

PUBLIC ISSUES WRITING/REPORTING

JOUR 4180-001/JOUR 6180-001

FALL 2024

CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:40-11:05 am

ROOM: Meeman 208

Prof. Tonyaa Weathersbee

Office Hours: By Appointment.

Email: tjwthrsb@memphis.edu

Office Phone: 901-678-3484

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog description: Emphasis placed on deadline writing and critiquing of political and public policy news. Encourages familiarity with the methods and insights of political and social science and develops confidence to use those methods and insights in reporting. Encourages use of social media to cover and explain campaigns and policy.

Prerequisites

JOUR 3120 or 3629 & JOUR 3526

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

- *The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques*. Brant Houston and Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc., sixth edition.
- *The 2 W's of Journalism: The Why and What of Public Affairs Reporting*. David Merritt and Maxwell McCombs.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:
<http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Login using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JOUR 4180 – 001/6180-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You will select public affairs beats to cover and gauge their impact on policy and social and economic conditions in the city of Memphis and in Shelby County. You will produce two stories developed from the beats you select, and a final enterprise story developed from issues you uncover during your coverage. Meetings may be covered via livestream, but you must attend at least one meeting in person. You will also be expected to read The Commercial Appeal, The Daily Memphian and Chalkbeat Tennessee to keep up with current events and write a one-to-two page weekly critique of the coverage.

Class format: We'll meet in person, twice a week. Occasionally, we may meet offsite to cover a meeting or event.

Attendance: One excused absence will be allowed. After that, 25 points will be deducted from your grade. Make every effort to be on time; I will not provide a do-over of activities or discussions that occurred during class for those who arrive late.

Cell phones: Not allowed during class unless used as part of the lesson. Please put them on silent mode.

Laptops: Laptops are not required. We meet in a computer lab. However, you can use one if you wish.

ASSIGNMENTS

You will complete 10 weekly critiques of a story about a public affairs issue. The critiques will be due each Tuesday at the beginning of class. You will also complete one story due Sept. 26, a second one due Oct. 24, and a final enterprise story on Dec. 3.

Unless otherwise stated, all assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be accepted only up to 24 hours after the due date and time and will be penalized 10 points. If an issue is preventing you from meeting those deadlines, please contact me before the assignment is due and we can discuss it.

GRADING

Ten weekly critiques= 15 % towards grade

First deadline story= 25%

Second deadline = 25 %

Final enterprise = 35 %

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4%

B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%

C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%

D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%

F 0-59.4%

OTHER ISSUES

Cheating, plagiarism, and unethical behavior will not be tolerated. Evidence of such behavior may be grounds for an automatic "F." As a journalist, you are entrusted with certain privileges and responsibilities. Your research might lead to sensitive information on individuals. Any misuse of this information – identity theft, trolling, doxing, etc. – may be grounds for an automatic "F." We are here to learn and to serve the public good, not to serve our own interests

or to harm others. I am committed to including and valuing the identities and voices of all students, especially those from historically marginalized and vulnerable groups.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Aug.27: Introduction to this course and one another. What is public issues reporting? Why called you to journalism?

Assignments due Aug. 29: Read Chapters 1 &2 of The Investigative Reporters Handbook; Chapter 1 of The Two W's of Journalism.

Aug. 29: Discussion of readings. Assigning of beats.

Assignment due Sept. 3: Critique of public issue story of your choosing from the news sites recommended. Read Chapter 3 of the Reporter's Handbook and Chapter 2 of the 2 Ws.

Sept.3: First critique due. Discussion of readings. Structuring beat coverage, scheduling and logistics. Assignment due Sept. 5: Read Chapter 4 of Reporters Handbook; Chapter 3 of the 2 Ws.

Sept. 5: Discussion of readings. Assignment due Sept. 10: Second critique due. Read Chapter 5 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 4 of the 2Ws.

Sept. 10: Second critique due. Discussion of readings. Review of beats and issues. Assignment due Sept. 12: Read Chapter 6 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 5 of the 2 Ws.

Sept. 12: Discussion of readings. Assignment due Sept. 17: Third critique. Read Chapter 7 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 6 of the 2Ws.

Sept. 17: Third critique due. Discussion of readings. Assignment due Sept. 19: Read Chapter 8 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 7 of the 2Ws.

Sept. 19: Discussion of readings. Assignment due Sept. 24: Fourth critique.

Sept. 24: Fourth critique due. Discussion, preparation for first story due on Sept. 26.

Sept. 26: First beat stories due. Reviews, critiques in class. Assignment due Oct.1: Read Chapter 9 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 8 of the 2Ws. Fifth critique.

Oct. 1: Fifth critique due. Discussion of readings. Assignment due Oct. 3: Read Chapter 10 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 9 of the 2Ws.

Oct. 3: Discussion of readings. Assignment due Oct. 8: Sixth critique; Read Chapter 11 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 10 of the 2Ws.

Oct. 8: Sixth critique due. Discussion of readings. Assignments for Oct. 10: Read Chapter 12 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 11 of the 2Ws.

Oct. 10: Discussion of readings. Assignments for Oct. 17: Seventh critique due. Read Chapter 13 of Reporter's Handbook; Chapter 12 of the 2Ws.

Oct. 15: FALL BREAK

Oct. 17: Seventh critique due. Preparation for second story, due Oct. 24. Guest speaker.

Oct. 22: Preparation for second story, due Oct. 24.

Oct. 24: Second story due. Guest speaker. Assignment due Oct. 29: Eighth critique. Read Chapters 13 and 14 of the 2Ws.

Oct. 29: Eighth critique due. Review of stories and discussion of readings. Assignment due Oct. 31: Read Chapter 15 of Reporter's Handbook.

Oct. 31: Discussion of readings. Preparation, discussions on final enterprise stories. Assignment due Nov. 5; Ninth critique. Read Chapter 16 of Reporter's Handbook.

Nov. 5: Ninth critique due. Discussion of readings; preparation on enterprise stories, due Dec. 10. Assignment due Nov. 7: Read Chapter 17 of Reporter's Handbook.

Nov. 7: Discussion of readings. Guest speaker. Assignment due Nov. 12: Final critique.

Nov. 12: Final critique. Preparation, discussion of enterprise stories.

Nov. 14: Preparation, discussion of enterprise stories. Guest speaker.

Nov. 19: Preparation, discussion of enterprise stories.

Nov. 21: Preparation, discussion of enterprise stories.

Nov. 26: Preparation, discussion of enterprise stories.

Nov. 28: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Dec. 3: Last day of class. Enterprise stories due.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 4180

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)

- Students will recognize and critically analyze the role the press plays as a watchdog of government and other public organizations.
- Students will develop the finer techniques of information gathering including: searching public records, interviewing uncooperative or hostile news sources, sensitivity in reporting on disasters and tragedies and avoiding manipulation by political image makers and other news sources.
- Students will learn the importance of a diversified press corps and diverse news sources.
- Students will develop writing skills that emphasize fairness, balance, clarity and in-depth understanding of complex public topics.
- Students will discuss and analyze various ethical dilemmas in public affairs reporting.
- Students will learn and apply multimedia storytelling techniques appropriate to public issues writing and reporting.
- Students will learn to discern which Internet sources are legitimate for news stories and which are not.

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Students will report on public entities including governmental bodies, police, and courts.
- Students will conduct an in-person and online search for public records.

- Students will monitor all types of media during a two-month period and turn in an in-depth analysis of the media's coverage of a topic chosen by the professor at the beginning of the semester.
- Students will be tested on current events.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to meet strict deadlines.
- Students will conclude the semester by using their acquired interview techniques, public records gathering ability, writing skills and multimedia skills to produce an investigative or in-depth news package on a public issue involving at least six news sources. This assignment will count 20 percent of the final grade.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Become aware of public issues through class discussions, journalistic research and current event quizzes of issues affecting news and the industry such as: diversity, multicultural reporting and ethics.

Understanding

- Understand the importance of using diverse sources and exercising multicultural reporting techniques
- Understand objective writing and discern which material to include in a story

Application

- Write four multi-sourced, researched stories regarding issues of public concern that may include coverage of local police, fire, government, courts, or governmental bodies.
- Produce multimedia components for each story.
- Complete a culminating public issues multimedia project that demonstrates all of the skills learned in this course from research and information gathering to diverse sourcing to multimedia storytelling.
- Create an online portal for the class project.
- Use various outlets and sources to obtain secondary data and information for their assignments and projects.
- Apply creative and ethical interview techniques.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the

portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an

assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help:

<https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.