school board closes a neighborhood elementary school.

Week 5 – Objectivity and its discontents

Feb. 17, 2021

- Read
 - TBD
 - Matthew Pressman, CSPAN on Media (video)
 - Guest: Michaela Winberg, reporter, Billy Penn
 - Rants & Raves
 - Post-mortem of Story 1
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Week 6 – Solutions, advocacy and other journalistic approaches

Feb. 24, 2021

- Reading
 - The NY Age, Wells, Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases
 - Guest: TBD
 - Rants & Raves
 - Story 2 Workshop
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Week 7 – Writing with numbers

March 3, 2021 — **Story 2 Deadline**

- Reading TBD
 - Guest: Peter Eisler, investigative reporter, Reuters.
 - Rants & Raves
 - Exercise: Where to find data
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Week 8 – Spring Break

March 10, 2021

- No class
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Week 9 – Digital journalism

March 17, 2021

- Reading
 - Harrower Chapter 8, pp. 157-180
 - Georgetown JIA, Ward, Making Sense of the New Information Landscape (PDF)
 - www.ernestowens.com
- Guest: Ernest Owens, senior editor, Philadelphia magazine
- Rants & Raves
- Post-mortem Story 2
- Ideas for Story 3 (Data)

Week 10 — Can a source buy me a cup of coffee? What about a Tesla?

March 24, 2021

- Reading
 - Harrower, Chapter 7, pp 140-156
 - Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics (PDF)
- Guest: Dan Biddle, former Philadelphia Inquirer writer, Pulitzer Prize winner
- Rants & Raves
- In-class exercise: Ethics Scenarios
- Workshop Story 3

Week 11 — Black Lives Matter

March 31, 2021 — **Story 3 Deadline**

- Reading
 - Neiman Reports, Renaud, Learning from Little Rock
 - Neiman Reports, Pierre-Louis, It's Time to Change the Way the Media Reports on Protests
 - Neiman Reports, Aushana & Pixley, Protest Photography Can be a Powerful Tool for and Against Black Lives Matter
 - Vanity Fair, Coates, The Life Breonna Taylor Lived, in the Words of Her Mother
- Guest: TBD
- Rants & Raves

Week 12 — Hiroshima: The story of a city destroyed

April 7, 2021

- Reading
 - White House statement on the bombing of Hiroshima
 - "Hiroshima," John Hersey, The New Yorker
 - BBC presentation, Hersey's "Hiroshima"
- Rants & Raves
- Censorship and Transparency
- Post-mortem Story 3

Week 13 — Diving into the deep end

April 14, 2021

- Reading TBD
- Guest: TBD
- Rants & Raves
- Ideas for Story 4 (Long format)
 - This assignment requires you to take a deep dive into a subject of your choosing. It combines the elements of the three previous assignments (interviewing, analysis, data) into a larger, substantial piece of journalism that demonstrates a grasp of the semester's work.

Week 14 – Bright, tight, and brilliant

April 21, 2021

- Reading
 - Zinsser, On Writing Well
- Discussion of Self-editing
- Rants & Raves
- Workshop Story 4

Week 15 – Final story conferences

April 28, 2021 - **Story 4 Deadline**

- Rants & Raves
- End Notes