Topics in Communication:

PUBLIC AFFAIRS REPORTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Course Description:

This course introduces undergraduate students to the exciting part of journalism—gathering and reporting of public affairs news to strengthen civic discourse in American democracy. Public affairs reporting remains the journalistic core of the news profession. It is in a state of constant flux situated in the fast-changing news media architecture. Making news relevant to the consumer is the main purpose of public affairs reporting. Research, interpretation and investigation provide depth to journalistic writing and news gathering. We will learn how to report public affairs for both the traditional as well as the new and digital media. The course exposes student to in-depth knowledge of beat areas for gathering and reporting news of significance. We will approach public affairs reporting as central to the social developments affecting public interest.

Learning Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the course, students should be able to:

1) Understand public affairs reporting and its beat areas ranging from politics and elections to crime, science and the environment in the context of the U.S. media and democracy;
2) Learn different journalistic reporting styles and gathering of news from society’s critical institutions such as courts, law enforcement, legislature, and urban affairs;
3) Learn to use new and digital media and data bases to enhance the quality of depth reporting of public affairs.

Required Textbook:


Major Course Requirements and Expectations:

Students will be required to attend every class period and produce weekly stories drawing from public affairs beats. The course will be composed of instructor's lectures, class discussions relating to course materials and readings, possible field trips, and weekly stories of public affairs researched and written by students.
Students will be evaluated and their performance will be assessed on the following criteria and grading scale:

**In-class participation/Attendance**: 20% (Discussion on assigned readings, lectures and media readings).

**12 Weekly Public Affairs reporting stories**: 80% (W=Stories from different beat areas in news coverage)

*Grading Scale*: 90-100 A Excellent; 80-89 B Very Good; 70-79 C Average; 60-69 D; 59-below F

**Course Policies**:

*Attendance and Tardiness*: Attendance is required—both physically and mentally. You are expected to take an active role in classroom discussions. Absences, late arrivals, and chronic failure to engage in class discussion will all be reflected in your participation grade.

*Late work and make-up exams*

- If there should be a legitimate reason for you missing class (illness, family emergencies, certain University-sponsored extracurricular activities), please provide the instructor with the notification prior to the event or as soon as you are able—before the missed class period. If appropriate, we can arrange alternate times for you to make up quizzes or exams, but it will be your responsibility to get any information from lecture from one of your classmates.
- Unexcused absences will be noted and reflected in your participation grade. Also, any work missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up.
- Late work for any reason considered unexcused will be panelized by at least one letter grade for each day it is late.

*Cell Phone/Electronic Device Usage*: While in class, please make sure your phone is off or on silent (and in your backpack or out of sight), so it’s not heard in class. Also, limited laptop use is permitted— for note-taking only, but do not abuse this privilege.

- If you would like to discuss any course readings, lectures, or assignments outside of class, you should feel free to contact me via email or by arranging to visit me during office hours or set up an appointment to see me at any other time.
- Please submit hard copies of your papers, prior to the class period on the due date. Marked copies will be returned to you.
- All writing for this course must be composed using a standard, 12-point font size, and with the standard 1-inch margins.

*Academic Integrity/Plagiarism*: University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examination or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work). In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in the course grade of F.

*Dropping the Course*: I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation will not automatically result in your being
dropped from the class. Please check published dates for the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

Classroom/professional behavior

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

GRADE APPEALS PROCESS: Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade earned in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.

Academic Advising: The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 361-825-3466.

Notice to Students with Disabilities and/or Returning Veterans

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible. Please have your accommodation letter from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Disability Services (DS) Office with you when you come to see me. If you are a returning veteran and experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Office for assistance. If you suspect that you may have any disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Disability Services Office (located in Room 116 Corpus Christi Hall) at 361.825.5816.

Lecture Topic Schedule and Assignment on following page
COMM 4390: Public Affairs Reporting in the Digital Age

Lecture Topic Schedule and Assignments (subject to change)

Introduction, course outline/expectations
Jan 21-23: Introduction to Course, to Assignments and Textbook review

The World of Public Affairs
Jan 26-30: Chapter 1: The World of Public Affairs Reporter (Friday labs begin)

Towards a New Definition of News in the Digital World
Feb 2-6: Chapter 2: Difference between PA News and Spot News (Story # 1 due)

New Perspectives on Public Affairs News
Feb 9-13: Chapter 3 (Story # 2 due)

Strategies of Public Affairs Reporting: Understanding the Beat System
Feb 16-20: Chapter 4 (Story # 3 due)

Monitoring Public Issues
Feb 23-27: Chapter 5 (Story # 5 due)

Covering the Law and the Legal System
Mar 2-6: Chapter 6 & 7 (Story # 6 due)

Covering Government Agencies and Services
Mar 9-13: Chapter 8 (Story # 7 due)
Mar 16-20: SPRING BREAK

Politics and the Legislative Process
Mar 23-27: Chapter 9 & 10 (Story # 8 due)

Urban Journalism
Mar 30-Apr 3: Chapter 11 (Story # 9 due)

Covering Business, Labor and Consumer News
Apr 6-10: Chapter 12 (Story # 10 due)

Covering Science, Environment and Medicine
Apr 13-17: Chapter 13 (Story # 11 due)

Strategies for Tomorrow
Apr 20-24: Chapter 14 (Story # 12 due)
Apr 27-May 1 Wrap-up and Review of the Course; MAY 4: Last day of classes
ABOUT THE PROFESSOR

Anantha S. Babbili (Ph.D., The University of Iowa) is Professor of Communication & Media Studies at Texas A&M - Corpus Christi. He was Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs of the university from 2007 to 2010. He is former Dean of the College of Mass Communication (2002-2007) at Middle Tennessee State University. As dean, he held the oversight of the John Seigenthaler Center for First Amendment Studies. Babbili taught and directed the Journalism and Media Studies department at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, for more than two decades. He was the visiting Rogers Chair in Journalism and New Information Technologies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada and lectured in Mexico, India, Slovakia, UK and Asia. Babbili is the co-author of the book, An Ethics Trajectory, published by the University of Illinois Press and has published his research in several books including Communication Ethics and University Values, Critical Issues in Media, Bosnia by Television (British Film Institute), Mass Media in the Middle East, and The Press and the State.

A former journalist and newspaper editor, Babbili has published scholarly articles that have appeared in journals such as Media, Culture and Society, Journal of Communication Inquiry, Newspaper Research Journal and the International Third World Studies Journal. Babbili was the Editor (2000-2008) of the national Journalism & Communication Monographs and served on the editorial boards of the Journal of Mass Media Ethics and Journalism Studies. He is on the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences advisory board at The London School of Economics and Political Science. He received the Barry Bingham Award From the National Conference of Editorial Writers and was the consultant to the United Nations and the UNESCO on human rights and communication. The Carnegie Foundation and the Council on the Advancement and Support of Teaching named Babbili the Texas Professor of the Year. He is the recipient of the National Teaching Award from the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, St. Petersburg, Florida. His columns and opinions as a news source on breaking events and U.S. foreign policy appeared on CNN, ABC News, CBS, and NBC and in Chicago Tribune, New York Times, Fort Worth Star-Telegram and many other media outlets. Before earning his doctorate, Babbili earned two undergraduate degrees in biological sciences and journalism from his native India and M.A. in journalism from the University of Oklahoma.

Since 2006, Babbili has been a member of the governing board of a communication institute operated by a reputed media-related reputed foundation in India. As the Provost of Texas A&M Corpus Christi, Babbili served as the chief institutional liaison to the successful SACS accreditation Process and was responsible for overall quality of academic affairs of the University. He is the graduate of the Management and Leadership program of Harvard University.